



PEPPERMINT ROOSTER REVIEW

Peppermint Rooster Review

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Dear Reader,

This is the fifth issue of Peppermint Rooster Review, an annual publication that publishes fiction, poetry, and essays by Lewis and Clark Community College students and former students. We hope you enjoy this book. We would like to thank Jill Lane, who wanted to showcase outstanding written work from our students and who secured the financing for this project. In addition, we would like to thank Lori Artis for assisting our staff in the production of this magazine.

For the fourth year, we held a campus-wide contest for a student to design the cover. A panel of judges decided on the winning cover art, “A Study in Clownery” submitted by Shelby Clayton.

When we were looking for a name for this magazine, we considered many different suggestions. The name “Peppermint Rooster” was suggested by a former Lewis and Clark student, and the idea resonated with us because of the odd juxtaposition between the two words. (Also, it sounded more interesting that “Lewis and Clark Literary Magazine.”) This book, as you’ll see, contains some interesting juxtapositions, too. We hope you enjoy reading this and that you will stay tuned for next year’s book as well. If you are a LCCC student, please feel free to submit your work to litmaglc@lc.edu. We will be reading submissions year-round and we look forward to reading your work.

Sincerely,

The Staff of Peppermint Rooster Review

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Essays

Elizabeth Hall

Close Call

My family owns a farm that produces corn, soybeans, hay, and we have roughly one hundred head of cattle. As a young girl, I always enjoyed spending time with my dad, and that meant being around farm equipment the majority of the time spent together. When I was just ten years old, my dad taught me how to drive a tractor. Once I had the basics down, he taught me how to rake hay. I built upon these skills until I could do everything from tedding hay, which is done after the hay has been cut, and is meant to help the hay dry so it can be raked and then baled, to picking up the bales and hauling them in. I had been working on the farm for a little over seven years, and I was eager to help whenever I got the chance. However, one day would change my attitude about working on the farm.

My dad is a simple man. He never works on Sunday because it is a day of rest, and he refuses to eat at White Castle. He is a strong man with callused hands proving he works hard at everything he does. His arms and face are a deep brown in the summer until you lift up the sleeve of his shirt to see his pasty white skin that never sees the light of day. He would be a great example of what the definition of a “farmer’s tan” looks like. Dad has deep brown eyes, bushy eyebrows, and a mustache comparable to Tom Selleck. He always wears a pocket T-shirt, usually red since it is his favorite color, with a pen and a small, faded blue flip notebook in the pocket. His blue jeans are faded. He has a pair of plyers looped to his dingy brown belt, and he wears brown work boots every day. His salt and pepper hair is covered by one of his numerous worn out baseball style hats that usually have a farm related small business or seed dealer logo on it. Dad was always really busy working and I was involved in several activities throughout the school year. However, I spent the majority of my summer helping him. I have always enjoyed working in the hay fields alongside my dad.

It was an overcast hot summer day in the middle of July. The humidity was extremely high which made my hair a frizzy mess and it was “air you could wear” as Dad would say. Sweat stained his shirt making the color a deep red, and I could see the tiny beads of sweat forming on his forehead around his hat. We had been working in the hay field earlier in the day and it was baled into round-bales, which are five feet in diameter and about four to five feet wide. They are held together by string that is tightly wrapped around them and tied off. All that was left to do was haul them to the shed. We had looked at the weather radar and could see that a thunderstorm was headed our way. If we were going to get the bales in before the storm hit, we had to act fast. The field was away from the main road making it private and quiet. It was surrounded by trees, corn fields, and a cattle pasture. The field itself had several terraces with steep inclines going from one to the other. It was difficult to maneuver through them no matter what type of day it was. I was driving an open air tractor with a canopy on top to help shield my body from the sun’s penetrating rays. *This canopy is rather useless today since the sun is not even shining*, I thought to myself as we got ready to head out. As soon as I started the tractor’s engine it began to produce an immense amount of heat. However, there was a small breeze that came as the tractor picked up speed, but it was not nearly enough to fight off the heat of the day.

Almost simultaneously, the air changed. It had turned cold and goose bumps formed all over my bare skin. I was quickly regretting the decision of wearing a cut off shirt. The wind picked up and the corn stalks swayed with the wind as I slowly drove by the fields. Right before we got to the hay field, it began to pour. I could hear the rain pounding on the top of the canopy. It seemed to be coming in every direction and the cold rain made the hair on my arms stand up. I felt like I had goose bumps on top of goose bumps. I was quickly soaked from my head to my toes, and I desperately wanted to go home. The only dry spot on me was my lower back which had been protected by my seat. I could not complain about it to Dad because he was already itchy (meaning angry), and I knew the rain had only made his attitude go down the drain even more. So I sucked it up and tried not to think about having wet feet the rest of the day.

We unloaded the skid-steer, which is a small piece of machinery used for transporting heavy objects with the help of a bucket or forks on the front. Dad unhitched the trailer from the tractor, and together we were going to pick up the wet bales. He was on one side of the bale in the tractor using the spears to get to the center of the bale, and I was on the other in the skid-steer with the forks to slide under the bale. The skid-steer is about a six-foot-tall piece of machinery, and the engine is located in the back. There is a cage surrounding three of the four sides of what makes up the cab, and there is a roof that connects and supports the side walls. However, there is nothing to keep the driver from falling out the front of the machine. The operator has to climb in by stepping on one of the front wheels, then swinging one leg around the side of the cab onto the narrow platform. Then step down into the cab backwards since there is not much excess space to move around. The body of the skid-steer is all yellow except the back of the cab where it had been scorched a charcoal black when it caught fire once before. It had a seat belt that had hardly ever been worn, two yellow joysticks with black handles, and two foot pedals for operating the skid-steer. Every move the machine made was controlled by the foot pedals and the joysticks. It had forks on the front which could be moved up, down, titled up, or tilted down to the preference of the driver. We picked up the first few bales with ease, and everything seemed to be going smoothly, considering the circumstances.

We got to one bale and we could tell it was heavier than the others we had already moved. I slid my forks under the bale and Dad put his spears in the center on the other side. At the same time, we would raise it off the ground until the tractor could hold it on its own. At this point I would then lower my forks and cautiously back out. As we lifted the bale from the ground, Dad started to raise it before I got the chance to get ready. The load was too heavy for just the tractor itself, and his spears lost their hydraulic pressure, which allows them to lift things and hold them in the air. His spears let all of the bale on my forks—which, in turn, caused the skid steer to tip forward off its hind wheels due to the heavy load. I had no idea what to do, but I had to figure out a way to quickly keep from falling out of the skid-steer and underneath it. There were two small yellow handle bars on each side of the cage, meant for

assistance getting into and out of the cab.

Except today, they would save my life.

The skid-steer was sitting at a forty-five-degree angle facing the ground. I grabbed onto those bars and held all of my weight in my hands as I dangled inside. I felt as though I were on a carnival ride hanging almost parallel to the ground; however, this was not a fun carnival ride.

I could not see Dad, nor could he see me, due to the monstrous hay bale blocking our vision. I did the only thing I could do in a scary situation: I screamed. The roar of his engine and mine easily drowned out my crackling cry of a screech repeating “DAD” over and over again. It was not working. Tears were streaming down my face as my body went into complete panic mode. My stomach had jumped to my chest as I hung on for what felt like eternity. I clamped my eyes closed. If I cannot actually see the problem it might go away, I irrationally thought as my fear continued to grow. I could hear my heartbeat in my ears and with each passing second I could feel my heart beating faster.

As my thoughts were all becoming a blur I heard my dad’s voice. “You’re okay, you’re okay, you’re okay,” he repeated as he ran over to me.

“I don’t know what to do,” I croaked.

“Climb out and I will fix it.”

His steady voice calmed my nerves as I slowly crawled out of the cab, jumping down to the ground, then ducking my head to miss the beams of the forks as I got to safety. My hands were uncontrollably shaking and there were dark red lines on my palms where they had been clenched to the handle bars just seconds before. I watched as Dad climbed into the skid-steer and eventually all four wheels were back on the ground. He got out and came over to me.

“I love you, now climb back in so we can finish up,” he so compassionately told me.

“I really don’t want that to happen again,” I said, still shaken up.

“It won’t, but just to make sure let’s use the seatbelt.”

Reluctantly I crawled back into the cab and watched as my dad buckled me in as if I were four years old again, and then he walked back to the tractor to try it for a second time. I nervously grabbed the joysticks. I could still feel my hands shake as they grasped the handles. My stomach was tied in knots, and I swore I was about to vomit.

Hesitantly, I positioned the skid-steer and slid my forks under the bale all while holding my breath. We lifted the bale slowly, and this time we got it on the trailer with no problems. Needless to say, we picked up the remaining bales with no trouble, and we made it home safely.

After that, I was hesitant to help on the farm. For several months I would weasel my way out of helping by coming up with a lame excuse. However, I eventually found my way back by easing into it at first, starting in the easy fields and making sure there was no rain in the forecast for that day. I am now working as much as I can and loving every second of it. Recently, Dad was planning to bale hay in the same field the incident occurred. Unfortunately, I was going to be out of town at that time and could not help. I sarcastically commented that it was a shame I would not be there in case there was another close call.

Ellen Johnston

Home Away From Home

Living away from home, especially in a new country, can be a very interesting and unforgettable experience; simultaneously, it can have some significant effects on a person's life. Travelling to as many countries as possible is something I've always wanted to do. I have visited many countries in Europe, some examples are: Greece, France, Spain, Poland and Italy, and each have very different cultures. At the beginning of this year I was given an opportunity to flee my hometown in Liverpool, England, and pursue a dream of playing soccer in America. I didn't hesitate to take this opportunity to travel outside of Europe and accept an athletic scholarship which gives me the opportunity not only to play soccer but get a good quality education. I've been here for almost five months, and I've noticed certain aspects of living four thousand miles away from home that have affected me as a person. For me, the three main effects of living away from home have been missing the simple things which are usually taken for granted, accepting a new society and culture, and most of all developing an independent behaviour.

Being out of my comfort zone is missing the simple things which I may have taken for granted when I was home; this doesn't mean that I am unhappy, but I'm more aware of being on my own. The feeling of missing everything that you left behind sometimes takes over. This feeling is accentuated by the fact that nothing feels or seems familiar anymore. Senses are often subconscious, so it's not until you sit and think hard about exactly how everything sounded and smelt at home that you realise how your new surroundings are much different. So much of what I miss about my old town isn't even tangible; such as the smell of the washing powder factory that released an unbelievable scent across the streets every Wednesday at 4pm just as I finished college, or the way the sun used to set every evening behind the church on Mossley Hill. Last week I was walking to class and I heard somebody laugh behind me. I swiftly turned around as it sounded exactly like my favourite waiter from that one restaurant my friends and I would go to for two-for-one meals and a cheap pitcher. Not being surrounded by my family

and friends is one big thing on its own, yet it's the little things that I miss like sitting and watching TV alone on a Saturday morning rather than cuddling with my mum, catching up on *Downton Abbey* while sharing a packet of Rich Tea biscuits. I also miss specific rooms in my house but not just the rooms which you'd assume such as my bedroom or living room – I never thought I'd hear myself say I missed my bathroom. Usually, of an evening my family would watch a film together – the dogs would sit between my mum and dad, and we'd each have our specific places on the sofa. Now in my apartment, my roommates do the same thing where we all gather round and watch films together, but it's still not the same. I miss the way my sister asks for the film to be explained to her every five minutes, and the way my nana would call for a seemingly endless conversation every night, without fail, halfway through the film. I can recreate it, perhaps, but it will never be quite the same.

Having to accept new societies and culture is another effect of moving away from home. This includes making new friends, seizing every opportunity to go to new places, getting used to Americanisms and also being involved in an alternate educational system. America is less similar than England than what I anticipated, but not all in a bad way. The main cultural difference is the country's outlook on sports, which is one of the reasons why I chose to come to America – amateur sports in general is taken much more seriously. For example, in America, high school and college soccer games are a huge part of the school as they are taught at a young age this is the social norm. Though on the contrast, other countries such as England and Australia go to school to concentrate more on their academic future and use the hours given to them outside school to practice their chosen sport. The attendance ratings for the games are nowhere near the same. A college soccer game has been known to reach up to 13,000 people whereas in England nobody seems to care that much; a crowd considered 'large' could be about 300 people. Accepting new societies is an obvious effect of moving away from home. Luckily for me, I have met people who I have become extremely close with in the past five months. In fact, being from another country made this easier as we tend to mimic each other's accents and laugh about British slang compared to Americanisms. I've

noticed myself saying ‘for sure’ a lot more and ‘trash’ instead of ‘rubbish.’ My roommates have pointed out a few words or phrases that I use which they aren’t familiar with including: ‘path’ instead of ‘sidewalk’, ‘brush’ instead of ‘sweep’ and ‘mate’ instead of ‘dude’. Especially at the beginning of the semester, although it still happens now, my roommates struggle to understand me when I talk too fast. The amount of times they’ve said “what did you just say?” or “I’ve no idea what that meant” while staring blankly at me is too many to count. In my experience, having a British accent helps me in social situations. After every time of meeting a new person as I was moving into the apartments they would say, “No way, you’re from England? That’s awesome!” Seizing every opportunity to travel is significant when adapting to new surroundings. I was lucky in the sense that in my first few weeks in America I visited New York, Nashville, Memphis, St Louis, and hopped across a number of different states where I acknowledged the differences between them and British people. This includes the way they talk, walk, and greet each other. I’ve realised that Americans can’t seem to walk past someone they know without doing some sort of complex handshake whereas in England uttering “alright” while simultaneously nodding your head is sufficient. Experiencing new cultures is definitely an effect of moving to a different country.

Developing an independent behaviour, in my opinion, is the most significant effect of living away from home. Living alone so far from away from my family and everybody who I have grown up around has given me a lot of experience with organising and being in control of my own life. Of course, at first, I felt a great sense of freedom – doing what I wanted whenever I wanted to; however, since it is up to me and no one else to go to work or school, clean my room, wash my clothes, and manage my money, the novelty wore off eventually, and I felt a strong meaning of responsibility. The effect is knowing that even though I have an estimated million (give or take a few) things to do, I will learn to know what needs to be done when and how to prioritise. Sure, my family and friends check in on me, but I’m the sole person responsible for myself. As it is for most people, at home it was normal for my parents to do the majority of chores for me. I did not have to worry about not having clean clothes or good meals

every day as we would have a home cooked meal every night – nothing that consisted of Ramen noodles or chicken nuggets. Another aspect of learning independent behaviours is that you must know how to solve your personal problems, as well as other affairs on your own. If I were home, I would turn to my parents or have gossip sessions with my sisters if I wanted to talk things through, whereas while I'm here, it's just not the same trying to discuss everything over a Whatsapp group chat, especially with a six hour time difference. If I have learned one thing, it would be that moving away from home really nurtures you into putting things in perspective, and also to be thankful for everything that your parents do for you at home.

In summary, living away from home can be really hard at the beginning because of three effects: the simple things, accepting a new society and culture, and developing an independent behaviour. Living far from normalities and comforts, even for a short period of time, can be really hard at the beginning. We have to remember that all changes are difficult, but they are necessary to go through them to build character. Most important of all, it helps us appreciate everything we have. I may complain sometimes, but I certainly do not regret making such a big step in my life.

Ellen Rachel Johnston

Nightclub

For some people, working in a nightclub sounds like it could be a dream job; getting good wages, raking in tips, drinking on the job, socialising and judging drunk people all night – seems like a good idea, right? Wrong. I had previously worked in A La Turka – a modern restaurant and bar in the picturesque village of Stockton Heath, Cheshire. It was a beautiful 5 star restaurant with luxury furnishings, an 11 metre granite bar and a huge heated outdoor terrace which overlooked the antique cobbled streets of the village. Weekends at A La Turka usually consisted of a range of innocent nights out – bachelorette parties, family reunions and 50th birthday parties. Working there was fun for a while, but after two years of repetition (same shift, different day) I was ready to move on. Considering all of my friends were spending every weekend in a nightclub anyway, I thought it would be a bright idea to work in one – I'd still be there with them, but just on the other side of the bar earning almost as much money as they were spending. I heard of a new club opening just on the edge of town so I handed in a successful application form. Less than one week later, I started my new job in our local club called Showbar. As you walked into the joint, the intermingled smells of smoke, sweat and too many people instantly assaulted your nostrils. It usually took a few minutes for your eyes to adjust to the imminent tomb-like darkness. Bright spots of neon beer signs were scattered on the wall, illuminating the faces, cleavage and Mohawks of the dancefloor, while others disappeared into the contrasting blackness. People would swarm around the bar like bees to honey and be sure to maintain eye contact with the bartender as a guarantee that they would be served next. The floor gradually became stickier throughout the night. At the tender age of 18 I was unaware of the kind of nightmares which would be involved in working in a club; I was just ecstatic to have been offered a new job which was an escape from silver service and my short-tempered boss; however, after witnessing and experiencing

some events during work within the past couple of months, I would welcome waitressing back into my life any day of the week. If I had to narrow it down to the three most awful things, it would have to be the working hours, arguing with customers and the cleaning.

First off, I hate the unsociable working hours. Usually I would start working at 8PM to set the club up for the night. This would involve preparing the bar, slicing fresh fruit, checking the stock and touching up last night's cleaning job, yet I would typically only finish to go home at approximately 4AM. An eight hour shift would seem to last a lifetime. I would avoid looking at the clock, fearing the slow passing of time that will only seem slower if I watched its progress. Since working these shifts, I have had to wave goodbye essentially any daytime hobby such as sports, watching TV and going out with friends as they have been replaced by spending the majority of the next day sleeping. I have missed so many house parties due to being in work; usually my friends can throw parties which make *The Hangover* and *Project X* look like a joke – so I'm sure to have missed out on a lot. One night after work, I had 14 missed calls and multiple messages and snapchats of the crazy things that went on during that evening. I was sent a video of one of my friends doing a naked run into a horse field after he lost a bet – then, of course, he got chased by a horse, and attempted to jump over a fence (which happened to be electric) so he lay in a field, electrocuted, naked, and regretting all decisions which led to his state.

“Sorry I can't, I'm working” is all I ever seem to reply after an invite, shortly followed by a remark from a friend saying “You should have been there! Last night was mental.” Working in a club has turned me into a semi-nocturnal, drink-pouring machine.

Another challenge of working in a nightclub is dealing with the arrogance of some customers and constantly explaining to drunken people that they cannot afford the expensive spirits. Having to argue with a delirious consumer who is trying to barter his way through his purchase, or a middle aged woman who tried to bargain a cocktail price of eleven pounds to eight will never become less irritating. In my club, we would display the most expensive bottles of spirits like Belvedere or Grey Goose vodka so that they would tower over the

surrounding drinks. Ultimately, conversations with students usually go like this:

“Hey love, how much is that big bottle there?”

“About £500, mate.”

“I’ll just have a coke then please.”

The amount of times a customer has tried to impress their female companion by asking for ‘the nicest bottle of fizz’ then having to change their order as they realise the champagne is £200 too much for their budget is endless.

What I’ve learned is that, whether you’re right or wrong, you’re never going to win an argument with a customer.

Undoubtedly, the worst part about working in a nightclub is testing the limits of a mop’s capability. Picture this: It’s verging on 3 am and in your peripheral vision you spot someone staggering away from a corner while wiping their mouth with their sleeve. Simultaneously, people are crowding the corner, frowning in disgust and pointing towards a deposit which was just made on the floor. Then you recognise that you’re the victim who has to clean it up. One night, it was almost 3.30 am and I was just about ready to quit and go home when I hear the sound of a person heaving in the area of the restrooms. Mopping up a punter’s stomach contents is not something that was in the job description, yet someone had to do it. My colleagues and I had a well-rehearsed method of deciding whose turn it was to clean it up in the form of rock, paper, scissors. Inevitably I failed; therefore, I was the chosen one. I spent just over 20 minutes ineffectively displacing vomit with a mop while trying to fend off the knocks and bumps of other drunken teenagers as they danced beside me. Just as I thought my night couldn’t get any worse, when I eventually managed to clean it up, a woman commences to stumble her way towards me: barely managing to walk in her 6-inch platform heels with a cosmopolitan in one hand and a Jager bomb in the other. I knew what was about to happen but it all seemed to occur in slow motion. She keeled over and renewed the batch of bile on the floor, which I had just worked so hard to clean.

I don’t get paid enough to deal with this! I thought.

At that point, I held my hands in the air and announced my surrender.

So, I assure you that if you're a cash-strapped student in need of a fresh source of income, there are places more appealing to ply your trade than a nightclub, unless you like repetitive music, late nights/early morning and babysitting drunk and disorderly customers, of course. Luckily for me, I've been working there long enough to develop a more positive outlook on my job – the people I work with are some of the best people I have ever met, and eventually together you develop a tactic in which you can get just as drunk as the customers without the manager finding out!

Sierra Murray

Worst Job

On November 14, 2015, I started my first day at Mc Donald's. This wasn't my first job. Before that I worked at a movie theater. I also have another job, dog grooming, but I prefer to keep two jobs at a time to ensure that I make enough to save. Although, sometimes it doesn't seem worth it to continue working at Mc Donald's. Mc Donald's is the worst job to have because of the constant rush, co-workers, and rude customers.

The constant rush is terrible. There is never a moment when we don't have an order on the screen. If I'm working drive thru and have a headset, there is a constant *DING!* that goes off in my ear, and normally someone screaming hello, to see if I'm there, right after. What happens when I work an eight-hour day is me patiently waiting to see if I get a break. We are supposed to have a break after five hours, but that's unlikely. Mc Donald's is so busy that no one is able to leave their spots because we have to be the "fastest" fast food restaurant out there. Some standards are a little crazy, like you're supposed to make a sandwich in thirty seconds. Now that's a little difficult when we have people come in ordering eight Mc Doubles, which is a total of sixteen patties. We're only allowed to make so many patties at a time. Let's just say I wish I could sit down for two seconds sometimes, because standing and running back and forth for eight hours is awful. I also hate when I have to present (hand the food out) because I'm saying "Hi, thank you" nonstop throughout the day. Sometimes, I make myself dizzy turning to grab a bag of food, and then turning back around to hand it out the window, and doing this over, and over, and over for about five hours.

In addition, the co-workers are awful. They can be lazy, ignore you, and not understand that when you're in a rush, you need to be moving quickly and not moving like a snail. There have been times when I have to go up the window and hand out the food because the person who was supposed to be doing it is handing stuff out wrong or getting confused. Not to mention, so many people either don't show up or call off. It seems at least every day we have someone call off. I remember

this past Friday someone called off and I had to stay over because they were short handed. On another note, some of the people there are seriously gross, and there is drama. We just had our store manager quit and everyone is saying that the person stole money from our store. At times, the manager's awful, too. You ask if you can go on break before you hit a huge rush, and some of them just ignore you and start doing something else. I asked to leave one time, after I had stayed an hour over, and the floor manager (main manager in charge) just walked away from me. Now, some of you may be thinking, why don't I just walk out? Well, for some reason that is the one thing that will get you fired at Mc Donald's other than a "no call no show." You can go ahead and call off all you want – you'll still have the job. So, I had to stay there until the manager finally let me leave. Also, I don't know if this applies to all McDonald's or just the one I work at, but the creepy male managers are awful. They try to hook up with the high schoolers, or any girl in general, and it really makes me want to vomit. One did get in trouble though for saying something to a girl about her boyfriend being ugly, or something ridiculous like that. Another thing that I hate about the co-workers: almost every Monday a crew member and a manager get into an argument, and the crew member (a regular worker) gets sent home. The co-workers who actually come to work are not the worst part of this job, though.

The worst part, which is something that I never had to deal with at the movie theater, was the rude customers. Within the first month of working, an old man decided he wanted to cuss me out because it was more expensive to buy the sandwich and fries than the whole meal. My manager was not having it either, so she walked away while this man sat there yelling at me. I was on front counter, too, so everyone behind him was staring at me. I literally bickered back and forth with this old man who wanted a refund onto his card.

The whole time he was saying, "This machine isn't working!"

He was talking about the card reader because he had to re-swipe his card in order for us to refund it back.

I asked him what the card reader was saying, since my screen was still the same. He yelled at me, "It's saying credit or debit!"

I tried my hardest not to roll my eyes, but at this point I couldn't contain my anger and yelled back, "Just pick one so it will refund your card!"

The man angrily pressed the button and my screen confirmed the refund and I handed him his receipt. Now the interesting part was the man behind him who started arguing with him about how he shouldn't have yelled at me. Another case was when we took a sundae to back booth (where you pay) to try and speed up the line. The lady who ordered the sundae was angry because her sundae was slightly melted and she waited about five minutes in line to come up to the second window and dump it on a girl, who was not expecting a sundae to be splattered on her. We all stood there surprised that someone would actually do something like that to a teenager. One thing that always makes me crack up is when we ask people to pull forward and wait for their food. It seems the majority of the time we get an eye roll, or the "I'm not pulling forward." Just an warning, we can call the cops on you. If we pull you forward, it is because we have the order behind you ready, and we don't want to hear them complain about their food being cold. Also, not all of us want \$15 an hour. So many people are rude to us because they think we're gross, or that we all want raises, etc. I'm fine with minimum wage, and I work two jobs to make up for any expenses I have. You can't judge us just because some Mc Donald workers elsewhere want \$15 an hour. I have really never hated people so much until I started working the fast food industry. Sometimes I just want to look at the customer and say vulgar things, but I need my job. So, while people throw things at me, I have to suck it up.

If you're wanting a job, and can't handle the rude constant rush, awful co workers, and rude customers, then Mc Donald's is not for you. I recommend not working fast food at all. Mc Donald's is by far the worst job to have, and some days I contemplate not even going in, and just working at my other job only. Unless you desperately need money, please try to find somewhere else to work. When I'm finished with college I should have an associates in nursing and finally be able to get away from Mc Donald's and never work there again. That will be the best day of my life.

Deborah Dhue

The Nightmare

My mother tucked me into bed that night. She kissed my forehead and said, “Goodnight.” As she left, I knew that I would sleep very well. At least, I thought I was going to. I fell asleep that night with my back to the window. Then the dream began. Only it wasn’t a dream: it was a nightmare.

I could see outside my bedroom window, only it wasn’t really mine. It belonged to some boy with a rare trainset on his shelf. Outside, there was an African American family, dressed up in hospital gowns and the little name tag bracelets. There was a mother, a father, two children, and a baby. They stood, looking at the house with longing and desperation. Then, out of the shadows, I saw something move. Oh, God, it was horrible. The creature looked like a hunched over human, only the arms were long and scythe-like. I could smell its rotten, green skin. Vines and moss grew out of his cadaverous flesh, twisting around its arms and head.

The family looked over at the creature, but they still did not move, and, in one swift attack, it swallowed them whole. The entire family was sucked into his mouth, never to be seen again. It looked up at me through the window. I don’t know how it really looked at me because now in the light of the single street lamp, I could see that it had no eyes. There weren’t even sockets or holes. Just viscous tissue. Then, it darted off with such speed that I could barely see where it was headed.

I could now see two houses down. I was in the bathroom. It looked just like my bathroom. The same calcium stained tub, the same pink and white tiles on the wall. Only there were candles around the bathtub, and a small baby sat in the water. There was faint opera music in the background. The window over the tub was open, and I saw it jump up onto the sill. My stomach churned. I tried to wake up, but I couldn’t. It was as if my mind wanted me to see this. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t close my eyes or look away.

It jumped down into the tub, and the baby began to cry. I could hear its mother outside, banging on the bathroom door in a panic, but it was

locked from the inside. Everything happened in slow motion after that. The water turned red as it splashed out of the tub. The creature ripped and tore at the baby, but it continued to cry and scream. Suddenly, it stopped crying. The crimson water was once again still. I felt like I was going to be sick.

All of a sudden, my dream skipped to the next morning. I could see the boy's mother at a museum, asking about the history of the train he had.

I woke up. I laid in my bed, sweating. I couldn't breathe, and I started to cry because of what I had seen.

"Mom! Mom!" I cried out. She ran into the room, and I told her through my tears what had happened in my dream. She told me it was okay, like all mothers do.

I was only seven or eight when I had this nightmare. Now, I never let my eyes stray from the bathroom window, and I fall asleep facing my bedroom window. If it ever comes for me, I will be ready.

Brady Lewis

Florida Is Not For Me

Florida, the wonderland of places in the United States. There are resorts, cruises, beaches, miles upon miles of shops, and unforgettable sunsets. No one could ever possibly think of hating such a paradise. I thought the same thing, until I moved to this false heaven. I am from a small town in southern Illinois. It's right next to the Missouri border. Here, nothing really happens. I like the atmosphere. It's a small community so everyone knows each other. It's just like a huge family. I actually lived in Florida when I was younger, but I was too young to really understand much. I moved back my sophomore year of high school and I found out how awful it really was. Florida is hidden behind all of the luxuries and it's rarely shown for what it truly is. The expenses are outrageous, it's home to the complaining elderly, and the place is a crowded mess.

Florida's prices are outrageous. Even a simple trip to the beach can be costly. My sophomore year ended with me on the beach lying down drinking a pineapple smoothie out of a pineapple under an umbrella shade. The feeling of the sand between my toes and the cool breeze from the ocean was so relaxing. Just kidding! I wish I could have done that – except it would have cost about 20 dollars in gas, another \$20 for the umbrella shade, \$10 for the smoothie, about \$10 in parking fees for the day and much more. Moving to a house from where I lived to a so-called “paradise” is outrageous. If you would pick up a moderate, say, 3-bedroom house from Illinois and put it in Florida, the price of the house will almost be doubled (and may even be tripled) depending on where you go. An insurance trade magazine reported in 2015 that Florida has the highest homeowners insurance rates in the country! This state also has one of the highest sales tax because Florida counties can tack onto state sales tax rate. Expenses in Florida are crazy! When I lived in Roxana, I was able to always go out with friends. My mom would give me 10 dollars here, 20 dollars there to go out and play laser tagging at Edisons or to the Wood River water park. But in Florida with the same exact job, I wasn't even able to get a penny because my mom

had so many bills with renting (which was about \$1,000 a month. If you add in bills for sewer, water, electricity, and trash, she was paying close to \$1,800.) In Florida, there were water parks all over the place, except it was 60 bucks for the day. I could pay that at the Wood River pool for the whole season! I never tried going laser tagging, but I could only imagine it was double the price of the laser tag where I am from. A special day for my mom is when her boyfriend proposed to her on the beach with a nice dinner. Don't propose on the beach unless you have a wad of cash. It was 300 dollars JUST to set up a table on the beach, not even counting the 5 course meal that was about the same price. The funny thing is that right before they brought all the food out, it started pouring. It was raining so hard that it felt like a whole bunch of tiny needles were falling from the sky. We were able to get into the hotel where we were staying, and we ended up having the meal there. I was surprised we were not charged for walking in wet. I have lived in a lot of states such as Michigan, Indiana, Georgia, Illinois, Florida, West Virginia, Ohio, and Missouri. So it's not that Illinois is just cheap. Florida just steals and scams people of their money.

The complaining elderly – don't even get me started. I like to call it "Heaven's Waiting Room" because it is basically home to three-fourths of the world's elderly population. It's home to all the old rich people gone away living the "life" before they go to heaven. The elderly outnumber everyone in the state practically 10 to 1. Everywhere you go, you always see an elderly man in the corner at a cafe or somewhere sipping his coffee, reading his newspaper, occasionally looking around and seeming annoyed by the world. Or you'll see an old couple in a nice convertible cruising around the city. My mom's boyfriend has blood clots in his legs so he isn't supposed to be walking much and is considered handicapped. Well, good luck ever finding a handicapped spot in this state. Being a teenager moving from a small town wasn't easy. Spring Hill, which was the city I was living in, is the size of all the other cities combined back home. I didn't really know anyone at all. So what I did with my life was play basketball outside my house. Just shooting around, I didn't think I was bothering anyone or anybody. Little did I know we would get a letter in the mail saying that I had to take down my basketball hoop because it was a "distraction" to the

old grumpy neighbors in the neighborhood – which of course was practically everyone. Also, if you are ever going to live in Florida, never live in a deed-restricted area. They are full of old rich grumpy people. So, not only is Florida expensive but also I couldn't even do anything for free like go outside and shoot a basketball. Being a teenager of course I didn't listen to them and I continued doing what I liked to do. It was a nice sunny day with a slight ocean breeze, and I walked outside to see one of the neighbors Mr. Thompson, the one I despised most. He had patches of snow white hair, a slight hunched back, and always wore the same clothes: a light blue polo, plaid shorts, and a grey beret. He was holding a long screwdriver pummeling my expensive Nike 2.0 basketball. I yelled at him and he continued hacking away, throwing out my droopy basketball. Never before have I been so annoyed.

Finally, Florida is way too crowded. The horrible congested roads would make anyone a mad man. Florida is greatly overpopulated because it's a huge tourist trap. So, everyone comes down in all parts of the year. I lived maybe 15 minutes away from school, and most days the roads were so clogged that it would take me nearly an hour to get to school! The city was so crowded, I had to get up on average 6 in the morning to take a shower and eat breakfast. *I don't know how girls can do this everyday.* Wherever you go, it is impossible to ever get a parking space. Why do you think everyone in Florida is in shape? It's because they have to walk a few miles a day just to get to wherever they're wanting to go. Living in a small town, it was never like this. School could be at 8:05 and I would wake up at 7:40 and able to get ready and get there on time. I lived 10 minutes away then. So, people should stay away from the big cities. I went to go to Disney World one time, and it was a nice day. We made sure to go a little early so we could get a good parking spot, but so did everyone else. We ended up having to park at a gas station sort of near the park and walked. It took us about 45 minutes to walk all the way to Disney World. (Plus, on top of that, we had all the walking in the park.) My feet felt like they were dragging on the ground, and I had a piercing needle feeling in my foot every heavy step. So you will find yourself needing to carry a case of water in a book bag in order to make it without dying of dehydration.

Florida is not a place to live, but is a great place to vacation. It's a

nice place to take your family. This state is not just full of everything horrible. You can go on longboard rides down the boardwalk. There's sight seeing, and cliff jumping. There is a whole list of things that people can do in the sunny state. But, living there is just awful with all of the money, evil old people, and almost becoming handicapped because you have to walk so far everywhere you go. Make sure that, no matter where you go, do research on the state and if you think it is the right budget and the environment suits you, well then do it! I learned that mistake and it was the worst year and a half of my life.

Aleta Camerer

Four Types of Nursing Home Residents

I have been working at Willow Rose Rehab and Health Care for the last four months as an employee in housekeeping and laundry. Willow Rose is a wonderful nursing home located in Jerseyville right next to the middle school. This is my first real job other than babysitting family members, and I've loved it so far. I've seen several different kinds of residents since working here like the independent ones, the needy ones, the call lighters, and the runaways.

First off there are the independent ones, who are residents that don't need help with anything. They can feed themselves and go to the bathroom without assistances. During the time that I've been working here, I have only seen one resident that would fall under this category. K.T is a tall skinny little lady with hair dyed blond and always has cute little outfits. I don't understand why K.T (using initials for confidentiality) is at the nursing home because there is literally nothing they have to offer her other than three meals a day and people to socialize with. K.T doesn't want to be at the nursing home, but she is a social butterfly. Anytime I see her, she's either pacing the halls or talking to other residents. K.T likes to go around helping other residents out, and being super sweet by giving everyone candy. Out of all sixty residents, K.T is probably the only one at Willow Rose that would be considered an independent one.

Next are the needy residents who depend on the help of others because they can't do it themselves. Most of the needy ones sit at the feeder tables during meal time because someone either needs to feed them, or they need to be supervised while they eat. A lot of the people at the feeder tables are also on puree diets. J.C is an elderly man who loves to dance. Whenever anyone says "a wiggle wiggle" he'll just start shaking his booty. J.C sits at one of the feeder tables, but he is a little less needy than the others because he can walk by himself and doesn't need the assistance of a wheelchair or a walker. One of my favorite things about J.C is that he loves to dance. Now, B.D also sits at a feeder table; she can feed herself but needs to be supervised and she has to have assistance when walking. B.D is a little fluffy old lady who's just

full of smiles, super sweet, and adorable, but I've never heard her speak. She's always in her room just watching t.v. Another needy one is W.Y she is a cute elderly lady who is ninety-three years old with white hair and is in a wheel chair. She's always yelling "Help me!" She does this because all she wants is someone to sit and talk with her, and give her bubble gum. W.Y is my absolute favorite resident. I always make sure that I sit and talk to her at least fifteen minutes, and I always make sure I bring some extra bubble gum just for W.Y. The other day, I was talking to W.Y and she was telling me what she says to me all the time, which is that she's getting old, and she can't remember anything. Her hearing is getting bad also. So, she told me she wanted me to build her a machine to make her remember. I've been talking to her a lot for about the last two months. Just about two weeks ago, W.Y got really excited because she knows I talk to her a lot but she usually cannot remember my name; she remembered that I work in laundry and got really excited.

Then there are the call lighters, or residents who always have the lights above their doors on because they need something. One of the top residents on this list would S.N because she has hers on 95 percent of the time. You could go and do whatever she wants, such as going to get her ice water, and then turn off the call light. When you're walking back up the hall from her room, she will already have her light back on. She always gives you a judgmental look with her hand up, saying she has to go to the bathroom, but most the time she's just passing gas. It's gotten so bad that she is now on a two hour bathroom care plan. P.G is another resident that always has her light on, and by time you get to her to see what she wants, most of the time she's already forgotten. P.G also just likes to put her call light on because she just wants someone to talk to. Most the time the CNAs don't have time, or they just plain out don't want to take the time to talk to her. Although if I'm working housekeeping and on her hall, then I will stop and talk to her for a little bit. Then there is J.C (different resident from the one mentioned earlier.) She is a resident who seems to be bipolar because she'll love me for half the day, but then out of nowhere doesn't want anything to do with me. J.C is a call lighter because she always finishes her meals early, then goes down to her room and turns on her light so a CNA can see it and put her in bed. J.C knows that, even though she turns that light on, most the CNAs are still in the dining room, and that she'll have to wait at least

thirty minutes until someone comes and puts her in bed. One day she had her light on and I went to go see what she wanted, which was to be put in bed. So, I looked at her and told her she'd have to wait for a CNA, and she got mad and smacked me n the face. Almost instantly J.C apologized for reacting so rashly. She also turns on her call light when she wants someone to come get her hot pocket and cook it for her. Normally, when I work evening laundry, I will get stuck doing this job, which is fine, but last time when I was leaning over to get the hot pocket out of the mini fridge, J.C decided to smack me on the butt a couple of times.

Finally, the runaways are residents who are always trying to escape the building. D.R does this sometimes, for about five or more times on a bad day. When he escapes the building, the alarms start blaring and everyone is running to go get him before he gets out to the road. He always tries to do it when he knows that we're busy, like during meal times because the CNAs are sitting at the feeding table feeding people. He also doesn't like to come back in once he has escaped, and has been known to become very violent. The days his wife comes to visit him are days that he tries to escape the most. So during the really bad days we try to find someone who can sit with him. Or, if he's very aggravated, they watch him from afar. Another resident that is a big runaway is R.S. He likes to sit at employee doors that lead outside and wait for someone to come through them. One day, I was coming in through that door and he tried to ram through it at me, and started pinching my arm and wouldn't back up in his wheelchair. I waited about five minutes until the nurse noticed he was pinching me really hard, and she came and pulled his wheelchair back. He always gets mad and tells me that I'm a b**** when I won't let him out of the building, and that I'm being sketchy when I shut the door really quick. He has also told me that young women are mean and scary. There are days that R.S and I get along, and he isn't always trying to be mean.

If you decide to work here, beware of these types. It is extremely important to watch the runaways. D.R still tries to runaway every time he sees his wife. The needy ones can be annoying, but others just want someone to talk to like W.Y. Even though these groups can be a hassle, I still love to come in and talk to all of them. I still wonder why K.T is even in the nursing home, but I figure that is where she will have to spend the rest of her life. If you have a big heart, this job might be for you.

Jacob Voss

In the Club

The two-hour drive home went by too quickly. As I slowly crept up my driveway, I began to dread every second of my life that was about to come once I made it to my parents' house. As the house came into view, I saw my parents standing in the driveway awaiting my arrival. I slowly came to a stop and put my car in park, all the while trying to convince myself that I would survive my parents' punishment. I took a deep breath and stepped out of the car. Before I was even able to fully stand up, my dad yelled, "What were you thinking?"

"I wasn't thinking, I'm sorry," I apologized, knowing no matter what I said, or how much I meant it, my words wouldn't make a difference. I knew what I had done was wrong and nothing short of a bad idea, but I was still searching for an excuse to explain my behavior.

All along I knew trying to get into a club with a fake ID was a bad idea. I knew my parents and family would be disappointed in me if they knew I had got into a club under-aged. I tried to tell myself I should just stay in the car and let my friends go in without me, but with lots of convincing, my friends made me decide that I didn't want to be the only one not going into the club. As I slowly got out of the car, not feeling so sure about my decision, I noticed a line that seemed to go for miles. As we made our way up to the long line, I began to get nervous. Fear began to build within me as we inched toward the doors.

"Are you all sure you want to do this?" I asked with an unsure tone.

Tyler quickly reassured me that everyone has fake IDs and uses them to get in. He began to convince us by explaining about all the fun we would have, leaving out all the parts about what would happen if we were caught. Tyler said it with such confidence it was hard not to believe him. So the long wait to the front began, and I was still nervous to attempt to make it through the entrance. The line shortened with every passing minute and before I knew it, it was our turn to face the buff, scary looking club bouncers.

Josh and Tyler were the first to approach the bouncers with their fake IDs, and instantly Tyler was cracking jokes trying to make his

nervousness less obvious. It worked; the bouncers quickly scanned over the IDs and returned them, all the while laughing at Tyler's jokes. Josh and Tyler were then let in the club.

Cameron and I couldn't believe it. Tyler seemed to be right about the fake IDs working for anyone after all. It was now our turn to face the bouncers. Not knowing if it would work for us, we handed the bouncers our fake IDs, while trying to act as friendly as possible. The bouncer quickly scanned the ID and handed it back and said, "Have a good night boys."

"Unbelievable," I whispered to Cameron. He shook his head at me with wide eyes, showing how much in disbelief he was. We were in, and we were ready to have a good time. Not five minutes after buying drinks and making our way to an empty booth, we were quickly confronted by a bouncer who asked us to come with him. Not willing to test our luck and defy what the bouncer had requested we stood and followed him down a long dark hallway.

I should have never listened to Tyler and got out of the car, a panicked tone inside my head says.

"My parents are going to kill me," I hiss at Tyler who doesn't seem to be worried at all.

"Relax, we will be fine, man," said Tyler with a cool, confident tone.

We finally arrived in front of a large black door, and were told to enter. Inside stood two bouncers and another small, stern looking man. "Boys, take a seat," says the small man. "I'm the owner of this club."

Oh my god, what have I gotten myself into.

The owner leaned over onto the table, getting very close to our faces and asked, "Is there anything you would like to tell me?" I began to feel beads of sweat forming along my hairline.

After a long silence, Tyler finally says with a questioning tone, "Not that we recall."

The owner chuckled a bit and looked at us again with a raised brow.

"Fine, don't tell me yourself. I need to see your wallets," the owner says with a smirk on his face. We did as he asked, and laid them out on the table.

My ID! panics a voice in my head. My real ID is in there too. I'm so dead. What was I thinking?

The owner and bouncers searched through our wallets for only a few moments before finding our actual IDs. I closed my eyes and hung my head knowing we had been caught. “Boys, the way I see it, you have two options. I can either call the cops and let them deal with you, or I can call your parents and inform them what you boys have done. Now before you choose your fate, listen to my words carefully. You are not to come back until you are of age,” orders the club owner in a stern voice. We nodded our heads quickly to show we understood what the club owner had just told us.

“We want you to call our parents,” I proclaimed very quickly. The others again nodded their heads in agreement. The owner smiled and nodded at one of the bouncers who then sat down and took our parents’ numbers.

The rest of the night I spent nervous, unsure of what my parents’ punishment might be when I arrived the next day. My parents were disappointed and angry as soon as they got the call from the owner. Knowing I had made a terrible decision to just have a little fun, made me reflect on what all I could have lost if the club owner would have called the cops, and not my parents. With every mile I got closer to home, I became more nervous. I knew my parents’ punishment would be harsh and that I deserved it. I knew from that moment on, I was never going to do something illegal and stupid again.

Christopher Wense

Steelworker To Tutor

Looking back through the years, I have held several blue collar positions, and had the fortune of being somewhat successful in all of them. In 1992, I graduated from Granite City Senior High by the grace of God himself. My mother likes to tell people I graduated Magna Cum Miracle, and although it isn't a pleasant thought, it is probably true. My academic work ethic was non-existent back then even though I had dreams of becoming an Illinois State Trooper. After graduation I decided to enroll at Belleville Area College. (For my younger readers, they call this institution Southwestern Illinois College or SWIC.) This was a new start and a new chapter in my life. The idea of being in college seemed so much more appealing than being in high school. This was the thought process of a guy that had not put much thought into the idea. As it turns out, college was no different for me except for one small fact: if I skipped classes I wasn't going to be suspended or given detention. It was obvious early on in my collegiate career that hunting and fishing were much more important to me. Skipping a class or classes on any given day was as simple as throwing my writing utensil out the truck window. Most people would have accepted the obvious, and just dropped all their classes and avoided the headache or embarrassment of failing college courses. I on the other hand was not one of those intelligent folks.

By the end of my short lived first college attempt, which consisted of two epic fail semesters, I had accumulated a whopping eight credits out of a possible twenty. It finally had become clear to me that college and I were not going to get along or be a good fit. By this time, it was June, 1994, and my future had zero direction or plan of action. I found gainful but less than exciting or lasting employment with a rental car company at Lambert International Airport. This illustrious career lasted for a grand total of six months, at which time I managed to get myself fired for roasting the tires off a new Lincoln Town Car in the snow and ice covered holding lot. Little did I know the shift supervisor was sitting in another rental car on the lot within view of my antics. Once again I

had ever so proudly demonstrated my immaturity – and cost myself a job this time. To accurately sum up this rather short, but tremendously wasteful sector of my early adulthood, I simply had not grown up yet, and something needed to change quickly.

After my abrupt release from my initial post-high school job I found myself searching for something I could be good at and even enjoy doing. In February of 1995, I stumbled on an ad in the Granite City local newspaper for the temporary employment service company “Manpower.” I had heard of this company before, but wasn’t familiar with what exactly they did. I immediately grabbed the phone to call them, because... well... the internet wasn’t available quite yet. The lady that answered the phone informed me that a large factory in Granite City was looking for press operators. I had absolutely no idea what she was even referring to when she said press operators, but I didn’t care. This was a job, and the company was hiring many temporary workers. I drove to the Manpower office as soon as I hung up with the recruiter, and had my application, drug test, and pre-employment physical completed that same day.

Two days after I applied for this job, I received the call that changed my life. The Manpower recruiter was calling me to inquire about what shift preferences I may have, without hesitation I told her I would prefer midnights (11 pm-7 am) because I figured most people applying would select the day shift. In my mind, I was giving myself a slight advantage by picking the most dreaded shift, and it paid off. I was offered a position the very next day. I was going to be a factory worker and was overjoyed even though I truly had no idea what the job truly consisted of. On February 5, 1995, I started what would turn out to be the very beginning of what got me where I am today. The first night I was informed by other temporary employees, whom had been working at the plant for a few months that there was no chance of being hired on as a permanent employee until you had three months under your belt. I didn’t care. I was employed and finally felt like I had found my calling. Silly as it may sound to most rational people, there is a factory worker type and a culture that goes along with it and I loved it.

After my shift ended on March 3, 1995, I was approached by my shift foreman about taking the test to become a permanent employee. Naïve

as I was at the time, I quickly responded to him saying I had only been a temporary for almost a full month. He responded just as quickly by telling me the selection process for hiring certain temporaries is strictly up to the foreman, and the three-month rule was not being implemented in my case. My heart fell into my steel toe boots. I could not believe what I had just heard, but I wasn't waiting around to hear it again. I proceeded upstairs to the cafeteria where the testing was taking place and took a seat. The rest is history as they say. I passed all the assessment tests and began my career at A.O Smith Automotive Products on March 30,1995. I started my career in the same department that I had been working as a temporary. It was a horrible, dirty, hot, and dangerous shit hole... to put it nicely. We made steel car frame assembly parts for Ford Motor Co., and this department was responsible for forming, trimming, and piercing the necessary holes with huge house sized break presses. This department was old and outdated and the average weight of every part we produced was approximately thirty-five pounds, and we would produce anywhere from 500 to 2500 per shift depending on the orders from Ford. As you can imagine, this type of work is hard on the body.

After two brutal years in this archaic department, I was fortunate enough to can attend a company sponsored four-week welding training program at my former college. This time I was attending for a program that interested me, and had a much better ending than my previous attempt at this institution. I completed the training and was given a bid into a welding department at A.O Smith. Shortly after my department transfer A.O. Smith sold their automotive division to Tower Automotive. With the new ownership, we were all uncertain how the transition would directly impact all of us. It didn't take long to realize this transition was a welcomed breath of fresh air. Tower came in and transformed our rundown plant into a thriving facility with new business and opportunities for new training and advancement for employees. Only six months after the purchase of the facility, Tower was awarded a full frame bid for the new Lincoln Aviator line. With the arrival of the new department, it opened another opportunity to take more advanced weld training to be qualified to bid into this new department. Once again I found myself back at my alma mater again to increase my welding knowledge and skills. I passed the training, and was given a bid into the

new department, and I spent the next six years in the full frame weld assembly department. Life was perfect, I had found my calling, and I loved what I did for a living and made great money at the same time.

This dream was relatively short lived, though. In 2005, Tower Automotive announced they were closing the Granite City facility, and moving the operation to Mississippi. The perfect career fit for me was being ripped out from under me and there was nothing I could do about it. Immediately, I was bitter towards the production industry, and swore that I would never go back to a job like that again. I was given the chance to attend college as part of a severance package deal for laying us off. Thinking about attending school for two years seemed like a total nightmare so I chose a different path. Instead of going back to a traditional school, I decided to get trained to drive a tractor-trailer through a driving school with a four-week training course.

While I was still in driving school I applied to TMC Transportation Inc., an over the road trucking company out of Des Moines, Iowa. I was accepted and began my driving career a mere six weeks after being laid off. This was a whole new career and adventure for me and I was so excited to get paid to see the country. Within the first year of employment I managed to drive through all forty-eight states and Canada. It seemed like I had found the perfect replacement career for myself. The over the road portion of my driving career lasted for four years until I received a phone call from a TMC account manager who offered me a new position on a dedicated account. After discussing the ins and outs of the account and what exactly the new position consisted of. The dedicated account was hauling building materials from the Home Depot distribution center in St. Louis, MO to Home Depot stores in the Kansas City, MO area. The thought of being home a minimum of every other night was the overwhelming deciding factor. I drove on this account for another three years when another position opened which intrigued me. A yard position became available when the current driver retired. The yard position was nothing more than moving trailers on the property of the Home Depot distribution lot. As the empty trailers were loaded with building materials, it was my job to move the loaded trailer and park it in a holding lot and place another empty trailer back in the loading area. I had gone from being gone over the road for one to two

weeks at a time to home every other night, and was now home every night. As the old saying goes, “All good things must come to an end” or “If it’s seems too good to be true, it probably is.”

My new position was working out perfectly until Home Depot decided to open a new distribution center in Kansas City and cut our orders in half. I went from working in a stable environment to being forced to take days off due to lack of work. My income was falling fast and had no indications of ever getting back to normal. A decision had to be made quickly before I ended up in the poor house. A good friend of mine worked for Beelman Truck Co. and made good money so I decided to give them a call. Luckily this decision worked out and I was hired almost immediately. I remember thinking that even though I had been forced to change jobs frequently since the Tower closing, it seemed like I always managed to land on my feet and improve my situation. It was in that moment that I decided to stop focusing on my misfortunes and begin to focus on all the blessings I had been given throughout my working life.

One week after calling Beelman, I was working for them hauling coal to the coke ovens at U.S. Steel. Little did I know this would be the start of my latest college experience. After working for Beelman for a year, I was making plenty friends at U.S. Steel at the same time. My brother-in-law had been employed at the steel mill for twenty-nine years and gave me a call one evening to inform me that the mill was going to hire soon. He was just giving me a heads-up in the event I was interested in applying for a position. Ironically, I had the opportunity years earlier to get hired there, and I passed on the chance because of their history of lay offs. After we got off the phone I talked to my wife about the possibility of applying. A job at U.S. Steel is a highly coveted gig for several reasons. The number one attraction to this hot, dirty, dangerous job is the benefits package including family coverage health insurance with no premium cost to the employees. Yes, that’s what I said – we didn’t pay anything towards the premium, but had fantastic coverage with extremely low co-pays. At my advancing age, this was by far the most enticing aspect of the job. My wife and I had a long talk and made the decision together to go for it.

After an agonizing ten-month wait, I finally received the call. I was

officially a U.S. Steel employee and my excitement was overwhelming. Being a steel worker is an entirely different lifestyle from any other job I had ever had. Sixteen hour shifts were the norm, and swing shift was grueling. Planning any family time was next to impossible because you never knew from day to day whether you would be forced over to work a sixteen-hour shift. When you got time off, the only thing you truly wanted to do was sleep to try and catch up on the sleep you had gone without the previous week. Our schedule was referred to as a twenty-one turn. All this meant was, you worked seven days in a row and then had two days off. At the end of your third week, which totaled your twenty-one days of work, you were given a four-day weekend. On the surface this schedule doesn't sound that horrible. Generally, what would happen was every time you were on your seventh day, your relief would call off and consequently you would be forced to work an additional eight-hour shift. It never failed to happen on your last day of the seven-day work week. Now that you worked an additional shift, sleep was now what replaced whatever plans you thought you had for the weekend. I made excellent money, and I could provide an amazing living for my family, but the cost was tremendous.

Depending on how you choose to look at the situation, the next set back was either a devastating blow or a blessing in disguise. After a year of gainful employment at U.S. Steel, I was laid off because they had decided to close my department forever. Shock was probably my first reaction because all I could see were all the opportunities for my family disappearing. My wife is the true hero in this whole story because if it hadn't been for her strength and belief in me I doubt the next phase of my life would have ever come to fruition. She was the clear thinker in this whole thing, and the one that suggested taking advantage of the schooling option that the company had offered all their laid-off employees. *School, my favorite place on the planet*, was all I could sarcastically think in my mind, but maybe it was time to finally give it a real go. The time had come to improve my marketability, and move myself out of the laborer level up to the management level through education.

My new journey into the world of education began in the summer semester of 2015. Process Operations Technology was the degree

program I selected. This program would allow me to gain the classroom side of the production world to match with my twenty plus years of practical experience. By the end of my first semester my attitude towards school had made a 180 degree turn. I loved it, and I was good at this school stuff. This arrogance was short lived because I knew I had my first English course in more than twenty-five years in the fall semester. The word “butterflies” doesn’t begin to describe the churning in my stomach that first day in English 131. In my mind, I was going to be so far behind the curve that all the kids fresh out of high school were going to whip this old man in paper writing. Fortunately, I was blessed with an awesome teacher who helped me get past my nerves and was patient with me. Once she reassured me that I was going to do fine in the class it all seemed to be much more enjoyable. This class was a pivotal moment in my college experience because it opened so many opportunities for me that I never knew existed. I was lucky enough to get an essay of mine published in the school’s magazine (*The Peppermint Rooster Review*) for poetry and short stories.

This English teacher also encouraged me to apply for a new position at the writing desk. With the tremendous help from her recommendation letter I was selected as the first student peer tutor the writing desk had ever had. During this same time frame I received an invitation to join Phi Theta Kappa, which is the National Honors Society fraternity for junior colleges. I had gone from a blue-collar steelworker with a strong distain for school, to a full-fledged college student who was getting involved. The list of people at Lewis and Clark Community College that I owe a life-long debt of gratitude is long and distinguished. It is a little sad that my career at this institution is winding down, but I will always be thankful for the encouragement and teaching I received. Thanks to everyone who had a hand in making me the student I am, I will be continuing my education to complete my BS at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. In my wildest dreams I would have never imagined that any of this would have been possible... let alone coming true. I truly hope that someday I get the opportunity to pay it forward and honor the ones who made this such an amazing journey and experience. If my story could help one person realize how much they can accomplish once they get out of their own way, then this story

would finally be complete. To close out this fantastic almost whimsical journey, it only seems fitting to thank the person that opened the doors of opportunity for me. Ms. Laine Frizzo was my driving force throughout this adventure, and the one person that saw some potential in this old blue-collar guy. Simply saying thank you doesn't seem to be an adequate showing of appreciation, but I hope you will always know how much you helped me and how truly grateful I will always be. I could have had any ENG 131 teacher here, but I ended up with the one that would introduce me to opportunities I would have otherwise missed out on. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything.

Poetry

Helen Jarden

Bad Grades

So you suck. A big F for Failure.
Way to go kid, you're going far.
No, no! Don't walk away from me
and oh please for the love of god
stop that crying. Listen to me,
you are not the first to screw up.
Everyone falters at least once.

What test was it that you slackened on?
Math? Well, it's a bunch of hogwash.
Biology? Then don't feel bad!
Son, all you really need to know
is that Mother Nature lies like
a rug. She's not clever. She's fake.
Animals are frauds. Who needs 'em!

The starfish isn't even a fish.
Coming from the family, uh,
Echinodermata, that's it!
The fraud flounders on the seafloor,
unable to traverse water.
Don't call yourself a fish if you can't swim,
you loser!

At least the kiwi doesn't keep lies.
If you think you're a failure, kid,
just remember this flightless bird.
It incubates its kin- oh shucks,
I'm kibitzing at you, aren't I?

Let me prove the point I'm making.
The penguin would need a parachute
if it took to the sky. It's webbed
feet pad throughout icy waters.
Feathered wings prepared not to fly.
No pouts for the tuxedoed bird.
My point is, it plunges into
the water and patrols the depths
for delicious krill, fish, and squid.

The bird failed at flight and choose to swim.
So you suck at something, that's fine.
Pick yourself up, dust off your wings,
and pounce into water. Maybe
you won't be such a screw-up there.

Helen Jarden

The Hat Enthusiasts

All lines were taken from The Fedora Lounge

Mike is making a hat for me.
A Duelist but with a monti top and
brim binding to match the ribbon.
I don't know if this is a silly question.
What do you do with your panama hat
when you're walking indoors,
or in a cafe?
Do you hold your panama
in your right or left hand?
I'm effectively feeling paralysed
having to hold a hat in my hand always.
If I am outdoors, a hat is on my head
One hundred percent of the time!
When I dine out, I always feel nervous
about surrendering any garments
or hats to the waiters. I mean,
how do I know they won't give mine away
for someone else who takes a fancy?
Some hats come with a wind-trolley
and the button that goes with it.
Some look like Stetson Open Road models,
oft with a remarkable reverse taper.
I sure dug your hat and
will soon sport one similar.
Flavio, the person responsible
for shaping hats, set to work
selecting a few forms.
Time was spent determining
the exact size of my head.
Unless I am at a wake

or funeral in a church,
or in someone's home,
I never take my hat off.
If I want to create an imposing
presence with a strong
visual symbolism,
then wearing a panama hat
would make it hard to avoid since people
would have to try and look around it.
Youyou still have hair??!
The inhabitants are
mostly Indians, of several tribes,
which dress differently
from one another.
These people are, generally,
very well dressed, their clothes are impressive
and, more often than not, women and men
wear very fine looking hats.

Helen Jarden

Cotton Candy With A Hint of Wicked

Fill their hearts with syrup.
Bake all those feelings
into a big frosted cake.
Sprinkle on compliments.
You're a doll, moving
at their command. Be
magical, sugary, unreal.
Your sweetness is addicting

and goes well with the sweat.
You know, the salty sweat that runs
down his neck when you two
first meet and he can't talk
without stuttering. The sweat
building on his palms
when he confesses his love.
The sweat when you two fuck.

All that has to end at some point.
The sour disappointment
when he takes and stops giving.
That's when you have to leave.
The relationship is too tart
when there's no gifts. You're a doll,
sure, but not a sex toy. You deserve
a display case, not dick.

Hearts break, honey, But he
acts like this wasn't coming.
His bitter words are fuel
for the next fire you inspire.
You'll get another catch

while he sips on vinegar.
It's not that you're greedy.
You're just too sweet for this creep.
All the flavors of a heart break
are savored on your tongue.
The best part of all is there's
no hole in your heart. Go out,
And break another one.

Helen Jarden

The Ledge

Its faded glass
and aged plumbing
was an affront to the eyes.
This orange brick building
was where my parents
lived, fought, loved.

The golden numbers
four one seven
were on the peeling paint
of a rotten door.
I saw those numbers as I
grew, learned, fled.

On the vacant roof,
the playground of my youth,
broken bottles rested
and syringes lie molding.
I stood on the ledge and
retched, screamed, cried.

And from my perch,
I saw the ghosts
of lost memories
meaningful only to me.
With closed eyes, I
breathed, tensed, jumped.

Helen Jarden

Blue Blouse Baby

I hate starting sentences with I.
Once I assumed it was because “I”
was repetitive. Like the beat
of a song that just
won’t go away. The one that drums
in the back of your head
as you try to pull yourself together,
push past the booze and clean
yourself up. Now though, I
wonder if it has some deeper meaning.
A hatred for the spotlight, perhaps?
When people look at me, I
recoil from their gaze.
What are they thinking?
Do they see the secretary
who works long shifts
then goes, not home, but to the bar?
Or do they see the little girl
who once thought she’d be something...
something more.
Certainly it’s not the girl who
sticks to shadows like glue.
They aren’t looking at my
accomplishments and accolades.
It’s my character they see.
It’s not *what I’ve done* it’s *who I am*.
Maybe I don’t like that.
There’s a reason I sit in the corner
when music blasts through speakers
while warm bodies float and sway.
Maybe I’s remind me of the flaws
the wrinkles I can’t iron out,

the typos on an important letter
that no one wants to read.

Is the convenience of a short,
blunt sentence worth
the inner scrutiny of my soul?

That night in the grimy bathroom, as I
poured bleach on my blue blouse,
a part of me wondered.

“Who am I?”

When I write down “I”
do I think about the boss that touches me,
the dreams that won’t come true,
the little girl that grew,
or that drunk with my knife lodged
in his gurgling throat?

Helen Jarden

Bend

The town hall is a towering
red brick building, with white
pillars boasting of prestige.
From pilgrim times it grew,
shoddy shack to proud
mansion, elegant and refined.

The inside is decorated
with mahogany desks and
plush leather seats.
The thrones hold the fat cats
while the blood of the poor mix
with their gold and silver.

Oil paintings adorn the walls,
white men staring with pride
at the varnished wood panels
and intricate crown molding.
At night those beady eyes
stare at the mayor and his

secretary, bent over the desk,
staining the wood with froth.
The jabbing shadow makes the
painted smiles widen. She
cleans the mess from her dress.
Keep it up and you'll get that raise.

In the morning, smiling faces
sift through metal cabinets,
tucking away manila envelopes
in between the dark cracks.

Incriminating folders are burned,
the paper trail is now smoke and ash.

The town hall stands in glory,
its pillars raised high and ready
to bring down its marble fists.
*Don't bring me your tired and your poor.
Keep your lazy masses in the
ocean of refuse where they belong.*

The grimy town bends down
like the pretty secretary,
and closes its eyes. *Deep breath.*
Its streets filled with filth,
its people struggling to survive.
It will be over soon.

Foul disease haunts the poor
While the rich turn a blind eye.
She leaves work, shivering.
*If you just put up with it,
maybe you'll get a raise.
It will be okay. Don't cry.*

Helen Jarden

Opalite Faces

The floor shakes.
Tires bump on the gravel road.
You open your burning eyes
expecting to see dusty
fan blades slowly spinning
above you in their
monotonous pattern.

Instead there is a blackness
that not even night
could hope to mimic.
Sitting up makes you dizzy.
Blood drips from your head.
Just as you realize there's rope
around your tied hands,
you hear something.
A sputter.

It all comes flooding back.
A deluge of memories flow
through you. The girl in the tub,
her brown curls danced in the water.
A yellow rubber duck bounced off
your arm as you held her down.
Bubbles flowed from her soundless screams.
Did she see her killer's smile?
Did you look at her body
and feel no shame?

The van makes a quick swerve.
Your body lurches forward
and your stomach protests.

Someone lets out a string
of curses as the sickly
driver retches. “Keep drivin’ cunt,”
a shout threatens from the front seat.

Looks like you’re not the only one
who is heading to hell tonight.
The ride quickly gets smoother
but the coughing never stops.
Her breathing sounds
like churning gravel.
However they torture her,
it won’t last long.

The rider pokes his head
around the ragged seat.
His shadowed face stares down
into your blood-shot eyes.
There are no words exchanged
but you hear a cold laugh.
He sits back in his seat,
and the radio starts
all a sudden. Pop melody
and sultry voice assault
your already annoyed brain.

The van stops just as your migraine
has reached it’s peak. Thank god.
“Get out, sugar.” The rider speaks.
A flashlight is shining
into her dirty window.
She waves her hands
in desperate protest.
A crack makes you flinch.
Her door flies open
just as she blacks out.

Dragging noises grow distant.
Clad in black, an angel of death
ducks his head inside.
“Our hungry need more for the hunt.”
This makes you pause. Hunt?
You swear you’ve heard this before,
maybe even delivered
a few poor souls
to this desolate hell.

“We gotcha one in the back.”
The rider’s voice is far too smug.
The angel’s dark eyes
are now looking you up and down.
“Hey wait- he costs ya extra.”
Never a good idea.
You’ve tried that tactic before,
asking for more.
It’s a genius way
of getting skinned alive.

“Don’t stick your head in a bear’s mouth.
His sharp teeth lust
to tear into your skull.”
The angel’s voice
was thick with threat.
Either the message is lost,
or the rider is obstinate.
“Listen asshole, save the speech
Cause that horseshit don’t work on me.”

The angel’s mouth distorts.
The rookie rider’s big mistake?
Never insult the client.
A roar erupts, the battle cry.
A hundred demons

beat down the metal walls.
A woman's scream, cut short,
adds to the chaos.
She lasted a lot less
than you had guessed.

The van spins around
like a washing machine.
The metal crunching
cuts off as your head
smacks against the ceiling.

Blood on your teeth.
Aches and burns
pierce your bones.
Groans escape your mouth
halfway before you realize it.
You open your eyes
and curse the bright light
that dangles overhead.
Dead wood molds around you.

Your freed wrists still burn
from the rough rope.
The rotted chair creaks
as you finally stand.
This shack is baren.
Scatched windows and a broken door.
You bolt out before fate decides
to screw you over. You are free.

Free in a night-ridden forest
where the hunt is afoot.
Shadows stomp through foliage.
Human howls reverberate
against shredded bark.

You almost slip against wet
leaves soaked in blood.
Someone, something,
crashes behind you.
It's getting closer.
It's breath is on your neck.

Then you're flying, falling.
Your leg hits the ground the wrong way
just as you realize you've
fallen down a small cliff.
A scream is forced out of your lungs.
The hunt grows closer.
Victorious chants vibrate the ground.
You can't stand. You can't crawl.
You're immobilized.

Obsidian eyes and
opalite faces
stare at you from afar.
Silver teeth
protruding from pale lips.
Their white faces
visible from the dark.
You cover your face,
and try not to scream
as their hunt ends.

Helen Jarden

Violence on Snow

The unruly brute
slouches at a bar
and watches Susan,
with her curly hair
and pink lips, swishing hips.
Lust and imagined thrusts
create sparks in his eyes.
His mouth parts and speaks to her
with sweet nothings.
Words of eternal dedication.

Two seasons of his bliss,
and her faithful loyalty.
He barks his orders
and she obeys.
But then a thread breaks.
A command issued
that she refuses.
The tapestry unravels.
She won't give in
and he won't wait.

Her drunken lover
speaks slurred romance
to others more willing.
A one night stand
not shrouded enough.
Pure Susan finds lovers
entangled limb to limb,
seed burst on bare thigh.

Her heart calcifies with ire.
Bags packed with silk dresses,
a rosary from her youth,
and photos of painful memories.
He returns home to find
the emptiness. Her absence is like
a geist, haunting him.

The thought of her gone,
wandering into the warmth
of another lover. Sworn to some other
as if she were free. The brute
decided it was time to show
the strength of his reign.

So he gathered his brothers
his wolves of erect teeth.
In the blanket on night,
they descended on the lamb.
Their howls drowned out screams.
Her purity ripped away,
her clothes torn apart,
until her wounds bleed out.

Then frozen kisses
brushed bruised body
until the remains
were gently covered
in a sea of white purity.
Laid to rest, but not in peace.

Deborah Dhue

He Was Once A Tall Structure

A gust of wind.
A cloud of dust.
A tree coming loose
From the ground at the root.

He was once a tall structure,
One of grandeur.
With murals of tile
And glass of color.

His grains were perfectly toned
And his beams broad and strong.
No one could ever break him down,
Until she came along.

At first, he was maintained.
She lightly caressed him
Like a gentle breeze,
Blowing through the branches.

Slowly, however, he began to decay.
His colors became muted;
His beams began to sag;
Under each eye was a purple bag.

Her fingers, they rotted his being.
Digging in deeper,
Leaving her mark
As if he was her property.

Karley M. Swarts

Thank You

Thank you for helping me even when I approach you with an attitude.

Thank you for every pant leg and shirt sleeve you lift from the floor.

Thank you for “checking the back” even after you’ve already explained that there is no back to check.

Thank you for allowing me to tear apart your store in search of the latest trends and dinner condiments.

But most of all, thank you for taking the time to read all of the things that retail workers pray to hear everyday.

Devin M. Winter

Is It My Birthday?

Miles, feet, inches, yards
I'm already using mine
No goals to achieve
My day has been so easy
I've been walking in the park

Devin M. Winter

Not In My Eyes but in My Mind

I used to see them
Neither drawings nor paintings
Supernatural
That wasn't the case either
Yet they haunted me
Although this was no movie
They were directors
I like controlling my thoughts
Thank goodness I have that skill

Kathrine Rethorn

Simple Satisfaction

The feel of a long stretch after a night's sleep
The sight of a clear sky on a Friday morning
The sound of coffee brewing
The smell of freshly cut grass on a summer's day
The taste of your lover's lips.
The feel of their hair tangled tight in your hands
The sight of confusion when they realize they're not safe
The sound of their screams as your knife slides deep
The smell of iron that fills the damp alley
The taste of each other's sweat mingled together in the end.
The feel of a hot stream thrumming against your back
The sight of a four course meal
The sound of rain against your window at night
The smell of your steak cooked medium rare
The taste of the first juicy bite gushing over your tongue.

Kathrine Rethorn

Melancholy

I woke this morning
a pile of bones
my sockets empty
ears missing
lips no more.

When I moved
I could feel the cob-
webs stretch and
restrict my
knobby fingers.

I tried to talk to
see if I could
but my jaw dropped
not in awe or fear
I didn't hear the

rattle as it fell
and hung like a
collar around my
neck.

I began to ponder
the life of a Skelton.
The jobs I could
have, what family
would think.

I began to wonder
where my life began
and when it ended.

Was I real, or stuck
in a dream.

I began to consider
staying like this
laying here wasn't
so bad. Rather
enjoyable.

Being a pile of bones.

Fiction

Andrew Crook

Zombie Bud's Cabin

“Get ahold of yourself Alan! We’ve got to go!” SMACK.

“Great God man, what the hell?”

“Something is here! Come on!” Mike tugged on Alan’s reaper robe, raising him to his feet. They ran.

Their lives were normal before the party. Alan and Mike rode to college together every day and attended the same classes. Alan was tall with blue eyes. He wore glasses, and had short brown hair. Mike was also tall with brown hair but he had green eyes. A lot of people got them mixed up or called them twins. Neither of them knew what they were going to their local college for, other than to please their parents. They went to school, ate, played video games, and slept. They led the lives of typical college freshmen. Until they met disaster.

“Hey chumps!” SMACK. One of Mike and Alan’s friends from high school slapped his way in between them as they were walking to the car. “Where were ya at Saturday? I texted ya.”

“Oh sorry Bud, I had a family thing,” Mike lied.

“I had the flu,” Alan lied.

“Oh shut up, Alan. You don’t have to lie to me, ya prick. I was going to invite you dorks to my cabin. I had beer and bitches.”

“Ah damn, I would have loved to join you, mate,” Mike lied again.

“I cut down a fuckin’ tree too! HA HA! Someone recorded it, but I can’t remember who.” Bud scratched his ape-like head. “Anyway, how about you guys come out tonight? I’m having a costume party. You guys like slutty costumes right?”

“Well, it’s Halloween after all. I think we can make an appearance.” Mike looked at Alan. Mike knew he was pissed but he was good at hiding it.

Mike was driving them back to the suburb in Fresno, California.

He was singing loudly with the radio trying to tune out Alan's bitching.

"WHAT WERE YOU THINKING!"

"Come on Alan, lighten up for once, it's been 3 months. You deserve a bit of fun."

"I don't want fun, Mike."

"Too bad! Now what costumes should we wear?" Mike was driving home and ignoring Alan. Alan and his girlfriend of 3 years had broken up 3 months ago. Since then, he wasn't the same. He was frequently depressed and he barely even talked to Mike, his long-time best friend. Mike had been trying to get him back to his old self. "Ah hah! I think I'll be a pirate! Arrrr! Hahaha! Hey! I have a Grim Reaper costume you can use."

"Fine, whatever." Alan looked out the window, trying to hide his excitement.

"Mr. Pirate! Mr. Reaper! Welcome to my cabin!" Zombie Bud opened the door to reveal a mass quantity of dressed up bodies. More female than male. The cabin was in the woods, near a small lake just outside of Fresno. The country music was loud (thanks to Zombie Bud) and the guests had to shout to be heard. The party wasn't different from the typical college Halloween party; there were slutty girls, douche guys, and lots of beer. The sun was setting over the water, causing the pinkish glow to reflect and blind everyone in the cabin. The ceiling was made of rusted tin to give it that "country feel." Mike and Alan shook hands with the guys and gave hugs to the girls. Most of the people were from their high school, but there were a few guests that they didn't know. It didn't matter where they were from, it was a party after all.

"Hey man, I'm Mike, and this is my mate, Alan."

"Nice to meet you." Reaper Alan stuck his hand out to shake. The Clown's white bloodstained glove shook Reaper Alan's hand vigorously. Alan was surprised with the strength behind the shake.

A cold voice replied. "I'm Bob, greetings." Clown Bob shook Pirate Mike's hand just as hard then got up and went directly outside.

Reaper Alan rubbed his hand. "What the hell man?"

"That guy is tense. Hey Bud!" Pirate Mike tapped Zombie Bud's shoulder, probably saving him from crashing and burning with a girl

way out of his league. Zombie Bud was angry that he was interrupted. “Who the hell is that clown guy, Bob?”

“Clown? The hell you talkin’ about?” Zombie Bud slurred.

Pirate Mike removed his eye patch. “Alan, what the hell...”

“Bud’s drunk dude, just forget it.”

The party raged on. A few hours later the floor was littered with cans. Some crushed, some half full. Mike and Alan were both 5 beers in now. There were games of pool, darts, beer pong, and drinking card games going on in every corner of the room. By this time the music had changed from Zombie Bud’s country to the Slutty Sorority Cat’s pop. They danced in the middle of the cabin while the drunk guys drooled. Pirate Mike and Reaper Alan both found themselves a girl.

The dried leaves provided enough padding for the sex hungry drunks. Pirate Mike and his nurse were down by the lake. Reaper Alan and his witch were behind the storage shed. However, Mike was no longer a pirate and Alan was no longer a reaper. When they were finished they dozed off for a while.

“Get ahold of yourself Alan! We’ve got to go!” SMACK.

“Great God man, what the hell?”

“Something is here! Come on!” Mike tugged on Alan’s reaper robe, raising him to his feet. They all ran.

Ghostly white figures. Three of them. They didn’t move very fast but their tall legs allowed them to take enormous steps. Alan turned to look at them every few steps. He noticed that they were just legs, they didn’t seem to have a torso or a head, and they looked like white sheets as they blew back and forth. Mike stopped.

“Okay guys, enough with the tricks.”

The others stopped. The white figures laughed from underneath their sheets.

“We got you good!” Zombie Bud surfaced from his sheets. He was standing on some homemade stilts. The other two were his friends from college. They were all laughing their asses off.

“All right, all right. Good scare, now let’s head back to the cabin. It’s getting cold out here.”

They approached the cabin and the crackling noise it was making.

The cabin was ablaze. Smoke rose through the bare branches of the trees, blocking the light of the moon.

“WHAT THE FUCK! AGGHHH!” Zombie Bud ran like lightning to the cabin. He was stopped. Completely stopped. Something struck him as he ran. Something cold. Something sharp. Zombie Bud fell to his knees, then collapsed onto his stomach.

“Bud? What’s wrong dude?” Alan took a few steps forward. He saw it, then stopped. A fatal wound to Bud’s neck. He wasn’t breathing.

“Bud? BUD?!” Mike screamed. “What the fuck is going on! Run guys!” he turned to run as far away as possible. A swift wind rustled the leaves beneath Mike’s feet. Before he could scream, the invisible metal met his neck. The impact to his bones made a crunching sound. His head landed a few feet from his body.

Alan silently went to Mike’s body. The girls screamed and ran, but were soon headless and soulless. Alan cried over his friend’s body. He retrieved the head and tried to reassemble it with the rest of his twitching body.

“Mike! Please no. Mike! Come on Michael!” a hot breath warmed Alan’s cold neck, but sent a chill down his spine. He turned but there was nothing in sight. The breath fogged Alan’s glasses.

“Happy Halloween.” Clown Bob appeared in front of Alan. He was much bloodier than before. The mad clown reeked of iron and smoke. He dragged the bloody axe behind him in one hand, which left a trail of blood on the dead leaves. In his other hand was a garbage bag. “Congratulations! You’re the survivor! Did you enjoy yourself with that little whore? How about round two, lad?” He pointed to the decapitated body of the girl. It was still twitching and oozing blood. “No? Well maybe I’ll help myself. AHAAHAH!”

“What the hell do you want!? You fucking monster!” Alan cried. He tried to move but was frozen in fear.

Clown Bob got closer to Alan’s face. His wicked breath fogged Alan’s glasses. “Just enjoying myself.” With a thud Alan’s head hit the ground just like the rest. Clown Bob gathered up all the heads and placed them in the garbage bag. He then disappeared into the mist and smoke, whistling a circus tune.

Deborah Dhue

Growth of Fear

“Whatever you do, don’t go out into the woods.”

Yoli woke with a start. She was drenched in sweat, but she couldn’t recall her dream. Grampa had always been weird about the vast forest that surrounded the town.

“Guess he’s just coming back to haunt me.” She sighed, getting up for a glass of water. As she gulped down the room-temperature fluid, she gazed out the window. The woods looked dark against the red sunrise. A dense fogged wrapped itself around the trees. She went back to bed for another hour of sleep.

Driving to work, she realized that she had no memory of anywhere but the town. She was so bored with it, and she didn’t know what was wrong with the forest. It was just trees, right?

“You look like death warmed over,” her boss said as she sat down at the reception desk.

“I didn’t get much sleep last night.”

“The dreams, again? Yoli, when are they going to stop?” she asked in a worried, yet exasperated, tone.

“I don’t know, but I am going to finish it today.”

After a long day at the reception desk of a psychiatric office, she decided to overcome her grampa’s fear of the forest herself. She drove to the outskirts of Circle City, and parked her car right outside the treeline.

Getting out, a sudden sense of unease came over her, but she ignored it and trudged on into the forest. It was completely dark, even though she could see the sun through the leaves. The trees took on a blue hue, and it suddenly got colder. She kept walking, not keeping track of where she was going. The trees became more and more dense.

She was now so far in that she could barely see in front of her. She looked up and saw that the sun was fading from the sky. As the last of the light was fading from the tree tops, she saw something move. Then she understood why Grampa was so scared of this place. She wanted to run so badly, but she was frozen as the thing approached her. She could

barely see, but it appeared to be made completely of wood and rotten flesh. She squeezed her eyes shut as she felt the energy leaving her body as the creature came closer.

The next day, Yoli didn't show up at work, and there was a fresh sapling in the middle of the forest.

Deborah Dhue

The Islander

Josef looked out across the crashing sea. A light rain drizzled onto the dock, dousing the flame in his pipe. It had happened exactly thirty years ago today. Elissia had set out on the sea to visit the new land. She had always been a skilled botanist, even for a woman.

It had been stormy that day, just as it was this very evening. When she set off, it had just been a light drizzle. But once her ship had gone out of view, the storm grew more fierce. He knew that they should have christened the ship, but there was no time during its production. The bare, nameless wood from the ship had washed up a week after the storm, but her body was never found. The only thing left in the wreckage other than the wood and a few broken bottles was a small trunk with a letter in it. After the years of living in depression, he had decided to open the trunk. Inside was a letter scrawled in her hand writing.

My beloved Josef,

I couldn't tell you before I left because I knew that you would have never let me go on this excursion. Josef, I am pregnant with your baby. I wish I could have told you, but you know how stubborn I am and how much I needed to study these. I had to prove that I was worthy of being a scientist. I am so sorry, my love, I wish you would have known. I was hoping that once we evaluated the environment, you could come with me and be a father to our child. I hope to see you soon.

Love, Elissia.

The drops of rain and tears muddled the ink on the paper. Not only had he lost the love of his life that long ago, but he had also lost his unborn child.

“My Elissia, my princess in the tower, too stubborn to let me help you,” he whispered, as more tears ran down his face. He took in a deep inhale of white grass from his pipe, then let out the puff into the cool humid air. A familiar lullaby she used to sing ran through his head as he stepped off the dock onto the soggy grass at the end of the beach. He

walked into the water, slowly, allowing the waves to toss him back and forth. A sad grin spread across his face as he descended further into the ocean. As he was fully under the waves, the storm came up and helped him to rejoin his family in their watery grave.

Deborah Dhue

The People On Mute

“Oh my god, you’re so funny!” Candace laughed at Jared. She then looked down, hiding her blushing cheeks. He smiled back at her, the light of love gleaming in his eyes. His chest felt tight and warm. Everything about her was perfect, especially her different colored eyes and tooth gap. They made her her to him.

“Candace, I feel like we’ve known each other for so long. I never want our fun times to end,” he began, looking her in the eye.

She giggled nervously and looked back at him. He was so handsome to her with his dirty brown almost black hair. He had small bags under his eyes because of sleepless nights, but that made him him to her.

“But Candace, I don’t think this is the time to be together. You know?” he finished, hesitantly. The smile on Candace’s face grew, but tears welled up in her eyes. She understood what he wanted. What he meant.

The scene slowly disappeared as Rodger O’Tallahan removed the pipe from between their heads. Blood and fluid spilled out before he could patch up the holes. Candace blinked. Rodger left and hooked up the pipe to a machine to watch their progress. They had been adopted for an experiment on human connection. They were both born mute, and they had spent their entire lives tied to poles, with the pipe screwing in and out of their head holes every week.

They had never spoken or interacted other than their sessions with the pipe. Candace looked over at Jared. He was still dreaming.

I love you, Jared.

Jared pulled out of the dream state. He looked at Candace and smiled widely, his slightly crooked teeth gleaming in the yellow tungsten light.

I love you, Candace.

Deborah Dhue

Welcome to Alleytown

January 3rd, Friday

We were driving home from school. On the Beltline, we passed the Old Alleytown Cinema. There was a car pulling out of its parking lot, leaving behind someone at the door. It appeared to be a woman in an aqua shirt and black skirt with one of those headscarves you see old women wear. However, at a closer look, we could see that it was an adolescent young lady. She shivered and waved farewell to the car as she re-tied her scarf. It was strange, but it was a strange town. As we got closer to home, we saw Jimmy in his truck again. Again, he turned left but had his right blinker on. This was a normal occurrence with Jimmy.

We pulled up into my driveway and I got out, almost slipping on the frozen-over slush. Old Larry wouldn't be outside today to mow the street; it was too cold and he is so elderly. He usually mows the street around 1, anyways. I gathered up my things and headed to my favorite coffee shop.

January 4th, Saturday

I learned today that the girl at the cinema is named Melody. She said that she goes to the cinema every day, and they have all kinds of great movies showing. She is a bit off like that. I always thought that the cinema was closed and condemned, but she said the inside is beautiful. I think she is strange, even for someone who lives here. Larry is out of luck again because today there is a blizzard with freezing rain. I hope this weather stops so that he can do what he likes.

That ugly bunny lady came into the shop today. The stupid bitch ordered a latte with no cream. That's what a latte is: cream and coffee. Oh well, my friend made one for her anyways. She's like something out of one of those old tv shows. She always has on bright bell-bottoms and feather earrings and she has an afro, too. I wonder why she stays here, but I'm glad that she hasn't decided to leave yet. It seems like a lot of people leave anymore.

January 8th, Wednesday

My sister and I saw a UFO today. We were leaving the coffee shop, and I thought that there was a really bright star over there. But we noticed that it was moving closer to us. At first, we thought that it was an airplane or helicopter. But it didn't have the green light that most planes have. And it was a weird shape, too. We told my dad about it, and he got into one of those moods.

January 10th, Friday

I told Melody about the strange ship we saw the other night. I also told her about the van that decided "right-on-red" meant "left-on-red" as well. The police officer across the way never even looked twice at the car. He continued to tweet on his cell phone as he went over the speed limit. Must be an emergency. The police are always doing weird things. When a family moves in next to a policeman, they don't stay for long.

January 17th, Friday

I was stuck in my English class today. I was bored, as always. However, my friend came up with the most delightful idea. Being very computer smart, he somehow gained control over the projector in our class. It was joyous to watch, really, and twice as entertaining as anything in that class. But the fan is louder than it should be. Maybe Jerard isn't the only one controlling the projector.

January 20th, Monday

Melody asked me if I wanted to go see a movie today at the cinema. Of course, I had to decline because of school. She gave me a funny look when I said I had to go. She said, "No one ever goes there anymore. It's just an illusion." Maybe she is right.

I'm glad I started taking my lunch to school because Catheryn's turkey sandwich did not look right at all. Where it should have been a very pale pink, there was a grey tint. She bit down, right onto a bone that was definitely not a turkey bone. People who eat the school lunches get aggressive and stay home from school more often. It isn't food poisoning. It's something in the food. Or it could be just my imagination.

January 21st, Tuesday

There were no bones in Catheryn's lunch today. There were no bones in my lunch, either. I had a pizza lunchable.

February 14th, Thursday

White Castle had a special today. If you called, you could make reservations and sit at a table with a tablecloth and be waited on. I didn't go, though. I spent my day at the coffee shop.

February 28th, Thursday

Today, I listened to George Gershwin while I did my homework. "Rhapsody in Blue" is not considered one of his best works. This makes no sense to me.

My kitten, Kettlecorn, teleported again yesterday. I could have sworn that she was atop my space heater. When I walked across the house, she came running out of the bathroom. It has happened several times, and I am now used to it, but it still jars me every once in awhile. Dad said that she had been in the bathroom the whole day. Dad is usually wrong, though.

February 29th, Friday

Today is the day that does not exist. However, it is quite here. It is today. But it is not in existence.

March 5th, Wednesday

A girl was raped today at our school. At first, we didn't know what was going on. Some people were called down to the office, and we didn't know why. It was her ex-boyfriend. Now we are not allowed to stay after school unless we are supervised by an adult. Even if the adults are more dangerous than the students.

March 7th, Friday

Last night at debate team, my friend got called a liar, and the entire raping incident was treated like it never happened. But it's okay for the teachers to get high in the bathroom and for strange things to happen in the basement at night.

March 8th, Saturday

My sister and I were outside today, climbing our tree in the front yard. A scary old woman came down the street. She looked normal, but there was something off about her. She walked up to us, even though Dad was sitting on the porch, watching us. She told us that we could call her Grandmother Marshmallow. She then told us to come with her, and she'd give us a surprise. My sister saw that Dad didn't think that it was okay, but I didn't think she was too evil. So I started to walk up to her. Dad said to get back here. She said not to listen to him. My sister finally pulled me back, and we went inside. That was the scariest day of my life.

March 9th, Sunday

My friend, who now lives in Texas, told me that when she was younger, Grandmother Marshmallow tried to talk to them, too. They ran away from her. When Grandmother Marshmallow walked around our neighborhood, more children went missing. I only went outside if Dad or my sister was with me.

March 15th, Saturday

Oh what great sorrow! My life is full of woe! That beautiful sycamore tree! Why did Jerry have to cut off his arm?! I HOPE THAT GRANDMOTHER MARSHMALLOW GETS HIM!!!

March 16th, Sunday

I came home from church around 12:30. I heard a faint whirring sound outside. I looked out the window. Larry was back to mowing the street again. There is no grass on the street, so I don't see why people don't openly question him. But no one talks to Larry.

On our way to dinner, there was an old lady going the wrong way on the highway. She almost crashed into several cars. We were going to the Beltline Taco Bell.

March 19th, Wednesday

We saw the lady again who went the wrong way. Only this time, she went the wrong way near the East Alleytown Cemetery. We were on our way to the East Alleytown Taco Bell. Maybe Taco Bell makes people go crazy.

March 27th, Tuesday

On my way to school, I drove past the East Alleytown Cemetery, which is right behind my house through the woods. It was the most peculiar thing: they were digging up the graves. Only certain ones. The ones closer to the woods. The ones closer to my house.

March 28th, Wednesday

Nothing extraordinary happened today. I had homework and ate dinner, like usual. Y.E.L.L. had a meeting, but no one showed up.

April 4th, Tuesday

A week later, I drove past the cemetery again. The graves that had been dug up were completely gone. The stones. The holes. The evidence that the ground had even been disturbed. What could the City Committee be hiding?

April 6th, Thursday

We were in the coffee shop, and this woman was talking to her friend. Something about chopping off this guy's arm. We hear weird things in the coffee shop all the time.

May 4th, Thursday

My sister took me to walk around her school with me today. She goes to the community college. There is a greenhouse there. It looks perfectly normal during the day, but night time is a different story. We looked at the map, but it seems that there is no visible passage to the greenhouse. And there is always a strange purple light that glows until the sun comes up. The windows are almost impossible to see through, so no one really knows what is being grown in there except for the botany students.

Kelsey Clore

One Day Soon

On the very last day that human beings inhabit the Earth, you will awaken in a cold sweat, clutching your sheets tightly to your chest as though they might protect you from whichever monster haunted your dreams.

You'll watch the morning bleed hues of oranges and pinks into the blackness of the night sky, as the stars fade away into the clouds, and the sun emerges slowly over the horizon.

You'll ask yourself what you dreamed about, but as time passes – as the glowing red minutes tick away on the digital clock on your nightstand, until hours have melted by and you find that it's already time for you to get ready for clas – you'll realize that your dreams were nothing but foggy images flickering by, only shadows now. The phantom of goosebumps will refuse to fade away on your arms.

You'll have slept fitfully the night before, tossing and turning with anxiety as you'd belittled your own abilities. You'd taken the plunge and submitted a story to the school paper. Only the night before will you have realized that you should have written more detail. You should have written about the thread count on the sheets in your protagonist's room. You should have written about the rosy shade of her lips – like apples or cherries, or something so appealing that the editor would have realized how tantalizing and irresistible your character really was.

When your alarm finally sounds, you'll pry yourself away from the warmth of your sheets, hissing through your teeth as your bare feet meet the chilly hardwood of your bedroom floor. You'll think about how you should have compared your character's breath hanging in the air to rainclouds. You'll wonder why you can never write anything beautiful when it really matters.

You'll find yourself so wrapped up in your internal crisis that you'll neglect to look out of your bedroom window onto the street below. You won't notice the absence of your neighbors – who usually wake up early to shovel the snow from their driveways and check the mail – or the ominous, otherworldly purple clouds looming over the cul-de-sac. You

won't even think anything of the fact that no cars pass by as you make the short trek from your front door to school, or the absence of your mother making coffee in the kitchen, your father watching the morning news in the living room on his favorite worn, faded chair. You'll be too busy thinking about metaphors – about comparing the fluttering of a beautiful girl's eyelashes to the black wings of a raven taking flight in a clear sky.

When you arrive at school, a friend of yours will be waiting for you at the front gates, gloved fingers wrapped around the black wrought-iron bars as she greets you from nearly a hundred feet away.

"Marcia, Marcia, Marcia," she'll say – a reference to a television show that you'll think that both of you are just a little too young to understand, "Always late, aren't you?"

You'll bite back the urge to tell her, "Veronica, you don't have to wait for me if I'm always making you late," and instead you'll only smile meekly. You'll be too busy thinking about the way that her hair tangles in the wind like spider webs, dark like moss against the backdrop of powdery snow on the sidewalk – how she resembles an inmate clinging to the gate, with the way that her hands wrap around the bars – how you should have written your story about a prisoner making a jail-break instead of writing the same tired stories about the same silly, boring girls time and time again.

Your writing teacher, Mr. Mulligan, will be the type of person who will tell you that you should write from your experiences. He'll tell you that you should only write what you know. You won't be sure if you're only writing about stupid people because you are, in fact, a stupid person, or if maybe you can only bring yourself to write about characters blindly creating their own problems because you know so much more about everyone else than they know about themselves. Mr. Mulligan will be the sort of teacher who will tell you that you have a "gift for expression". He'll tell you that your sensory detail, in particular, is impeccable. He'll be the one who convinces you to submit your writing to the school paper in the first place, and you'll never be completely sure whether you're flattered, or if you resent him for that instead.

Veronica will tell you about a boy who she met at a dingy little café on East Broadway last Saturday, and you'll be too busy wondering

if your story – centered around the woes of a seventeen year old girl who accidentally rips a hole in the universe and cannot mend it before the entire world flies out into the endless blackness of whatever lies beyond this plain of existence – is a little too complicated for your peers to understand. Maybe you should have written a love story instead. Maybe they could wrap their ridiculous, hormone-charged minds around something like that.

Veronica will stop and stare at you long and hard, a perfectly manicured eyebrow rising up toward her hairline. You'll contemplate comparing sharp brows to a spider's legs, but then you'll decide that describing a character with too many spider metaphors might inadvertently cause the readers to correlate that character with something sinister, something evil. Veronica isn't evil. She's loud and she's cocky, and you imagine that whatever tiny thing rattling around inside of her head that could possibly be called a brain might be just under the size of your thumbnail, but she isn't a bad person.

"Marcia," she'll say, shoving her hands into the pockets of her coat, as her breath hangs low in the air between you, "are you even listening to me?"

You won't be able to answer at first, because you'll be thinking about how you could describe someone's breath hanging in the air on a cold winter's morning to a strand of red thread between them and another person, connecting them for life. That's good, you'll tell yourself. You need to write that down when you get to class.

Veronica will roll her eyes. She'll cock her head to the side in a way that causes her long, inky hair to spill over her shoulder and catch in the zipper of her coat. You'll be reminded of moss again – wrapped around the propellers of a speedboat.

"Charles," she'll repeat, so annoyed that she's making herself breathless, "the guy from the cafe. He called me weird."

You'll tell her that it's his loss. You'll tell her many things that you imagine that she wants to hear.

"I'm not weird, though. I'm just not like most girls."

You'll resist the urge to roll your eyes. Veronica is your only friend, but she's just like everyone else. You aren't the type of person who thinks that other people are beneath you, but secretly, in the back of

your thoughts, you'll think so anyway.

When you finally arrive to class, you'll check the clock. You'll be fifteen minutes late. You'll notice the empty desks scattered about the classroom, realizing belatedly that you'd walked through the hall and boarded the elevator without the struggle of moving elbow-to-elbow with a crowd of other students. This sort of thing will be unusual. You'll take a moment to ask yourself if there's a holiday coming up, or if maybe some of the teachers canceled class because of the snow.

As you take your seat, you'll overhear a conversation.

"Who needs her?" a pimple-faced boy, who sits directly behind you, will ask his friend, "She thinks she's so much better than me just because she's the one who broke it off, but she was hairy anyway."

His friend, braces glinting like tiny rhinestones on his teeth, glasses smudged with greasy fingerprints, will snort when he laughs.

"Hell yeah, dude. You should have told her to go home and shave."

You'll crinkle your nose in disgust. You'll tell yourself that you are so much classier than all of the people around you. You're more refined. You have clear intellectual prowess. You have an impeccable gift for expression. These peers of yours, you'll tell yourself, are merely stepping stones on the narrow path that you must walk on your way to the very top.

As you're waiting for Mr. Mulligan to arrive – not realizing how strange it is that a teacher would now be twenty minutes tardy to his own class – you'll check your email on your phone. There will be an unread message from the school paper. You'll open it quickly, like ripping off a band-aid. You'll scrunch your eyes closed so tightly that your head will feel light.

Ms. Marcia Cleary,

We regret to inform you that your story will not be published in The Riverview Yearly this term. This story is simply not what we are looking for at this time. You're welcome to try again next semester.

Regards,

Sheryl Anderson,

Riverview Yearly

Editor in Chief

You will tell yourself that you are a failure. You are a walking abomination in human skin. You'll blame your shortcomings on the fact that you didn't mention the thread count, the apple/cherry lips, the eyelashes like raven's wings in a clear sky. You'll tell yourself that love stories and tales of jail-break were probably accepted instead. You'll consider the possibility that either of the morons sitting behind you could have written any mundane, typo-ridden disaster of a story, and maybe that would have been good enough for Sheryl Anderson.

You'll reason with yourself that you are too good for the Riverview Yearly. Your writing is far too advanced for some podunk town's community college's stupid magazine anyway. You'll tell yourself that you're destined for far greater things. Riverview is simply holding you back.

You'll be so wrapped up in these reassuring thoughts that you'll barely even notice as everyone around you begins to file out of the room. Twenty minutes will have passed without Mr. Mulligan ever showing up, and the whispered rumors of "*if the teacher doesn't show in fifteen minutes, we can go, right?*" will be the talk of the class as the last few students finally give up and decide to leave, too. You'll be the last one out in the hall. You'll watch as the pimple-faced boy and his friend wind through the crowd, disappearing amongst the nameless faces of everyone else. You'll rise only after you're sure that everyone has cleared away. You'll tuck your phone into your coat pocket, feeling as though it weighs a thousand pounds. It will be the anchor that will keep you rooted in reality for a long time. It will be the only thing that will stop you from thinking endlessly about metaphors instead of paying attention to life passing by around you.

Veronica will be waiting for you when you make it out to the front gates. The entire town behind her silhouette, pressed against the bars of the gate, will be barren and still. Fog will obscure the world beyond the school. The entire world will appear to be a plastic model—like the kind that your mother used to set on top of the fireplace around the holidays, with the cotton-ball snow and the tiny, plastic people, and the little lights that twinkled on top of all of the fake, empty buildings.

"So they rejected your story," Veronica will say, tucking her hands in her pockets as you complain during the walk home, "Who needs

them anyway? Who do they think they are?”

You’ll think, yes, who do they think they are, rejecting you? You’re far better than anyone else in your school. Your story was more than worthy of being published. You might be the most talented author that this college has ever seen! Are they just jealous? Are they trying to make you quit writing? Are they afraid of what you’re capable of?

The winding, empty streets will drag on far longer than they ever have before. It will feel as though an eternity has passed as you squint through the fog in hopes of spotting your house. You’ll wonder where Mr. Mulligan was today, where all of the other students went, too. You’ll think about the ominous shadows of your dreams, the goosebumps still raised on your arms—like brail, maybe, that one could use to read your discomfort and fear.

Veronica will stop, tipping back her head and baring her throat to the fog.

“You know,” she’ll say, “They won’t be anyone after today.”

You’ll ask her what she means by that and she’ll smile. There will be far too many teeth in her mouth. Her eyes will sparkle with the bloodlust of a predator watching prey. You’ll feel an electricity surging under your skin, a prey’s intuition—get out of here. Run, run.

But you’ll be too afraid to move even an inch.

She’ll draw closer, hands in her pockets, grin growing wider and wider until it cracks open her face. Her eyes will grow darker, until her sclera are black against the glowing greens of her irises, until you’ll see the terror of your own reflection in those dark, dark eyes.

“I told you,” she’ll say, “that I’m not like other girls.”

And she’ll be right.

Her jaws will unhinge, strands of saliva twinning between the fangs growing from her pink, fleshy gums. She’ll double over, spine prodding through the material of her coat, skin growing pale and green as she finally pulls clawed fingers from the pockets of her coat.

“Today,” she’ll tell you, “is the last day that humans inhabit the universe. I wanted to save you for last, Marcia, I really did. I wanted to share this empty world with you before I devoured all of it.”

Those fingers will feel like needles against your cheeks when she reaches out and touches you. It will feel the same way that you

always imagined that a candle would feel, when someone licked their fingers and diminished its flame. Your soul, like a flickering, miniscule fire, will die instantly. You'll fall into the snow. You'll think, in your final moments, that all of those spider metaphors were right. Veronica deserved them. You should have written your story about wolves in sheep's clothing.

And you'll awaken in a cold sweat, from a dream that you can barely remember. You'll clutch your sheets to your chest as though they might protect you from whichever monster lurked in your dreams. You won't understand the danger drawing nearer as the days pass. You'll only focus on the numbers flipping by on your alarm clock, until it's finally time for you to get out of bed and start your day.

But one day soon, the world will fall apart around you.

One day soon, the world will be put out, like wet fingers smothering a candle's flame.

One day soon, it will all end in blackness, after you've wasted your entire life worrying about things that will never, ever happen.

Contributors

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Kelsey Clore is a student at L&C.

Andrew Crook is a former L&C student, who attends SIUE. He is an English Major with a Creative Writing Minor. He hopes to share his writing with the world.

Deborah Dhue is a writer, artist, and musician. She was inspired to start writing after reading several books as a child, and she has an older sister who is published. Her parents have always encouraged her creative whims, so that planted the seed that has made her who she is today.

Elizabeth Hall is 19 years old. She graduated from Greenfield High School in 2016. Currently, she is enrolled at Lewis and Clark to pursue an Associates of Arts Degree. Then, she plans to transfer to a four-year university where she will major in Accounting and minor in Ag.

Helen Jarden has been writing creatively for most of her life. Along with writing fiction and poetry, she is the Editor-in-Chief of The Bridge, L&C's student newspaper, as well as President of Lewis and Clark's Eta Psi Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa.

Ellen Johnston is 19 years old and from Liverpool, England. She came over to Lewis and Clark on a soccer scholarship in August 2016 and is looking to major in Exercise Science.

Brady Lewis is 19 years old and is pursuing an Associates Degree in science. He loves to run and play football. He enjoys fun conversations with friends and great adventures like hiking. He has stated, "I'm very outgoing and love to make people smile and laugh. I want to help others in my life that is why I am furthering my education to become a nurse. I also hate Florida."

Sierra Murray is 18 years old and is from Jerseyville, Illinois. She is enrolled in Lewis and Clark and she plans go into nursing. Currently, she works as a dog groomer and likes caring for animals.

Kathrine Rose Rethorn is pursuing a degree as a literary major. She spends most of her time indulged in her studies and latest writing projects. She's an avid reader who enjoys fantasy and romance. Mostly, she writes realistic horror and romance with dark themes. She has stated, "I consider myself to be an open minded individual and love learning new things I've never known before. A big dream of mine is to travel the world and experience different cultures."

Karley Swarts is a very tired Walmart employee and L&C student.

Jacob Voss is a student at L&C.

Christopher Wense is a 43-year-old husband and father. In April, 2015, he was laid off from U.S. Steel. Currently, he works at The National Corn to Ethanol Research Center at SIUE. He will be transferring to SIUC in the fall to complete his Bachelors degree in Industrial Management and Applied Engineering. He's proud to be a member of Phi Theta Kappa and be a part of this excellent organization. He will graduate at the end of the spring semester 2017.

Devin Winter is 21 years old and has Autism. He said, "I live at home with my parents and my cat Rufus. Currently, I am attending Lewis and Clark College. This is my first semester. I really like it. I listen to rappers like Eminem, Canibus and LL Cool J, all of whom are known for their word play and this influences me. I love to write poems in all forms."



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