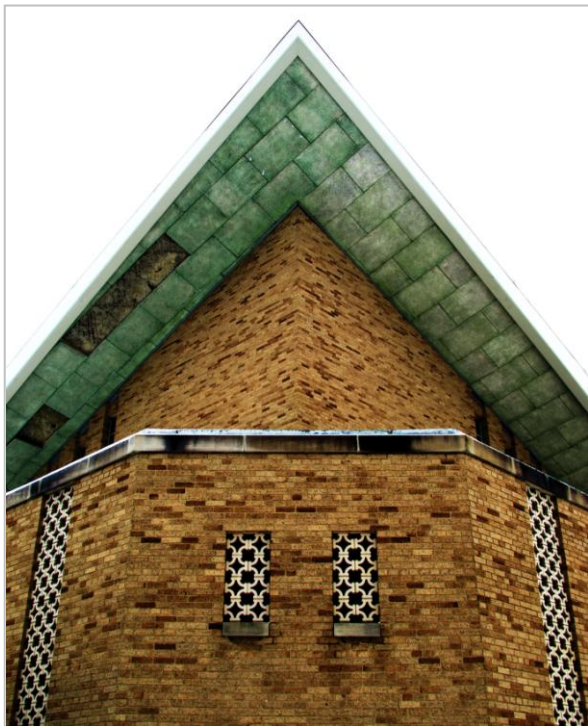


# The Athenaeum



**Xavier's Literary Magazine**

**Spring 2010**

**The Athenaeum**

**Xavier University's Literary & Arts  
Magazine**

**Volume CI  
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# Poetry



Photograph by J.R. Trevino

Andrew Davey

## Dew

Some nights I dream  
of gruesome sights  
that stick themselves upon my mind,  
when behind closed eyes  
my demons dance, and strip me  
down to but bones and fear

When morning comes  
my terror passes  
but my soul is drenched in dread,  
the pain the hurt and foreign forms  
swirl frenetic in my head

I then wake my legs who still stroll in nod,  
and step slowly from my sheets,  
comb my hair and steep the tea,  
breathe in the twilight hour,  
as it breathes into me

Barefoot I greet the waking world  
standing upon my lawn,  
to stare upon the morning sky,  
Stained dawn, with inky dregs of night.

Purple strokes of the Immortal's brush  
the sky upon my soul  
Is absolved by tea and breaking dawn  
my toes wet in the dew

### **Of Words I Hear**

I know the pain of words unspoken  
and of dreams never seeing days light,  
the touch revoked, the pain, the hope  
dashed as a glass on the pavement

I still hear him breath, soft in his sleep  
loving arms I wrap round his chest,  
A kiss, a breath, and a familiar touch.  
But in my bed I wake alone

Now I must take care and hold my heart  
off from the love of my dreams.  
I will seek comfort when I wake  
and learn the love of words I hear.

Blake Gibson

### Scarecrow

Out in the field  
And tied to a post  
Is the scarecrow  
That we love the most  
Never too scary  
And never too plain  
But come back later  
You'll see it wane

Scarecrow you're wasting away  
Getting smaller everyday

Scarecrow we're worried  
Your eyes sunken in  
You're losing straw now  
And your skin is so thin  
Out in the sun  
You're getting so tired  
Don't ever burn away  
Don't go near the fire

Scarecrow you're wasting away  
Getting smaller everyday

Never taking something  
Running out of stuffing  
Reducing to nothing  
Scarecrow, is this what you want?  
It seems like everyday  
You're losing more hay  
But you smile, swear and say  
That you're better this way

Scarecrow you're wasting away  
Getting smaller everyday

Just sticks and rags stitched together  
Still you promise you'll get better  
None of us believe a thing  
None of us are listening  
To a strawman  
Who always must lose  
To a strawman  
Who now must choose  
To rot for the crows  
And surrender to hell  
Or take action  
And save itself

I lean on the fence

As do we all  
To see if you make it  
Or see if you fall

Samantha Groark

### **A Trapeze Artist Falls**

Above a world of fading embers, the noise has  
long faded –  
the wings of an acrobat flutter across an endless  
sky.

Dreams are born, imagination wrought,  
free is the artist lost in divine flight!

Startled by my mother's push –  
I bowed my head as the priest raised the silver  
chalice.

With wings clipped, my surrender was  
professed,  
with eyes on the ground, I took the cup in my  
hands.

The aerialist startles at such a sight –  
of glowing stars giving way to iron bars  
across the now blemished sky,  
taking one in her hands, her wings dissolved.

From vision and notion, my body was tossed  
amidst a vast ocean of cables.  
Fantasies and dreams long given way to clouds,

in the distance  
ideologies thundered.

When I found myself –  
I found myself on the ground.  
I gazed up at a lone star in the flawless sky.  
There was my salvation.

### **Paradise Visited**

*“To think how thin the veil that lies between the pain  
of hell and Paradise.”*

*-George William Russell*

Ah, Paradise,  
It appears in the window!  
It taps on the invisible glass  
and clamors to become visible.  
It burns and glistens, waiting –  
then melts and runs off into the gutter,  
into the world of streets and yellows and  
poisons.

And so it is written:  
the cats will climb onto the windowsills  
and scratch,

and for no reason at all you will begin to  
cry.

I look through these dreams,  
consumed in mysterious activity  
of extension and reduction,  
but the phone rings, ending my prayer,  
leaving me at this table in the middle of the  
night  
wondering.

### **Sermon on the Mount**

When I imagine that holy one  
lowering himself to sleep,  
refilling a glass,  
running with the children down a steep hill  
and reading to them until their eyes drift  
upward like bubbles,  
It is impossible to explain  
how I get there.  
But all of a sudden I am buying everyone  
daisies,  
climbing over playground fences with my  
eyelashes  
to watch tots play,  
listening to the children shout late into the night

and keep me awake.

And when I create their dreams  
about the monsters and talking things,  
all those things that truly exist to me —  
there is no miracle other than  
there is no doctrine to report imagination  
and cancel it somehow,  
just the laughing affirmation of children and  
trees  
and fading human objects.  
Oh how they giggle!

Late one night, I visited a house of prayers.  
I pushed open the door and the knees  
of an old dining room table struck me.

I am everyone who was not there.

Each morning since then  
I have heard the words dug out  
from beneath the alter and sit silently,  
knees bruised, as though  
I were not there at all,  
only dreaming of being with the children again  
and laughing with my god.

Rachel Harris

### **Early Morning Confessions**

debatable. it's debatable.  
rewind the mix tape of flattering  
words and faded memories  
and ponder the long awaited  
question of my fate.

it's true, a gossamer covering  
hangs over my eyes and heart,  
shading me from what should truly be  
revealed.  
yet i do not try to discover the truth.  
i want to feel the tingling sensation of the  
could be,  
should be,  
and would be.  
stop pretending with the so called lover of my  
past  
and fly ahead to what is still to come.

lies, lies, lies.  
lies fill my so called truths to the brim.  
or are they lies?  
are they just shattered hopes of what is wanted

but will never happen?  
wants and dreams and hopes  
are ripped at the seams.  
they call my name.  
i want to take their hand,  
but my current idol holds me back.  
yet, their beauty...shall i commit adultery  
or live forever knowing its all but a  
masquerade?

Aaron Isett

### **Man Marketed**

Man is now a commodity.  
It's just odd to me.  
odd for me to see  
people changing packaging  
to fit what they seem to be  
into a mold cast by society  
Is THAT what a man looks like?  
A man seems different to me.

The world has expectations  
that we go after fulfilling  
until we get palpitations  
and die, forced to lie  
alone.

The world chooses for us  
how we tend to live,  
so each man loses more as  
he tries to control his life  
by controlling his body.

## **Music Over the Water**

Music of the immortal soul  
Chords progressing along my heartstrings  
Vibrate through my deepest darkness  
Spreading through my world like ripples  
in a still pool of thought and  
it all changes colors  
and the contrast sharpens  
on the waves it makes  
as it plays  
And I wonder...  
Where was the splash?

## **What Happened to Me?**

I wonder what happened to me?  
Do you know what life did?  
I know what I'm trying to be.  
I'm doing what I have to  
to become what I want to be.

Now I'm feeling lost  
I don't know my bearing.  
I can't tell what it cost  
because life keeps staring

me in the face.

I can't see beyond it.  
I'm so tired of this  
I can't be stuck on it.  
I'm wired for this.  
Time to overcome it.

Mitch Litam

**[Untitled]**

Why does a cat sleep upon a mat?  
It slumbers upon waiting for a rat.  
But what constitutes a rat?  
Merely a wingless bat,  
who sings,  
about things,  
more so screeching,  
upon beaches,  
but this teaches,  
about the reaches,  
of a silly kitty cat.

Lindsey Malott

### **Collective Isolation**

So many faces wandering  
through the silence.  
Voices dare not speak.  
Squandering potential progress.

In closed captivity,  
isolated  
from endless opportunities  
of knowledge, clarity.

Distant murmurs mimicking,  
echoing the cries of those  
left long before here.  
I fear I'm not alone.

Stuart McNiell

## **Road Ramblings: Nashville to Cincinnati**

I

Grip the lizard vinyl wheel  
And breathe in the last breath of Music City air  
Hot and thick through the busted AC;  
Tropical.  
Weariness approaches.  
Hippocampus takes over.  
An automaton Buick,  
Like a prehistoric fish  
In a black primordial sea.

II

You're in Kentucky now.  
The towns,  
Franklin, Bowling Green, Oakland,  
Are mile markers.  
With billboards that send  
mixed signals,

ADULT PLAYHOUSE  
and  
HELL IS REAL

The lizard brain watches the road  
And reads signs  
In brake lights  
And in turn signals  
And the price of gas in Sonora.

It performs the travel math:  
*Traveling north at 75 Miles an hour,*  
*An hour and 15 to E-Town*  
*About two and some change to Louisville*  
*Three hours and 45 until...*  
A proto-poem interrupts;  
A first good line:

*Eyes behind glasses*

Driving,  
Can't write.  
Think of Jack Spicer.

III  
Piss at the BP in E-Town.  
Buy a protein bar,  
20 dollars on pump two.  
Munch.  
*Have a nice day.*

IV.

Hands clasp the steering wheel,  
Foot on the pedal,  
Thoughts come.  
Eyes watch a car,  
(*What's a Florida license plate doing out here?*)  
Lips mouth the words,  
(*I want a girl with a mind like a diamond....*)  
Mind recalls at random,  
(*Eyes behind glasses*)

Ignore it.  
Focus.  
I-65 North,  
Pass the Gene Snyder,  
Watterson Parkway will be faster.  
I-264 around Louisville.  
Merge to the right.  
Look for signs to I-71 N  
(*I want a girl, with short skirt, and a loooong,  
loooooooooong jacket*).

V  
Pass more non-places  
With names like  
La Grange, Campbellsburg, English,  
Radio stations begin to fade  
Into three options:

Spanish,  
Jesus,  
Static.  
Choose Spanish.

*La razon de este recuerdo*  
*Na na na na...*

The Covenant Transport truck  
Swerves  
And warns,  
*It is not a choice.*  
*It is a child.*  
You forgot to call mom.

VI

Free association on I-75/71.  
Think of T.S. Eliot then Steely Dan,  
(*Bodhisattova would you take me by the hand?*)  
Traffic thickens.  
Sun sets slowly  
Into the Bluegrass State hills.  
The amber light is narcoleptic,  
Like a film of Jack Daniels  
Over the windshield.  
It flickers through the trees  
Turning the late afternoon  
Into sepia toned landscapes

And silhouettes.

Turn up the music.

Say something out loud.

That's better.

Another half an hour.

VII

Something mammalian stirs in the brain,

And rolls down the windows.

The pace quickens.

A new desperation

A new desire

*(Eyes behind glasses)*

See the skyline

The narrow bridge

And the sign saying

RIGHT LANE ENDS 1 MILE.

Take the exit,

*(Where you need to turn right though the sign says left)*

Find the street,

*(Cut down Ivanhoe, it's faster)*

Spot the red house.

*(Home)*

And stretch your legs.

David Oldham

### **Proof**

The tranquil seeds of thought could not  
transpose,  
In languages from books, alive and dead,  
The object – concept – which I now suppose,  
Would prove the muse if it came from my head.

Truth: I could not decry the idle hour,  
If deep within its breath I should devise,  
A modus by which thought should not turn  
sour,  
But by which what I've seen should verbalize:

Inherent to the concept of the soul,  
Lie answered questions we cannot surmise.  
But here's the rub, I've seen part prove the  
whole,  
I've seen it in the beauty of your eyes.

Lauren Rolfes

## Perfect Strangers

Man stranger following me from the parking lot.  
He is dragging his feet because he's done it all  
before.

I am walking as carefully, quietly, deliberately  
as

Possible

Hoping he doesn't hear where

I am going.

No matter the maze that my feet only seem to  
know

The way through,

He continues to keep close behind and then

As if a plea I unknowingly

indicate the direction I am heading

and allow him admittance and he continues to  
pursue

but then he does the same to me.

I continue to lead and he continues to follow.

I get to my desired destination and he to his  
with some hesitancy on the staircase.

Two strangers' life paths coincide for just a  
minute or two.

He was where I used to be.

We showed cared towards one another and then  
we diverged  
And went on our own ways.  
Perfect strangers.

Paige Strickland

### **A Place Which is No More**

In childhood I did adore  
a vay-cay spot which is no more,  
that had a view of five miles wide,  
white sand beaches, low or high tide,  
Sun and warmth to clear my face,  
along the shore I'd walk the pace.  
Our parents let us roam and play,  
building in the sand all day.  
We fed the gulls, swirling overhead  
that cawed and swooped and nabbed our bread.  
Not a worry, not a care,  
skin cancer, not yet a scare.  
But Jaws was showing on the screen.  
Be cautious in the Gulf so green.  
We never wandered very far,  
"No going past the first sand bar!"  
My mother's rule we sometimes broke.  
Parents lounged in chairs to drink and smoke,  
and kids then raced back to the pool;  
the water felt so clean and cool.  
Cannon balls, reckless flips, belly smacks,  
the water'd sting across our backs.  
Sharks and minnows, chicken fight

We didn't stop till late at night.  
Playing games were never solo  
our favorite one was: "MARCO!!!!" "POLO!!!!"

Our parents split, the condo sold,  
our childhood then ended. Cold.  
No more trips back to the shore  
to that vacation place which is no more.

### **Sometimes**

Sometimes I speak  
But the answer is wrong.

Sometimes I see  
But don't understand.

Sometimes I feel  
But I can't show you.

Sometimes I do know,  
But I can't tell you.

Sometimes trapped in a box  
With no way out.

Sometimes behind bars  
Where I see but never go.

Sometimes suspended in air  
Where I watch but never join.

Sometimes in a hole  
Where people look down.

J.R. Trevino

### **Death's Kiss, Death's Embrace**

Death kisses my newborn head -  
Holds me - Tenderly  
Staying with me - through the Years  
Causing Joy and many tears.

My Friend, My Darkest Foe,  
For Him alone I live.  
His Power - Immediate and Final  
Molds my every move.

Death offers Me Hope -  
Every moment;  
Encourages despair -  
Continually.

Death, You are my Lover -  
Whispering in my ear.  
I give Myself to You - Completely  
Falling into Your Embrace.

We come together,  
A union forged forever;  
A Marriage - unconventional

Yet lasting for Eternity.

Thaddeus Winker

### **An Ode to Heart Breakers**

To you who knew more love than you could  
bear,  
To you who had to break a heart and shed a  
tear,  
To you who watched us die and wondered why:

Avert your eyes from our sorrows.  
Some will curse you in tears  
only because of their fears.  
But we will have our tomorrows.

From every nice guy you turned bad  
From every beautiful lady  
who only sees malady,  
You are the best we never had.

You cry too, this I know.  
Your tears are not in vain  
and there is no gain  
in softening the blow.

I hear love is a battlefield  
and we are the maimed

and you are the blamed  
but the enemy won't yield.

Are you the great enemy of love?  
You aren't to blame for my pain.  
You didn't intend to maim.  
You wanted to be soft like a dove.

This is an ode to you, friend,  
I wasn't what you wanted  
and now I am haunted.  
I pray for peace in the end.

### **An Ode to the Broken-Hearted**

To you who gave and received nothing,  
To you who sought and never found,  
To you who loved and were rejected:

Raise your eyes above the filth  
for now you weep and hate  
but one day it'll be fate  
that joins you to a perfect fit.

I know it hurts so much right now  
but I promise something better  
than an unanswered letter

and a sight that leaves you saying “ow!”

You've survived such pain before  
it isn't like this is the first  
and now you only find a hearse  
but one day it'll be an open door.

Love is a battlefield, they say,  
there is someone for you,  
so they promise, but who?  
If love is war, whom do I slay?

Who is the great enemy of love?  
Who is to blame for my pain?  
Who should I rage at to maim?  
Is there even such a thing as love?

This song is for you, the loveless  
the lonely, the abandoned and scorned.  
I toast to you, you who have mourned.  
May you not hate or fear, but bless.

# Prose



Photograph by Steve Kinney

Henry Ackels

## Six Over

It doesn't fit, said George, tugging at the frayed brown cuff. It's too long, I'll have to hem 'er in.

George laid the suit on his long black-felt table and casually crossed the glib workroom. They never fit.

Laconically turning his attention to the patient customer, George probed, Why not take the time to buy one that fits Mr. Limbeaux?

I didn't buy it, Mr. Limbeaux replied tersely. Carloyn did.

Your daughter doesn't know your pant size Mr. Limbeaux.

Apparently not.

Just six inches over though. Lucky for you I'm the best in the county.

George meticulously pillaged his small wooden box of supplies. Old but never latent, George's hands took control of the task as his mind floated through the dimly lit room, mingling with a dull haze, the byproduct of a

long fading cigar napping limp between tired gums . I do this too often, George thought, biting into the aged cheroot as a rusted sewing needle inadvertently buried itself into the diligently searching digits. It never fits.

How is Carolyn these days, Mr. Limbeaux?

Don't know really.

You don't know your daughters pant size either, do you Mr. Limbeaux?

George knew his customers. Years faded to decades in that small town, and George had seen his fair share of fading. He had grown up in that room, working, preparing, living. He had grown old in that claustrophobic gloom, toiling, repeating, fading. It was his life, and it would be his death, so why not, thought George, talk to the every soul for whom that fading brass bell tolled above his solid oak door.

If you bought her one of these I bet I'd be fixin' it up just the same, eh Mr. Limbeaux?

Luckily I'll never have too. Her mother can take care of all that.

You think Miss Carolyn knows how big her kids are?

With all their growin', she'd better.

A pause. George used to hate these moments when his words rang stale in the maze of cigar dust, flailing into stagnation, crystallizing in his ears like bad advertizing. But he'd grown used to them, grown to like them even. He'd realized that they evidenced truth with naively sharp honesty. He knew that he'd voiced the repressed, that he'd struck some painfully diminished chord. His supplies uprooted from their wooden kit, he waded through this saturated silence back towards the resting suit.

Just a little off the bottom here and it should be fine.

Alright, no rush.

Wouldn't want to send you out in a suit that don't fit Mr. Limbeaux.

George's hands leapt to work without need of a reveille. Piecing and sewing, doing and undoing, making ready: the elements of his line. The ruffle of cloth and sizzle of searing tobacco padded the quiet.

It's an awful nice suit Mr. Limbeaux.

Not sure if I deserve it.

Course you do.

What does it take to deserve a suit like that?

Not sure, never had one myself. Don't know that it takes much though. What've you done?

Not much.

You've had a child.

Two wives, and three heart attacks.

Well that's something.

Something good or something bad?

Something.

Pause. This time not long enough for staleness, only slight hardening.

Well, what about work?

I never really liked...

You're job.

Get that a lot?

Sadly.

A fair banker. That's what they said. Fair. Not honest, but...

Were you?

Honest?

Fair?

No. But I tried.

George understood. Everyone tries, for a time. Until they can't, until they don't. Until something like Carolyn happens. They tried before money was baby food, then a first house and kindergarten, then transportation, then stability, then a future, then luxury, then aggressive apathy. But they tried.

Well that's something.

Is it?

What has it gotten you?

A suit.

Piecing and sewing. Padding petrified silence. Fingers aged with unwanted experience, piecing and slowing.

What has your job gotten you George?

Friends, George said with a smile. Mr. Limbeaux smiled back, but in that dry and rehearsed way. I'll have to fix that, thought George. He was always pleasantly light, always lubricant in conversation. People always came in with a stern expression but left with a smile. George could do that.

Whatever fragments of comfort George could instill through conversation were

compounded by the soothing air of his tidy workspace. Everything in its place, the same place since well before George. The room was tidy but not kept, simply clean from lack of action, lack of chaos to disturb the order. The oak tool box rested on a tiny shelf below that customer bell which hung with stoic poise above the front door. A lavender chair sat dusty and unvisited in the adjacent corner, waiting longingly for any unexpected visitors. The broad mahogany counter, for dealing with customers, jutted out of the back wall of the small room. Above the counter floated the old work sign, 'Charon and Sons', George representing the last of the latter. A grandfather clock, though its hands stuck at 3:17, chimed on the hour. One lamp and two high windows, rising up to meet a low ceiling, lazily illuminated the environment. The moonlight soaking in through opaque glass embossed a deep glaze on the space, the dimness revealing hushed luster. Soon the room would be a cold glitter of tools, still as a scene reflected from an undisturbed pond. But it wasn't the moon, thought George, just the

emergency light of a vacant parking lot. No matter. Standing by the back table under the windows, George pretended it was moonlight.

What's your handicap, queried George.

Expressionless confusion rested on his customers face.

Golf, George clarified.

Not Good.

Oh, now don't be modest Mr. Limbeaux, I've heard you're quite the regular at the Meadows.

I've been on occasion.

My short games no good. Couldn't putt a beach ball into the ocean. These old shaky hands just don't have it anymore.

Well then I'll take my suit back, jabbed Mr. Limbeaux.

Ha, can't do that, many have tried, but once I get to it there's no goin back.

Just make sure it's nice and...

No one will notice. George gave his customer a knowing wink, content with the easy mood. Six inches off the left leg and the right was coming along fine. The color of the thread

matched the pants well. 'Petrified Wood.' He wondered who named these tiny strings which tied it all together, which made his job possible, made his life meaningful. He wondered who put together these threads that he cut when it was all finished, but he knew he'd never meet them in this life.

Ellen won't let me go.

Mr. Limbeaux interjected, calling George's mind back from the bating smoke.

Sorry?

Golf. Ellen stopped letting me go.

Oh.

Said I wasn't working hard enough.

Were you?

Got my suit didn't I.

You got your suit...

Petrified wood closed up the last big gap.

Ellen looked good today, encouraged  
George.

What did she say?

Said she had expected you home to hem this  
suit yourself.

It's always something...until it's nothing.

Is that why you left?

I had no choice.

That's what everyone thinks, but...

You think I could have prevented...

Every day is a choice, Mr. Limbeaux.

Silence. This time stale. This time permanent.

Ring ring ring. The telephone burst to life. It was the type of sound, erupting out of silence, a creative bang that threw people off, that made people jump. George had lost that reflex long ago. After snipping the unused thread, George methodically moved to acquiesce the phone's pleading.

"Hello," croaked George in a tired, hoarse cough.

The other end was hollow.

"Hello?" and again, "Heloooo?"

George returned the receiver. Wrong number. A momentary reminder of the outside world, which never left him alone, but never gave him any company at all. No one had called

to talk to him. No one ever did. He had to make his own friends.

The pants complete, George calmly moved towards the broad counter where the body lay waiting. He slipped the finished product onto Limbeaux's unresponsive legs. A perfect fit, though no one would ever know. But he knew. It was all he could do for his friends. Making ready.

His work complete, George closed the red brown coffin with a casual goodbye. He wished he had known Albert Limbeaux, wealthy banker, survived by his wife Ellen and daughter Carolyn. He always wished he knew them, but he only knew them like this.

George locked the door to his quiet funeral home with his father's old key, listening as the bolt caught with finality. Patches of dirty snow faded into the wet concrete of an empty parking lot. His antique Deville sat lonely in the emergency moonlight. Ushered home by vapid streetlamps, he let shadows melodically stumble across his tired face.

George fell asleep in an empty house  
wondering if anyone knew his pant size.

Mike DeLaney

## Jeremy's Shadow

Jeremy sits in trepidation, awaiting his nemesis' return. He is held against his will in a white room lit by an indistinguishable incandescent irradiating light. His fingernails SCREECHED SCRATCHED against the leather armrests as he gazes at what appears to be a buck-toothed beaver feverishly smiling back at him. Just as his worries begin to subside, there is a prolonged and whining CREEEEAK as the door opens. Jeremy stares as his nemesis enters the room. His nemesis is clothed in a garishly gray-green garb and his horn-rimmed glasses add to his leering menacing glare. His nemesis begins moving his mouth and Jeremy assumes that words are coming out, but he can't hear anything but the familiar tingling sensation rattling at the back of his brain. His nemesis lowers the chair back. As Jeremy's head descends he knows things are about to grow terribly worse for all parties involved.

His nemesis SNIP SNAPS on rubber gloves and begins to remove the elastic restraints from Jeremy's oral penitentiary with a TRICK

TRONK. His nemesis loosens the wiry prison bars and Jeremy feels a SCRITCHETY SCRATCHETY and then peace. It feels like freedom for Jeremy but he knows that this is only a temporary reprieve from his jail. His Shadow, the rattling voice in the recesses of his mind, breathes a breath of fresh air with a joyful sigh of relief. "LIBERTY!!" Jeremy hears his shadow exclaim. But suddenly, his nemesis brings new restraints into the fold. With rubbery fingers deep inside the caverns of his mouth, Jeremy is surrendering to a steady suffocation. His nemesis brings out another shackle to torment Jeremy with, along with a mighty hammer to apply the shackle. The Shadow hisses in the corners of Jeremy's head. TINK TINK TUNK goes the mallet as Jeremy feels his head go numb and the Shadow begins to take over once more. His nemesis begins TINK TINKETY TUUUUUNKing away at another shackle. Jeremy tries to fight the Shadow's hold, but eventually submits to its control. There is darkness in Jeremy's mind when abruptly, "YOU ARROGENT AUDACIOUS ASS!!!!" he hears the Shadow declare. "YOU BELIEVE THAT YOU HAVE THE MEANS TO HOLD ME LIKE THIS

AGAINST MY OWN WISHES???! I AM  
UNSTOPPABLE YOU INSIGNIFICANT  
MAN!!!!”

The events that follow are fuzzy for Jeremy. He hears foreign words of malice and anger coming from his mouth; he’s not in control, merely a bystander in his mind. It’s as if he’s riding shotgun in a hell ride heading straight for the highway that intersects Bar of Soap in the Mouth from Mom Road. The next fleeting moments are a whirlwind storm of WHOMPs! YEEEEOWs!!! and THUDs.! When the storm settles, Jeremy feels his new restraints tightened, providing the familiar faint feeling of pain. He peers around the room and seeing all of his nemesis’ torture tools scattered across the floor, along with the beaver, still smiling relentlessly. He looks behind his torture chair and sees his nemesis lying on the floor, seemingly unconscious. Jeremy puts his sneakers on the ground, stands up straight, and walks out the door in a somewhat hurried manner. “Ugh...” Jeremy sighs reluctantly, “looks like it’s time to find ANOTHER Orthodontist...” Deep in the dark cabinets of Jeremy’s complicated pantry of a mind, the Shadow smiles.

Katherine Monasterio

## Good Morning

Rob called at eight. Who the fuck calls at eight a.m. on a Saturday? I said into the mouthpiece, "Hargh."

"I'm coming over to get my stuff."

No "Sorry, did I just wake you?" No "Libby, you awake?" Not even a "We're officially over, so I've decided to give you the courtesy telling you I'm on my way to your apartment to collect what's mine so we can start moving on with our lives."

I said, "Oh."

He said, "I'll be there in twenty minutes."

Click.

If I'd have been thinking straight, I would have told him not to bother, I'd leave his stuff in a box outside the door. But I wasn't thinking clearly, because I crashed at four-thirty and here it was, eight, and I may have still been a bit dizzy from last night's — this morning's — booze. Excellent.

I pulled myself vertical and launched toward the kitchen, where I found an old brown grocery bag and immediately began chucking

stuff in it. Picture frames. Coffee mugs. I stumbled to the closet and found running shorts, a few sweatshirts, a pair of sunglasses. I paused, staring distastefully at the sunglasses. Next time I'd date somebody whose eyes I can see.

Another picture. A pair of earrings he'd bought me. His Nikes. Since when did he leave so much crap at my place?

I had just stumbled across a napkin from the bar last night, with a new phone number on it (momentary elation!), when there was a knock on the door.

It was Rob. He pulled off his shades, and could hardly meet my eyes. "Hi."

I opened the door and stepped aside. "Hi. I got your stuff together."

He bustled in. "Great. Thanks. Here?" he hefted the bag, and its contents clinked together. He looked inside.

"Yeah. That's it." I watched him for a second. He pulled out a photo of him and me on one of our first dates, and then dropped it back in after an emotionless glance. I said, suddenly feeling much worse, "So we're done, then."

"Yeah." He scratched the back of his neck and had the decency to look a bit depressed. "I'm sorry."

“Me, too.” Wait — *me, too?* What the hell kind of answer was that? One that indicates I haven’t had a full eight hours of sleep in ages, that’s what. If I was feeling any more conscious, I would have been bitching him out. Complete with witty stinging sarcasm and devastatingly beautiful glare. Instead he gets bedhead, oversized paint-stained sweatpants and a “Me, too.”

He said, “I hope things get better for you. You just — somebody needs to help you pull your life together, Libby. It’s obviously not me.”

“Well, thank God for that.” Cruel, but so was he, and I went back to the door and held it open, gritting my teeth, tight with fury as I fought tears.

He left without a word. When he’d gone, I slammed the door, pressed my back against the wall. Then I slumped down and fell the rest of the way apart.

Britt Nygaard

## Denial and Consequences

*December 1904, small town in upstate New York*

"Jack." It had been three years since Jack Templeton had heard that voice, but it was instantly recognizable. Jack turned to face the slight, tall form of Katherine Winslow.

"Miss Winslow." Jack stared at the girl who had turned into a woman during her three year absence. Her dark blond hair was styled into ringlets and swept up from her face, leaving only a few curls to grace the back of her neck. Her ruby red dress complemented the Christmas cheer of the party her father was hosting.

Katherine frowned. "Don't be that way, Jack. It's me, Kathy--your best friend."

"Best friends say good-bye," Jack responded gruffly.

Katherine waved a pale, aristocratic hand. "You know Daddy, Jack, he didn't give me a chance before he had me packed to catch the ship to London."

*Yes, I know your Father,* Jack thought bitterly. Jack had been a servant at the Winslow home for eleven years – under an assumed name, of course. Templeton's did not speak to Winslow's after all. The Templeton family needed the money, though, or Jack would have long been rid of the ruthless control of Harvey Winslow.

Katherine seemed bothered by Jack's silence and started to speak. Jack interrupted her.

"Don't you have a party to host, Miss Winslow?"

Katherine looked at the hem of her dress.

"Jack, I..."

"Forget it," Jack said dismissively and turned around, walking to the back door of the Winslow mansion – the servant's door. Jack grabbed a ratty brown coat, pulling a pair of leather gloves from the pockets and put them on. Now prepared for the Upstate New York cold, Jack walked into the bitter wind to retrieve more firewood.

The door opened and shut again.

"Do not walk away from me, Jacqueline Templeton," Katherine Winslow's now harsh and commanding voice cut through the air.

"You stupid prick," Jack hissed as she turned around to glare at Katherine, "if your

father hears you..." She left the sentence unfinished. They both knew the consequences of lying to Glenview's richest banker. Especially if you were a member of the Templeton family. Or a girl disguised as a boy.

Katherine laughed caustically. "He's too busy buying off important people to hear me. Not that he listens when I speak anyway," she finished bitterly.

"What do you want, Miss Winslow?" Jack questioned after a moment.

Angered by the use of her full name, Katherine took a step forward. Expecting a slap, Jack braced herself. But Katherine reached for her cap instead, yanking it off. A neat chestnut braid slid out, revealing Jack's true gender.

"What I want," she whispered, "is my best friend, Jackie, to be my best friend.

"My name is Jack," Jackie whispered back vehemently.

"Oh, Jackie, why do you persist on acting like a boy? I thought for sure you wouldn't be here when I returned from London. You're 19 years old for pity's sake – why haven't your parents married you off?"

"Oh, I don't know, *Kathy*, maybe it has something to do with *you*."

"Me?" Katherine said, aghast.

"Your naive tricks worked on my brother," Jack spat, "but they won't work on me. I've known you eleven years, Katherine Winslow, and I know you're not as dumb as you pretend."

"You're right," Katherine admitted, her shoulders slumping in an un-lady-like fashion, "I'm not dumb. That's why I need your help, Jackie."

The words slammed Jack into a memory long repressed.

*"Kathy, I need your help." Katherine continued to twist her hair around her finger idly.*

*"With what?" she questioned, bored.*

*"You've got to stop your father."*

*"My father? From what?"*

*"Kathy he found out about you and Robert." That grabbed Katherine's attention. "He's going to kill him."*

*"Nonsense. Daddy wouldn't do something like that." Her averted eyes said otherwise.*

*"Kathy, come on, this is my brother." When Katherine didn't respond, she continued, "You said you loved him."*

Katherine looked up at Jackie with tear filled eyes. "I do," she responded. "But there's nothing I can do. Daddy doesn't believe in me marrying anyone he hasn't handpicked."

*Something in her tone caught Jackie's attention. "Your father's done this before, hasn't he?"*

*Kathy's none-responsive behavior told her everything she needed to know. "I can't believe you're going to let him kill my brother."*

*With no response from Katherine, Jackie raced out of her room, pulling her brown cap tightly to make sure a single hair didn't escape.*

Two days later the beaten, bloody body of her older brother Robert was found not two blocks from the Winslow home. The cane marks on his back could have come from no other cane than the one which belonged to Harvey Winslow. But with the mayor and the local sheriff in his pocket, Harvey Winslow had never been accused and Robert Templeton's death had been marked cold. Not twenty four hours after Katherine Winslow had been shipped to relatives in London, not to return until three weeks ago.

"I can't help you," Jack said finally.

"But he's going to kill my beau," Katherine pleaded. For a moment Jackie stopped. But she couldn't undo the bitterness. Bitterness caused by pretending to be Jack Marlow since age eight, bitterness at Harvey Winslow's destruction of her family when she was seven, bitterness from having lost her older brother, and bitterness

from realizing Katherine Winslow could never be the best friend she professed to be because she was too much her father's daughter.

"I can't help you, Katherine. Maybe if you stopped selfishly falling in love with them, your father would stop killing them."

Then Jack turned on her heel and marched into the barn to do the task assigned to a nineteen-year-old servant boy.

Paige Strickland

## Home

Every day is the same. I sit in this chair, and I wait. I don't know what I am waiting for, but I wait just the same. I wait and I watch, and I hear everything, but I don't tell. I never say a word.

"Daddy, come get me...Daddy, come and get me..." Lula calls. "Come and take me home..." That old woman whimpers, and I drop my head. I don't like her talking that way.

I used to know who I was, but I am not so sure any more. I used to have a different home than this place, but I can't remember where it was or how to get there. I don't even know how I ended up here. I think I used to have family and friends, but I'm not sure now. I try to picture them. I sit here and think all day and try to remember who I was and what I used to do, and then I don't remember what I was thinking about.

"Daddy, come and get me..." Lula doesn't stop. She paces around the window in her white

slippers and bathrobe on over her grey warm-up suit.

These people, the ones who are sitting across from me now, I know I've seen them before, but I can't figure out when and where, but the man looks like somebody I know...

"Daddy, where are you? Come here and take me home..."

I can't concentrate with that woman going on and on like that. Lula's been asking for her daddy all day. All I know is that the man sitting in the chair across from me is not my daddy or Lula's daddy. He's somebody though...He's someone special. I have this feeling, but I can't say. I see his face. He smiles at me, and so does that woman who's with him. Who are those people? They must be awfully nice to come here like that.

"Hey Aunt Sal," the young man says. I raise my head and look up. Yes, I know who he is now. I know that voice, but when I look him in the eye, I forget again. How did those two get in here? I lower my head again. I can't remember, so I look

at the green carpeting and the wheels on my chair. How can a chair have wheels?

“Daddy, Daddy, oh Daddy, come here  
Daddy...”

“Aunt Sal?” It’s the man’s voice again. He looks like a nice man. I do know him, but I don’t know his name. I don’t know how to even ask. I have forgotten how to talk. I see and I hear everything, but I cannot speak. He reaches out his hand to me. I take his hand in mine, and I hold tight. I know his hand. I’ve held it before. Once, when we crossed the street. I don’t know where we were, but I know this nice young man’s hand. It used to be much smaller, and now it is warm and wide. It feels safe and steady.

I lower my eyes again. Lula is shuffling back this way, still whining and calling out, “Daddy, Daddy, where did you go? Come back for me Daddy...”

I look up again and the young man and woman are still sitting there. They haven’t left, and we are still holding hands. The man has such blue

eyes. I know those eyes too. They look like mine. My eyes are tired and I look at the floor again.

“Aunt Sal, would you like a drink of water?” I would, but all I know how to do is stare. I look those two people in the eye. It’s all I can do for now.

“Be right back”, the lady says. She stands up and bustles off. Her pant-legs swish. She returns with a paper cup, and she holds it in front of me. I take it in my two hands and draw the cup to my lips. My hands tremble some, but I can do this. I swallow big gulps. The lady refills the cup, and I drink more.

Then I take a hold of the man’s hand once again. I look at his face and he looks at me, and he smiles. Yes, I do know him. I think I know her too, but I can’t get their names out. I know them! Yes! I do, and I smile back. I can’t speak their names, but I know these people. They are my family. My people. I am with them.

“Daddy, take me home. Daddy take me home...” Lula's mantra-like chatter cuts in again. Lula isn’t home, but I look at my people's

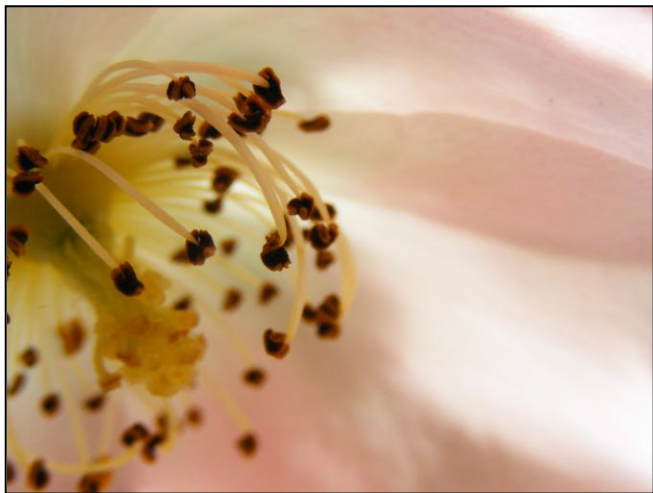
faces and hold their hands, and I think:

maybe,

today,

for now,

I am.



Photograph by J.R. Trevino

Jason Waters

## **Snow's Special Gravity**

In the middle of winter the world hangs low; snow's special gravity tugs tree branches, slows circulation, circumambulation. Shortened rooftops are drawn down to climbing snowdrifts while shuttered windows shut out the sluggish world. This is when most are content to sit, to wait, to doing nothing at all in warm beds and lazy chairs. This is when Jonas is out plowing the streets, laying down salt to clear paths for people he doesn't know and never will.

Today, while the city sleeps, Jonas arrives at the garage. Earlier than most he punches in but says nothing; walks straight to his truck and starts checking. First the fluids: he checks the gas, the oil, the anti-freeze – not a hello – he checks the brake fluid, the washer fluid, the hydraulic fluid-not a good morning. Jonas checks the lights: head lights, brake lights, turn lights and bright lights – not a how are ya' – the tire pressure – all four tires. He wipes salt dust from the red plastic brake lights, then off the clear glass of his headlights. Every mirror is

polished, every window is washed, every facet coddled and prodded, every detail doddled and rubbed; not a word passes his lips.

Then, while the sun thinks about rising, Jonas steers his plow through the streets. Snow jumps out of his way... collects itself in a ditch.

"Avalanche," he thinks, reminded of snow tumbling down mountainsides.

"Tsunami," because of the way snow curls and breaks when it reaches the top of the plow's curve. As Jonas approaches the hill he shifts into low gear, he does it without thinking really, and only the lower, deeper grumbling of the truck tunes him into the change of torque. Jonas doesn't think much; he straps in and turns over the engine to feel himself part of the grumble and growl.

"Jonas doesn't stop for food or drink." The other drivers say.

"He drinks diesel – he eats salt," and they're right. He loves his job, his truck, and his plow, and to not leave these, even in the summer... happiness. Summer is the worst time, when Jonas isn't useful, isn't in his plow. He'd been on vacation once way down south where the senioritas poured tequila down his throat. He'd wanted a woman then maybe not forever, but

for a night, and he took one down to the beach where they watched the sunset green, then Jonas went back to his hotel; the white beach had reminded him of snow. Those two weeks of sloth and leisure were hell, and from then after Jonas spent vacations like he spent the rest of his summer. Alone and dreaming of a pragmatic winter.

Down now the other side, shifting up at the same time. Jonas can't help a quick look in the side mirror; he loves watching the wake his plow creates. Swirling devils of snow rising up and curling around his edges, pulled from the street by the push of air he creates; sometimes they spin and linger long enough for Jonas to leave them out of sight, and when this happens he pretends: then they never stop but grow bigger into whirlwinds of snow and ice, his creation from the simple act of what he was meant to do.

Jonas sighs as he approaches the train tracks, he hates this part when he has to raise up or risk getting caught on the tracks. Trains don't need him to clear the tracks, engines have their own plows. Jonas could see the train tracks, he could see the unplowed road on the other side, he could also see the little two door coupe stuck

right on the ties; he couldn't see the women it belonged to. He sighed his sigh, stranded motorists were on their own. Those who couldn't wait for him to clear the way would inevitably get stuck. Not his problem. Plow up, he slows down to cross those tracks just as a woman steps out of the driver's door. She thinks help has arrived, she looks into the eyes of Jonas and Jonas misses a gear.

"Jade eyes." Green, that's all he sees, green, the green before a sunset. He'd seen it before way down south, that last call of green. The final strike of color before the sun retires, the final tinge of sunset, the final hue of golden day was captured in iris, trapped in her eye. Green like the end of days. Yet besides those eyes she was hardly there, dressed from head to toe in white, like snow walking, or standing, or being driven and gathering. Where winter stopped she has already begun. Except her eyes, verde. She leaves her feet. Jonas, who did not think to slow down, nor drop his plow lifts her up from the pavement and gracelessly tosses her into the ditch on the side of the road. Jonas misses another gear, and this time the engine dies.

Seat springs sink and snarl, than rise up and groan as Jonas leaves his truck. The early

morning air cuts fast and deep after leaving the warm excess of his cab. He jumps to the ground and skirts around the truck's hood-taking a quick listen to the engine's pings and thuds within- and approaches the other side of the old sedan where she has landed in the mire.

Months of car exhaust and oil scraped up into snow were piled to wait for the end of winter; her white dress is speckled black with grimy slush and snow. Her face is red and smudged with dirt, but she looks okay and her eyes are even more striking when they shine out from the dirty and ruddy cheeks.

"Your car's stuck."

"Fine" she says, expecting a different response. She pulls herself out of the ditch and begins to brush off the black speckles of grimy slush and snow, but as her foot slips and she falls back in.

"Need help?"

"Yes, please"

"Okay, climb out and I'll push your car off the tracks."

"Not my car." She seems on the verge of tears or screams; but her green eyes strike out all the more from ruddy and smudged cheeks.

"Look, your car or not, it's gotta come off

those tracks, someone could get hurt. Just jump behind the wheel and I'll push, you steer. Shouldn't take much, the front tires have cleared the ties and it's down hill after that." As the lady moved to get in the seat Jonas called, "Just throw it in neutral," he doesn't know her name but adds, "lady green eyes." Dropping low, Jonas squares his shoulder with the cold and salty steel- probably salt he had laid- and tightens his legs, straightens his back and digs in. Steel tracks catch his feet as they slide on the hard packed snow, his arms strain to straighten out; tendons and muscle swell and become apparent on otherwise frail arms; either the car will move or Jonas. Jonas' feet lose their purchase and slide out leaving him face down in dirty snow the car doesn't move an inch.

"Just use the plow" Lady green eyes had rolled down the window

"It's made for snow, not to push cars lady – what's your name?"

"What's yours?"

"Jonas."

"Jonas, Veronica."

"Alright then Veronica, you got your foot off the brake right? Right. Let's try again, this time try turning the wheel a little. Once I say, hit the

gas if you get going don't stop or you'll just get stuck on that next hill." Jonas turned to face the opposite way and squared up a fresh shoulder, digging his heels into the space under the tracks made sure they wouldn't slip this time.

"Alright, let's go...gun it." Tires spin and snow flies, while the wheel works back and forth Veronica gains some ground. Encouraged by the small movement Jonas really works his heels deep into the ties and pushes with second strength; sprays of snow and dirt fly on either side of his tight and hard pressed body. The little cars engine whines and clicks but fails to find purchase. Jonas presses into cold steel until feels like his shoulder should sink into metal, he gives one final push just as tires catch grip. With a final gasp Jonas hits the cold ground and Veronica is off and running up the hill following directions not to stop.

"Oh man," Jonas gasps. The cold ground feels like salve on over worked muscles. "Oh man" he sighs again, and just lays on the ground to catch his breath. Jonas stares into the clear sky now filled with early morning sun, his breath rises and disappears in little clouds, his hands are numb – blue – but the pressure on his body felt good and he feels good now that its over, now

that its over he just sits for a minute, "Just for a minute," and watches the cloud drift by along with his breath. "Phew, it's lucky," he thinks, suddenly noticing the round clouds working their way up over trees. "Here comes one now."

The 7:00 had just come into view.

"Here we go." Jonas pushes off the ground which sinks away from tired muscles and tries to pull his feet under his body. The right foot comes easily; the left is wedged under cold steel. "Damn." Jonas eyes the puffs of engine smoke. "Shoe's gotta come off." Slowly, with stiff fingers Jonas worked on the laces of his thick, snow-proof boots. Starting up at his ankles the laces are caked with ice and dirt, and clumsy cold fingers stumble with the slippery laces. "Damn, damn," under his breath and reaching for his knife; it's in the truck. "Damn," this time louder as frost bit fingers fight the steady and slowing cold, as Jonas fights panic. "Probably not even a train, just some bonfire, or hell, prolly not even this side of the track." But the joke doesn't last long as an engine rounds into view. "Is it on my side?" It's hard to tell with the engine so far off. Only two lights, left burning in spite of the bright day, are visible and eyes stay focused on stubborn laces.

"Probably not on my side, probably not," but fingers work hard on knots frozen solid.

"Damn, God damn this crossing," he thinks, "He can't see me, one man on the tracks, still a couple hundred yards off." Jonas tugs and curses, he puts his right foot back on the ties, wraps his hand around his left leg right above his knee and pulls with all his strength, all his weight. Anything, a separation of bone and flesh from flesh, a tearing of leather, a "please God" on his lips as ankle bones crack and separate. But flesh stretches and stays strong, flesh stays loyal. "Just tear, please God." But the foot stays attached to Jonas, and Jonas stays on the tracks.

Cold steel wheels on cold steel tracks make cold sounds. Jonas can hear even with the train whistle blowing. He can feel the chug, chug, chug of the engine on his foot. The ties press down a little more, a little more, a little more. "Come back Veronica, please come back." The train's plow grins wide, white snow foams from its wicked curve. "Please come back, Veronica please come back to say thanks, to say anything. Please come back, Veronica." The train whistle screams, the plow licks the tracks clean, a sedan works its way up an uncleared hill. Swirling

devils of snow spring up around the engine-they spin off into the trees that border the track.