Congratulations to

**Peyton Allen,**
Winner of the 2018 Creative Writing Award,

**Melissa Beggs,**
Winner of the 2018 Dessie Dean Pitts Award, and

**Olivia Paradis,**
whose artwork *Hippocampus* was selected as this year’s cover.

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Sea Angel

by Hunter Krebs
Salty ocean air hits my face as the rickety old Yo-Yo starts to pick up speed. I look up into the cloud-covered sky and ask God why he let me tell my mama I wanted to ride this stupid ride. In answer, I’m lifted higher in the air, and the swings begin their steady course with me hanging onto that plastic neon seat for dear life. I hate amusement park rides—always have, always will. I remember stealing a glance behind me to see my six-year-old little cousin, Alex, grinning like an idiot as he actually enjoyed himself on that death trap. Looking back, we weren’t even that high off the ground, and it probably wasn’t going that fast, but I hated that terrifying feeling of not being firmly planted to solid ground.

When the ride was over, and my nausea abated, we strolled around the Pavilion a while longer, taking in the twists of brightly colored metal and the stench of unwashed sunbathers with bratty kids screaming to ride more rides and eat more cotton candy. The aroma of greased-up fried foods combined with the crushing humidity from the fast-approaching summer storm assaulted my nine-year-old self’s senses; the screams of terror as adrenaline junkies took years off their lives on the Hurricane echoed in my ears. We continued our stroll until finding my Uncle Jay and his son Pat, my Bubba, finishing up on the go-kart track.

“Where’s my daddy?” I yell out to them, breathless as Alex and I race to meet them halfway.

Uncle Jay looked more worried than usual. I absent-mindedly wondered if he’d taken his anxiety meds that day, then remembered he definitely would have so he could ride all the fast rides he wanted to. He was my dad’s younger brother, with curly black hair and brown eyes that reminded me of some sweet chocolate teddy bear. Uncle Jay was the polar opposite of my dad’s permanently vile temperament. His short, stocky
frame always stood in stark contrast to my Bubba’s tall, lanky one; those same brown
eyes and curly hair remained.

“He said he had to take a shit and never came back,” Bubba sighed, “he might’ve passed out in the bathroom again.”

He was only eighteen and always the most grown up one out of all my family members, or so it seemed to me. I guess your mom walking out at four years old will do that to a guy. I wouldn’t know; my mom didn’t walk out until a year after all this, when I was ten. I wanted to be like my Bubba when I grew up in nine more years: calm, cool, and responsible.

“Well, Liz, what do you wanna do? Have y’all tried calling him?”

My mom’s cloudy blue eyes darted from face to face. With her stood her sister, my hot-tempered Aunt Terry. Alex’s dad had walked out on them the day she told him she was pregnant. He liked to hit, but Terry did too, and twice as hard. He knew if he ever touched Alex, he was a dead man. I guess he figured he wouldn’t be able to resist the temptation and got out with his pretty face still intact.

“I called, but he didn’t answer,” my mom stated with a sigh of her own. “I’ll try again. He mighta went back to the car and passed out.”

At this time in my life, my dad liked to pass out places. He preferred these places to be cushioned thanks to the pain he still felt from a once-broken back and once-broken neck, but just about anywhere would do. One time, he passed out on our kitchen floor, bag of Cheetos still in hand. I was the one that found him when I went to the kitchen for some water and found the floor crunching with every step I took.

She called, and the call went unanswered. She called again, and the phone went dead.

We decided the best place to look first would be the parking lot because, for some now-unknown reason, we had left the car keys with him. Of all the five adults
and two small children, we decided to give the car keys to the drug addict. We would’ve been better off with Alex keeping them safe in those big kid absorbent undies he still had to wear.

The six of us trudged out of the park like a band of refugees with no hope on the horizon. We knew what we were about to find before we even made it to where the car should’ve been sitting. It was an old Camaro with a faded, off-white paint job the color of spoiled milk, a cracked sunroof, and two missing hubcaps. My uncle’s prized possession. How we had fit seven people in that thing to get to the Pavilion, or even to Myrtle Beach for that matter, I’ll never know. However, we managed it; I’m almost positive it was all kinds of uncomfortable and highly illegal.

“I’m going to kill him. I’m going to absolutely fucking kill him,” Uncle Jay fumed as we all stared at the empty spot where the Camaro once was, partly in shock, but at the same time not at all surprised. We basically did this to ourselves when someone handed my father the keys to our only mode of transportation.

I saw my Bubba glance around, first up at the sky and then down North Ocean Boulevard, in the direction of our hotel. That Days Inn had to have been at least two miles away, roughly a thirty-minute walk. He took a deep breath before addressing our party.

“Okay, here’s what we’re gonna do. Dad and me are gonna start walkin’ to the hotel. We’re gonna get the keys from Uncle Dan, take the car, and come back for y’all. Got it?” He looked directly at me for that last part, so I assumed that it was my duty to keep the troops in line until Bubba got back.

“Yes, sir!” Alex and I cried in unison. Alex and Bubba technically weren’t even related, but I think Alex admired him almost as much as I did, especially in that moment.
Bubba and Uncle Jay began their journey down the boulevard, while me and Alex sat in our moms’ laps on a rusty old metal bench. We waited. We watched all the people go by: the rich women with their fancy dinner outfits, the delinquent kids trying to pick pockets, the people still in their bathing suits with a slick, tanning oil sheen. We watched, and we waited. We talked some, but not a lot. The sun was probably sinking, but we couldn’t really see it for the heavy black clouds in the way.

“Damnit Liz, I’ve been telling you for years now to leave his sorry ass. He’s never happy, and he never makes you happy. When are you gonna step up? Grow a pair and leave him!” Terry hissed to my dull-eyed mother. Terry was getting angrier as the minutes ticked by, like a bomb waiting to go off. I could only imagine what she’d have to say to my dad when we saw him again.

My mom sniffed as if on the verge of tears, though it was hard to tell. She’s difficult to explain; she’s not very emotional, but more the type to gloss over the bad. She just doesn’t like to focus on it. She and Aunt Terry are very different, just as my dad and Uncle Jay are.

“Terry, I know, okay? I have to be here for my baby right now.” She squeezed me a little tighter as I pretend-slept in her arms. I wish I would have savored that moment even more now.

“Well, if Jay and Pat don’t come back soon, we’re gonna have to start walkin’. It’ll be dark soon, and I swear to God I think it’s about to rain.”

“Well…it is about to get dark, ain’t it? I guess you’re probably right. Pat might be mad, but what else can we do?” My mom sounded overwhelmed. This wasn’t her thing at all; she was more the type to just walk away from a situation, not walk into it.

They woke us up from our pretend-slumber to tell us we were going on our own adventure. We started our trek down the boulevard, two women and two kids. Alone, with a rainy night fast approaching, in the middle of Myrtle Beach.
It was maybe ten minutes into our trek when the rain started. A hard, fast summer rain pounding down on us relentlessly, with rumbles of thunder echoing ominously in the distance. Alex started to cry. Terry told him to shut up or we’d leave him with the crusty old man selling smoke-tinged Myrtle Beach t-shirts out of a parked van. He cried more as we pushed on down the boulevard.

Ten minutes later, we spotted our saviors slowly creeping down the street in a shining, spoiled milk-colored chariot. We all rushed to hop in and get out of the remaining drizzle.

“Well,” Uncle Jay began once we were all settled in, “we found him in the room, passed out on top of one of the beds. God only knows what he’s done took or smoked or shot up this time. He didn’t even move when Pattie got the keys out his pocket.”

“Yeah, I could barely even tell if he was still breathin’ or not,” Bubba snorted.

We sat in silence the rest of the way, my mama training her eyes out the tiny back glass the entire time.

By the time we made it to the hotel, daylight had left us behind. The remaining clouds covered the moon, so the only lights were artificial ones from the hotels, streetlights, and slow-moving cars. It was an ominous atmosphere, strange for somewhere that’s usually so bright and happy.

All hell broke loose when we got into that hotel room.

There he was, curled up into the fetal position on the rickety old bed, sunglasses covering his eyes, cigarette tucked behind one ear. He hadn’t even managed to get his black cowboy boots off first, leaving swirls of sand scattered around the room where he’d stumbled in. His shoulder-length curly black hair was knotted like crazy, like he had been in some sort of struggle, though we knew he probably hadn’t moved a millimeter since hitting the mattress.
What I remember happening first was all Terry. She was like a hurricane combined with a runaway train—you just couldn’t look away. We all watched as she marched up and slammed my dad over the head with her tiny purse. Again and again and again. He didn’t move, which I now think only angered her more.

“Wake up, you worthless piece of shit! How dare you take the damn car and leave your family! Your wife and child! If you were Chad I would fucking kill you!”

Alex and I stood behind Bubba, not really surprised at all. We were pretty desensitized to scenes like this.

Uncle Jay pulled Terry away long enough to deter the explosion. My dad let out a long, low grunt and stirred slightly on the bed, stretching out as slow as an eighty-year-old man would after hip surgery. He tipped his head back, causing his neck to let out a loud pop. His hand crept up to his face to remove the unneeded glasses.

“What the hell happened today, man? How did you expect us to get back here without the damn car, huh?” Uncle Jay had Terry right behind him for back up as he stood next to the bed.

My dad slowly raised himself into a crumpled sitting position and rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand. His eyes scoured the room, taking in all of us watching. Then he got the hate-filled look that I knew too well. He was coming down from God only knew what kind of high, and he was not happy about it.

“Fuck outta my way,” he mumbled, so garbled we could barely understand him. That’s how his voice always got after he did drugs, like his tongue was twice its normal size and heavy as a thirty-pound weight whenever he attempted to speak.

He tried to swing his legs off the bed but fell into the floor instead, face first. No one moved to help him up. He struggled to pull himself into a sitting position, knobby back against the rickety bed frame.
He struck out with his hand, certainly searching for the small metal toolbox he kept all his favorites in: weed, heroin, prescription morphine, non-prescription Valium and Lortab. He needed something else now that his high was subsiding. That was the only way to make the anger go away. He was searching like a mad man in the desert searches for a drop of water—it was frantic, only slowed by his groggy state.

“Daniel, stop. Just get up, man. You don’t need all that shit.” Uncle Jay was almost pleading with him now.

“Where’s Liz?” my dad managed to mutter to the room. “Elizabeth, get my damn medicine.”

“Daniel, I don’t think you need that right now. Why can’t we just have a good family trip…without all that…” she was pleading with him now too. She walked forward, inching closer to him.

He looked up at us all, eyes bloodshot and hateful, scanning the room of people who tried to love him. Attempting to stand, he stumbled forward and caught himself on the bedside lamp. He was so close to her now.

That’s when he lunged. I don’t know why, but he tried to punch her. He swung, just as Uncle Jay stepped right in the way and received the sloppy right-hand instead. It brushed off his firm jaw and set my dad back just a step before he tried again. This time the fist completely missed its target and planted firmly in our hotel room wall instead.

He kept on swinging, bloody knuckles and all. He could barely even lift his arms long enough to make a good hit, and he was huffing like he’d lost a lung. But he refused to stop. Like a dying machine that doesn’t know how.

Terry was screaming bloody murder. I think my mom fell to the floor. Uncle Jay was pretty preoccupied. It was Bubba who thought to grab hold of me and Alex, taking one small hand each, and put us in the bathtub.
“You guys okay, right?” He looked entirely terrified and completely strong at the same time. His eyes had a hard, steely glint to them as he crouched down to our level beside the empty tub.

“Don’t let him hit anybody else please, Bubba,” I calmly asked of him.

With lips pressed together into a solid line, he nodded and left us in there until the police came. There was a lot of noise in that short period of time; screaming, things smashing and breaking, a lot of cussing. Alex and I played Patty Cake and listed off all the foods we wished we could’ve been eating to pass the time—Mr. Goodbars; McDonald’s cheeseburgers, ketchup only; my Nana’s famous mashed potatoes. We thought we were so important when the nice officer finally came to escort us down to the hotel lobby, where we got to eat freezer-burnt grape popsicles and watch SpongeBob on the shaken manager’s tiny, static-laden TV.

My dad was not arrested, believe it or not. Not that time at least. My mom was never actually hit, so no domestic violence charges there. And I think I remember Terry saying she kicked the drug box under the bed before the cops busted up in there. In our family, we protect each other.

Everyone did agree, however, that it was only right for my dad to pay the fee for the hole he punched in the wall. And he got the privilege of sleeping in the tiny backseat of the Camaro for the remaining day of our trip.

We never went on another family vacation.
Advice to an Aspiring Writer
by Peyton Allen

Words are not breakable and meant to be used like fine china. When arranged neatly inside a cabinet by a cautious and timid hand they will only collect dust and never feed a soul.

An Apology to Brooklyn
by Peyton Allen

In the heat of our childhood summers we would lie on the hardwood floor for hours to keep cool. I, on my stomach by the closed bedroom door. You, on your back under the open window. I looked at you. Yellow hair, freckles, soft belly. You looked at me. Snaggle-toothed, pink cheeks, olive eyes.

On particularly still evenings, When the dying sun was burning our shadows onto the floor, I could hear your heavy breath and churning mind. While I could dream and keep one foot attached to this planet, you would let yourself get lost inside the make believe. You had built a separate world so strong and colorful that you often cried whenever you had to step out of it. I would comb with my fingers the wet tangles of hair from your face and scold you, saying that your imagination was too powerful. Embarrassed, you would agree. Looking back, I’m sorry.
Dorothy, Toto, and the Storm

by Raleigh Kennedy
You used to drive a ’69 El Camino and wear pants when it was scandalous. You took your coffee with two teaspoons of creamer and one-and-a-quarter of sugar. Your favorite color was red, you loved football, you hated hypocrites, and you took way too much shit from everyone.

I remember your laughter. It always bubbled up from the depths of your stomach, deep and earthy. I remember your hugs. They smelled like stale smoke and left me breathless, so tight for someone with so little will to live.

Your sixty-three years of life are left in thousands, if not millions, of particles. Are memories made of matter? Where did they go? Where are your memories of your brothers and sister? What of how you used to sneak behind the creek at papa’s house and smoke clove cigarettes with my uncle? Your day-to-day thoughts, the worries, the memories of your children—I’d kill to learn what your last thoughts were.

Your last “I love you” wasn’t coherent. Your tongue stuck to the roof of your mouth, like the dozens of times I had seen you eat peanut butter on Ritz crackers. You just kept moving your jaw, over and over again. You didn’t even have enough strength to form your lips into a kiss. I understood. And then, I left you.

I left you with the blankets pulled off your feet; you hated that. You loved NASCAR though, so I turned the TV to it. I wrapped your calves in your favorite blanket, put a pillow under your knees, and I left you. I didn’t know. I didn’t know it would be the last interaction we would have.

I remember your lungs full of tar and the albuterol shakes. I remember you, unable to walk, and the endless doctor visits in hospital rooms. I remember an empty house and my refusal to turn off your oxygen concentrator, fearing the quiet that would descend. We gathered, the people you loved, in a circle. All we could do was stare at
that hissing machine. We felt the hum under our feet. Someone flipped the switch; I don’t remember who. All I remember was the deafening silence.

Your memories are gone. Your thoughts, non-existent. There are pictures of course, but what happens when I want your embrace? Your own mixture of stale smoke and Folgers coffee was my favorite. I always came home and complained, but I never realized how you it was. That was, until you were gone.

I remember sitting between your legs, my head on your stomach, telling you about my day. You never cared that I hardly ever asked about yours. I wish I did. How selfish it was, but I was a child. I never kept my mouth shut, never let you open yours. I would complain, whine, bitch, moan. Never you, though. You never did.

I don’t believe in anything really. If I were to believe in something, it would be the idea that you are above me, just sitting. Perhaps you are on a replica farm you were once familiar with. I imagine the air around you—there, it is pure, fresh, so unlike what surrounded you here. As you sit, I believe you are gazing over sprawling bright green hills. Above all, I imagine you sitting with dad at your side, cups of coffee cradled in unbruised hands.

You’re in my closet. You’re in a gallon Ziploc bag, in a black box, tied with a white bread tie. Not fancy, but neither were you. A picture of you is fueling my junk drawer. Most times I can’t stand to look at your toothy smile and clear eyes. I don’t remember that you; it feels like betrayal. But don’t worry, I do remember you. I can’t forget you.
If you play video games, chances are, you’re familiar with the concept of “microtransactions,” though you may not have heard of the term. The term generally refers to the business practice of using micropayments (small, online payments) in exchange for digital or virtual goods in games or apps. Microtransactions are most commonly associated with low-cost or free games as a method of increasing revenue for the developer or publishing company associated with the game. If asked to name a game involving microtransactions, most people would name a smartphone game—Candy Crush Saga, Clash of Clans, Pokemon Go, and Fate/Grand Order—games that can be found in top grossing app sections. However, these games aren’t necessarily unique to the app store. Computer and console games have seen a recent uptick in the presence of microtransactions, with highly popular games such as Overwatch, Counter-strike: Global Offensive, and Player Unknown’s Battlegrounds including or planning elements involving microtransactions. On its own, the idea of microtransactions isn’t terribly scary. They can be a way for people to support the games and developers they love without having to drop large amounts of money at a single time. However, a problem arises when microtransactions allow companies to take advantage of buyers, such as using tactics that are taken from gambling. Despite the gambling elements, game and app microtransactions are often free from the sort of regulations placed upon casino gambling. Children and young people who would not normally be permitted to gamble due to age restrictions can often purchase microtransaction content. Thus, microtransactions and how they are used and sold should be regulated to prevent abuse or exploitation of consumers.

When talking about microtransactions, it’s important to define what the term means and consider exactly how broad it is. As such, the term microtransactions could
possibly be taken to mean something like purchasing an upgrade or additional content for a game or app, purchasing a digital pdf of a book, or buying iMessage stickers or emojis. Microtransactions can often be considered to come in two forms—paying for an item directly and paying for a chance at goods or currency. The former is relatively self-explanatory—you pay money and, in turn, receive an advertised good. It is generally no different from going to a local store and paying for something off a shelf, with the only difference being that you’re receiving a digital or virtual item as opposed to a physical item. Other games let you pay for an in-game currency or a chance at getting something, which is a more indirect way of receiving a digital good. In most games with in-game currency, there is some way to receive in-game currency or chances at receiving items for free. In some cases where you receive in-game currency, items have a fixed cost. In others, the prices will fluctuate and change, meaning the value that you’re getting may change over time. In other games, still, the game will give you a chance at getting an item. Sometimes, you can pay for these chances with in-game currency. The method of getting a blind-boxed chance at an item is typically referred to as a loot box or gacha, gacha coming from gachapon, the Japanese term for crank machines with a random toy or item inside.

There’s an app called Quidd that can be found on the Apple and Google Play stores. In Quidd, players exchange virtual currency that can be obtained for free or for real money through various means for blind boxed digital goods, such as cards and messenger app stickers. Often, the items contained in these boxes have different rarities, and you can trade items to other players for their items. At one point, I traded away an item and got messages from another player who wanted the traded item, urging me to “die” and telling me to “go kill yourself.” The player in question claimed to be eleven years old. Prior to this point, it hadn’t really registered in my mind that the players I deal with could be anything but the same age or older than myself. It’s difficult to find
the exact statistics on the ages of people who play games, especially children. Oftentimes, these children are playing on accounts or devices belonging to their parents or older siblings, or they lie about their ages on age-restricted games. Many people discuss young children spending increased amounts of time on tablets and phones at increasingly younger ages. One of the things that they could be spending their time on is free-to-play games and games that include gambling elements. I have a friend who spends a lot of his time on free-to-play games and games with microtransactions. This friend of mine tends to get addicted to online games such as these, and he spent the summer completely absorbed in one with microtransactions. At the age of seventeen, he’d managed to blow over one thousand dollars in a single month on microtransactions. Teenagers can be affected by these money-grabbing schemes as much as, if not more than, children. Clearer restrictions or restrictions that are actually enforced are key to keeping these situations from happening.

As stated earlier, there are positive reasons to include microtransactions in a game. For starters, microtransactions can make a “free” game economically viable. It’s difficult to continue creating content if you lack the funds to do so. So many games would be unable to continue due to a lack of funds for paying artists, programmers, and writers. Without the ability to monetize free games, many companies would not be able to properly compensate the creators of these games. People should have an easily accessible way of being able to provide creators with funds to continue projects they want to see more of. What should not be allowed are exploitative methods used to make money. Oftentimes, these companies know that they’re being exploitative. “Whale” is a term in the industry used to refer to people who spend a lot of money on loot box or gacha styled games, but the term “whale” comes from gambling, synonymous with “high roller.” While not all games are using methods lifted from
gambling to be purposefully exploitative, the connections between the two can’t be ignored.

Microtransactions have become a part of our culture. Most people in the United States have or will, at some point in their life, use a smartphone, gaming console, or miscellaneous device that supports games or apps. A significant portion of people will purchase some form of microtransaction during their lives. Like any industry, it is important to impose a certain number of rules and regulations in order to prevent companies from implementing predatory tactics and protect consumers from exploitation. This is especially critical as we enter an age where our children are becoming more familiar with technology at increasingly younger ages. We know gambling can have lasting psychological effects on people, so why do we have little to no regulations on a form of gambling that is accessible to nearly everyone? Lists of highest grossing applications on the Apple or Google Play stores reveal an uncomfortable sight; these lists are absolutely dominated by games that implement microtransactions. We must, then, ask ourselves: is it worth it to expose children and young people to content that may cause them to develop lifelong addictions, or other problems, for the sake of a company making easy money?
Surprise Spider

by Natalie Evans
The fog plumed through the gunshot holes in the train windows like smoke from a pipe. One of the long oblong ones that your great-great granddaddy smoked while watching the sun sink below the mountains. A long thin puff of air withering about like a snake that he shot away from the chicken hut. Bang! Bang! The shots echoed across the land, causing birds to rise in flight and glass to shatter the frozen ground. He mistook the train for a beast. His pupils wide and dark.
Deon is a black teenage male driving his sister’s new car. He’s wearing a hoodie and some jeans; his hair is in a low cut. His friend Travis is in the passenger seat. Travis is wearing something similar, but his hair is in dreads. As they were in the process of leaving a Chick-Fil-A parking lot, they saw blue flashing lights and heard a loud siren. Naturally, they pulled over. Both of their hands were on the roof of the car as they tried to make themselves seem the least threatening as possible. They feared for their lives.

As the officer approached with gun in hand, Deon and Travis tensed up. The officer told them that he pulled them over because the car was apparently reported stolen. Deon knew this wasn’t the case because he had his sister’s permission to use it and the car was in his sister’s name. Deon calmly and politely tried to explain this to the officer, but the officer didn’t want to hear what Deon had to say. The officer pulled Deon and Travis from the vehicle and threw them to the ground. He then proceeded to arrest Deon and Travis and took them to the station. Deon’s sister had to come up there and straighten everything out. She had to jump through hoops to prove the car was hers and have them set free. That was the day Deon no longer trusted the police. That same day, Deon learned what it meant to be racially profiled. A few years later, Deon is now my stepfather, and to this day, he uses that experience to warn us about the cops. He uses this story to remind me that anything can happen in a matter of seconds and to always do what the police tell me to do because they have the power to end my life. That one experience scared my stepfather, and he will never forget the day he was arrested for nothing and had the end of a gun staring him in his face. That is what racial profiling does to many victims. It traumatizes them because they never thought that they could be accused of committing a crime just because of the color of their skin.
Many people believe that racial profiling is a great tool to catch criminals, but it only uses stereotypes to try to villainize and strip the rights of a certain group of people.

My stepfather isn’t the only one who has been racially profiled. I have been the victim several times just not in as extreme a way. I remember, about a year ago, I was saving up money to buy my mom an expensive Coach bag she had wanted for the longest. As I walked in the store, a sales lady greeted me as usual, but instead of continuing with her work, she started following me all over the store with a look of disdain on her face. When I finally found the bag I was looking for, I asked the sales lady to take it down for me. She gave me a sickly-sweet smile and said, “I’m not taking this bag down for you. It’s out of your price range, sweetheart, and I won’t be responsible for helping you steal it.” I was appalled at her comment. Instead of saying what I wanted to say, I politely informed her that I knew what I could afford and that I would be filing a complaint. I also informed her that I would no longer be giving the company my money and stormed out.

That wasn’t the first time something like that has happened to me. When I was a freshman in high school, my history teacher split the class up into groups for us to make posters about famous philosophers. After the posters were complete, she set them up around the room and had us copy down the information on the posters. One poster was hung up right beside her desk. My group, which consisted of two other black girls and two white girls, finished writing things a little earlier than the other groups. One of my group members, DyLana, noticed a picture on a table beside my teacher’s desk. In the photo was another teacher we knew from middle school. DyLana pointed the picture out to the rest of us who went to middle school with her, i.e. the other black girl and me. As we looked, our teacher barked out at us, “What are you doing by my desk?!” I respond politely, saying, “We were looking at the picture of Mr. Bailey; he teaches at our old middle school.” With a grimace on her face, she explained he was a teacher’s
assistant here before he was hired at our middle school. She then went and checked all her desk drawers and cabinets while glaring at us. I realized then she thought we stole something. I was disappointed because I liked her and respected her as a teacher, but she honestly thought that we, her most hardworking and respectful students, stole something from her. I was crushed that day and realized that what I do doesn’t matter to some people because the stereotype my race gets is all they will ever see.

That’s all George Zimmerman saw Trayvon Martin as. Trayvon Martin was walking down the street at night wearing a hoodie, with Arizona tea and Skittles in his hand, when George Zimmerman shot and killed him because Martin looked suspicious. As the story goes, Zimmerman called the police, ignored what the dispatcher told him to do, got in an altercation with Martin, shot and killed Martin, and then claimed self-defense. Since there was no way to prove whether Zimmerman was telling the truth, he walked away free. Communities were outraged. Zimmerman killed a teen, who was minding his own business, for no reason at all other than he looked suspicious and that he was black. That’s all the two policemen who killed Tamir Rice saw him as. He was just a stereotype. It doesn’t matter that the 911 caller said that “the pistol was probably fake” or that the shooter was probably “a juvenile.” These officers shot and killed a twelve-year-old black boy for playing with his toy gun. They assumed he was deadly because of the neighborhood he was in, the toy he was playing with, and the color of his skin. The entire encounter of the officers telling Rice to drop the gun and his murder took about two seconds. They racially profiled him. The officers didn’t even give Rice medical treatment for his wounds. I wonder if they would’ve been so quick to shoot if the twelve-year-old had blonde hair and pale skin.

Those tragedies brought not only family and communities, but the entire country grief. Racial profiling will do that. It affects how communities and the world see a certain race. Black men are always perceived as lazy, deadbeat, drug-dealing thugs who
cause trouble. Black girls are loud, angry, ghetto, poor, uneducated sluts who put themselves above their kids. The world sees a few black people like that, and they assume that all of us are the same. It’s horrible that, every time some terrible crime takes place, I hope and pray that the criminal isn’t black and I’m happy when they’re not. It’s wrong but the truth. It makes me happy because that means, for once, it’s not our fault. For once, it doesn’t affect the black community. It’s hard to try and never mess up because the world will never let me forget how horrible my race is. If I mess up, then I’m exactly like the stereotypes—at least that what the world will see me as. The world wants us not to group all policemen together or all white people together, but the world won’t do the same for black people. Racial profiling only pushes that stereotype on black people even more. It’s ridiculous to judge people by the color of their skin and not by their character.

Racial profiling clearly does more bad than good. It uses stereotypes to criminalize races. Racial profiling means a black man can’t drive a nice car without being stopped by the police and fearing for his life because, according to the police, the car had to either be stolen or purchased by money gained from selling drugs. Racial profiling means that, every time I go somewhere, I must be stealing something. It means I can’t walk down the street at night with a hoodie because I’m a thug. It means that my brother can’t play with his toy gun outside of the house because he is a terrorist thug. It means the black community can never change the way the world perceives them. That’s what racial profiling means. It means stripping away my freedom to be happy and replacing it with fear that I’ll be convicted of a crime I didn’t commit. It means a greater possibility of me dying after being stopped by a cop. It means going backwards in time and recreating slave mentality for black people with cops as the masters. It means a totalitarian government where the black community is constantly in fear. That’s what racial profiling means: the mass murder of the black community.
Subtle Breath No. 15

by Abby Baldwin
There Used to Be Rivers in Georgia
by Abigail Mudd

I sat on the gravel beside a girl with straw hair
Her legs are the size of my wrist
I remember the time my father asked me what I wanted in a man

And I told him

That masculinity is a dance and I want a boy who speaks his emotions
He laughed and said “you want a sensitive boy”
As if it was something

Bad

I sat on the gravel beside a girl with straw hair
And I tell her not to trust boys that act like mountains
I tell her that they will break your legs
And leave bruises that

Won’t heal in the morning
  Won’t heal in the evening
  Won’t heal when you wake up late at night

Her legs are the size of my wrist but
She laughs and says she doesn’t want to be sensitive
As if it is something

Bad

When the gravel starts to dig into the bare parts of my skin
I begin to realize that my weak legs have carried me my whole life
Because I was never meant to be a mountain
I begin to realize

That boys should be like rivers
That you should let the butterflies fester in your tummy
And pour from your mouth like a stream
I wish I could tell my dad that

I want a boy who’s like a river
   I want a boy who’s like a river
   I want a boy who paints emotions like the sky

I want to tell the girl that

Mountains can never break down the water
   Mountains can never break down the water
   Mountains can never ever break apart the sky

And I’m trying to tell myself that

Softness won’t ever make me inferior
   Softness won’t ever make me inferior
   I am the river and I am the sky

But

By the time the gravel sticks against my thighs
   I look over and
   The girl is
   Gone
Stage four lung cancer is not something you survive. I know that now. So what is still a mystery to me is how I even thought there was a chance for her. Maybe it was just youthful, naive hope. Whatever it was, I felt it that night at the hospital. I clung to it like a pillow, like you do on a night in which you feel alone and afraid of the dark. My entire family had spent long days and nights at grandpa and grandma’s house; we knew the end was near, but we didn’t know exactly how close it was. When we admitted her to the hospital that night, we had no idea it was the night she was going to die.

My mother, father, and I arrived at the hospital early in the evening. Waiting at the doors to the entrance was my Aunt Traci and Uncle Chip. Traci is my mother’s sister. Heather, her other sister, was already inside with her husband Chuck and her daughter Emily.

“We flew up as soon as we heard,” Traci began. “How bad is she?”

Mom just looked at Traci, eyes burning, and that was all it took. I could see in Traci’s face that she wanted to cry, but some part of her was holding her back. There would be a time to cry, and it was not then. Traci entered the hospital with Chip just as my sister Jordan arrived. She came towards us swiftly, her black hair moving freely behind her like a murder of crows. It was obvious Jordan had been crying. She walked up to Mom and threw her arms around her just before the tears started again. Dad and I let them have their privacy and went into the lobby of the hospital.

The lobby was large and open, dimly lit with areas designated for large groups of people. I sat down and noticed a faint hint of classical music playing over the intercom. Beautiful, yet haunting.
“Do you guys want to go up and see her?” Heather whispered this question as if there were a group of sleeping babies in the room, but the room was completely empty except for us. Of course we wanted to see her, so Heather led the way.

As she led us into the bowels of the hospital towards the elevator, we passed a room with an old wooden door unlike any others I had seen. This room also had a window made of stained glass.

“What’s that room for?” I asked Mom.

“You know what it’s for,” she replied.

And I did.

The cramped elevator ride seemed to last ages. Her room was only on the second floor, but for some reason time just moved slower in the elevator. I studied each glowing button, counted each tile of the floor, stared at the dim yellow lights, anything to avoid eye contact with my family members. Finally, the elevator dinged. We turned corners and went down hallways, Heather navigating as if she were an employee of the hospital. “This is it.” She gestured towards a room about the size of a walk-in closet. It was smaller and darker than I expected. Not one light was on, except the lights from the many machines she was hooked up to. Lying there, grandma looked like an experiment from a science fiction movie—all kinds of tubes coming out of her mouth, IVs and things in her hand, hair sticking up and frayed. Grandpa sat on the other side of the bed, holding the hand that wasn’t hooked up to anything. This was the first time I had seen her in that way, with no makeup and her hair not done. The sound of her breathing was like a vacuum trying to suck up water. I was so shocked that I quickly walked to the wall on the other side of the room, set my bag down, and went back into the hallway.

Everyone went into the room except for Dad and me. We stood in the hallway, silently waiting for...something. I’m not sure what. I was upset, but I wasn’t crying. I
didn’t feel like crying. I had never had anyone in my family die before, and I didn’t really know what to think or feel.

“Death is a part of life, son,” Dad said to me after an age of silence. “You have to realize that and accept it.” I was fifteen, so I’m not sure if I knew how to simply accept that fact. But, of course, I would have to come to terms with it. She was dying, and there was nothing that anyone could do about it.

This train of thought was interrupted by Jordan dramatically exiting the room. She was crying, and had been crying for a long time, because her face was swollen and red as if she had been stung by bees. She leaned up against the wall next to me and covered her face with her hands. She held them there for a moment until she was able to compose herself, and she slowly and forcefully pulled them down her face to wipe her tears. I imagine we must’ve looked like an odd line-up, the three of us standing there leaned against the wall. None of us looked like we were even related.

Jordan leaned forward from the wall to look at me. “I know you weren’t as close to her as I was, but I also know you don’t want to lose her.” She was right. I honestly wasn’t that close to grandma, but in some ways that made losing her even more painful.

“You know how close you are to Grammy? Well, that’s like me and grandma. She was my best friend growing up. We were always doing things together; I was always over at her house. I could tell she was happy to have a granddaughter after Heather gave her a grandson. She even took me to England once when I was little. That was the greatest experience of my life. I would give anything to have her get through this.” Then Jordan began to cry again. This time, Dad comforted her. I just couldn’t handle being there at that moment, so I left to go spend time with Emily.

I found her back in the lobby. Emily and I have always been good friends. Even though we were cousins, we always fought like we were siblings. Now that we were older, spending time together was much more fun. Ever since school let out, we had
seen a lot of each other. Of course the reason for that was because of grandma being sick.

Emily looked up at me and put on a high-pitched voice while pursing her lips. “So...come here often?” We instantly both burst out into laughter. Thank God for that. “I actually do come here often,” I responded. “I have a very serious case of IBS.” Since we were teenagers, anything relating to our bowels was instantly hilarious. After making one another laugh back and forth like this for a while, we finally decided to play some card games. We really enjoyed card games; they were so simple.

After a while, Jordan stepped away from everyone else to get some snacks from the vending machines. She was hungry, but it was mainly just so she could be alone with her thoughts. Jordan had a lot on her mind—the divorce, the kids, her new boyfriend Steven. And now her grandma was dying. To her, this seemed like the worst summer of her life.

Just as she pulled out her wallet to get the money, a voice said, “Jordan!” She was so startled that she dropped her wallet. She quickly bent down to pick it up and turned around to see Heather looking down on her with her hands on her hips.

Jordan rose up, breathing out a sigh of relief. “God, Heather, you scared me so bad!” Heather just stood there. She looked furious about something. “What’s wrong?” Jordan asked, confused.

“You’d better stop fucking around in my town,” Heather said to her.

“Excuse me?” Jordan asked, not sure how to respond to her.

“You’re being a whore, dicking around with that Steven. You haven’t even been divorced that long. Steven is just trash, and I refuse to have my reputation ruined just because my niece is a little slut.”

Jordan stared at her. How could Heather do this to her—now?
“Heather, I don’t know what your problem is. You don’t know anything about me.” Jordan was shaking with fury but managed to keep her calm. She walked away, forgetting all about the snacks she had come there for.

She walked swiftly and without knowledge of where she was going. She didn’t care if she got lost. She turned corners, went down hallways, going deeper and deeper into the maze of the hospital. She finally found a single chair in a lonely corner of a deserted hallway. She sat down and tried to gain control of her breathing.

And then she cried.

Emily and I were in the middle of what seemed like our hundredth card game. As we turned each card over into the middle pile, absent-mindedly looking at them to make sure they were not jacks, we heard the soft, unfamiliar classical music change into something we both recognized: Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*. This song slowed us down for a minute—after hours of listening to this endless music, a song finally came on that we recognized. And this song just so happened to be grandma’s favorite.

Suddenly, memories of grandma flooded my mind. She resembled a tree, tall and lanky, with her skin covered in many grooves that bore proof of her life. Her hair had always stopped short at her chin and had been gray since her 20s, but she always died it blonde. I remembered birthdays, Christmases, Easters. The best holiday to celebrate with her was Thanksgiving. One year, when I was very little, my family had just finished eating Thanksgiving dinner when grandma complained about having to wash all the dishes we had used. To this, grandpa jokingly suggested that we just go out back and shoot the plates. Grandma stood up, left the dining room, and re-entered with her handgun. From then on, we shot our plates at every single Thanksgiving, a tradition that she created. I barely got to spend fifteen years with this woman, and I hardly knew who she really was.
Heather came into our line of sight, the first time we had seen her since she had gone upstairs. We knew she must’ve had some news, maybe about where we would sleep. It was getting late, around 11:00, so we wondered if we would be going home to get some rest, ready to start the next day bright and early back at the hospital.

Heather reached our little group of chairs and didn’t say anything. We didn’t say anything either; we just waited for her to speak.

She sat down, looking down at the ground and wringing her hands. She breathed out a heavy sigh and looked up at us. Her eyes were sparkling—full of tears. “So…” she started, “grandma just passed away.” These words hung suspended in the air before me, clinging to the final solemn tones of Moonlight Sonata as it faded away.

In that instant, so many things changed. And our family would never be the same.

We all went home. And by home, I mean grandma and grandpa’s house . . .

grandpa’s house. We decided to all stay there for the time being, to be there for grandpa and for each other. Emily and I ended up sleeping on the pull-out bed in the den.

Jordan went back to her house to be with her kids. And for the first time in over fifty years, my grandpa slept in his bed alone.

To say I slept is only true if the definition of sleep is to close your eyes and think about how much longer you have until the sun comes up. I wanted to sleep, desperately, I needed to, but I couldn’t get what I wanted.

Finally, the sun was about to come up, and it was acceptable to get out of bed. It was around five in the morning.

I slowly pulled myself out of the bed, trying not to disturb Emily, and walked to the back door. Without putting on my shoes, I stepped onto the back porch. The air was heavy with utter silence.
This morning world was blue. I had never noticed it before. It was as if I was viewing the world through a sapphire filter. I dared to venture from the porch, carefully opening the screen door, then deliberately and quietly closing it. I stepped down the blue stone steps and set foot on the cool blue grass. It was like being on a different planet. Everything was so infinitely beautiful, and it was all mine. I noticed a spider web in one of the trees. Its strands held perfect drops of dew that resembled beautiful blue marbles. This web was like my life. The blue droplets were the milestones. In them I could see memories: my first day of school, the days Jordan had her babies, staying up all night on Christmas Eve in anticipation of Christmas Day, joining marching band, and in one of the largest droplets in the center, I saw grandma lying in the hospital bed.

The world slowly awakened; its true colors came to it once again. Mom was the next one up, shuffling into the kitchen for a drink of water and stumbling across me. She wasn’t wearing her glasses, so she was squinting terribly. She asked me when I woke up. I lied and said I hadn’t been awake long. Little did I know, this insomnia would plague me for the entirety of the summer.

The rest of the house woke up, and we all convened in the den and kitchen. Heather started to cook breakfast; Traci made coffee. No one knew what to say. The pain each of us felt was so excruciating, it was impossible to talk about. Traci sat at the old wooden table by the window, clinging to her mug and keeping her eyes low. She looked up and stopped suddenly.

“Heather,” she whispered. “Heather, look at the window.”

In the windowsill nearest to Heather in the kitchen, there sat a redbird. Heather dropped her utensils and brought a hand up to cover her mouth. I looked at the bird, then at Traci, then Heather, then back to the bird. They remained silent, and I continued to search their faces for some sort of answer.
“What is it?” I asked. Maybe they weren’t looking at the bird. But it had been there this entire time, not moving, which is kind of strange for a bird.

“The bird,” Traci said, not looking at me but instead keeping her gaze fixed on it, “the redbird. When I was really little, my grandpa died. I was upset about it, and Mom told me that our loved ones watch over us in the form of redbirds. Every time we saw one she would point to it and say ‘There’s your grandpa, Traci.’ I never believed her. But my God…” Traci’s eyes were filling with tears. “It’s her.”

The rest of the day went by painfully slow. Planning the receiving of friends, writing the obituary, welcoming guests. At least the people that came brought food. Emily and I ate an entire plate of fifty Chick-Fil-A nuggets by ourselves. We kept each other busy, and neither of us had cried yet because we wanted to stay strong for each other. Of course, boredom crept up on us like boredom does, and we decided we would play Larkin Sorry. Larkin Sorry is just the board game Sorry, with the same rules, but we threw out all the original cards and wrote a hundred or so of our own that pertained specifically to our family. Because there were so many cards and most of them were counter-productive to anyone winning, the game typically lasted a couple of hours.

We were about halfway through the game, desperately trying to have fun. It was my turn, and I drew my card from the stack of crudely cut out cards we had made. We always read the cards out loud, but I didn’t read this one to her. I just sat there, looking at it, reading it over and over again.

In my peripheral vision I could see Emily’s face go from smiling and happy to frowning and concerned. “What does it say?”

I opened my mouth to read it to her, but no sound came out. Every time I tried to say it, it was like my heart would stop beating. I just looked at her and handed her the card. It read: Grandma has just run out of cigarettes, move forward to the nearest corner to get her some.
Emily looked up from the card and held eye contact with me. I couldn’t breathe, and neither could she. I could feel my heart breaking in my chest.

And then we both simultaneously burst out laughing. All the tension from the night before and that day just released in a single moment. It was so inappropriately ironic that we couldn’t help but laugh. Soon, the laughter turned to tears. We both cried so hard we could barely breathe. Once we gained control, we threw the card away and put the game back.

A few days later, we had the receiving of friends. We weren’t really going to have a funeral, since grandma was cremated. Grandma and grandpa weren’t from the South, so they didn’t share the same obsession with the creepy open-casket funerals like everyone else in South Carolina.

Mom and I set up the room at the funeral home. We set pictures of her on tables, with lots of white lilies around them. We put some of her dog show awards up, too. Anything we could find to honor her. On a table in the center of the room sat the urn with her ashes.

The ceremony was about to start. Grandpa, Traci, and Chip still weren’t there. Heather, Chuck, Emily, and her older brother Austin were all there, and of course my parents, Jordan, and I were there. Mom left to call Traci and came back a few minutes later looking absolutely furious. Apparently they weren’t coming. Grandpa was too embarrassed and didn’t want people to see him cry, and Traci and Chip decided to stay back with him. Grandpa didn’t come to the service for his own wife. Traci didn’t come to the service for her own mother. I guess you could say that this is when the family started to break apart.

After we had taken everything to the car, I came back in and saw a program sitting on one of the tables. I picked it up and read it; I didn’t even know we had made programs. It said wonderful things about grandma. On one page it talked about her
family, her life, and her accomplishments. On the other it said the Irish Blessing. Grandma and grandpa were actually from Ireland and had lived there together for many years, just outside of Dublin. I had never heard of the Irish Blessing before, but after I read it on that day, I never forgot it. Even now, after all that’s happened.

After that day, everyone abandoned the family. I suppose it was a project too great for any of us to take on and fix. We left behind the traditions grandma so desperately tried to keep. Grandma had said this would happen, and she was right. She was the glue that held the family together, and she knew it. But I guess we didn’t, not until after she died. Of course, we found out what Heather had said to Jordan and confronted her about it. Traci took Heather’s side. We’ve split up. Something I would expect of high school students, but not my family members. What really hurts is knowing that all grandma really wanted was to keep the family alive. She was a spirited woman who was so infinitely wise, and even though she made many mistakes, she regretted nothing. I have a regret, and it’s that I didn’t allow myself to get to know her. I didn’t take the time to form a strong relationship with her, and now I’ll never get that chance. And I hate myself for it. Sometimes I look back at that little program just to read that Irish Blessing, to see the little italic words and think about what they truly mean:

*May the road rise up to meet you,*
*May the wind always be at your back,*
*May the sun shine warm upon your face,*
*And the rains fall soft upon your field.*
*And, until we meet again,*
*May God hold you in the hollow of his hand.*
Subtle Breath No. 9

by Abby Baldwin
Wednesday
by Austin Costenbader

The sun goes down, and the air becomes cooler. I button the top three buttons on my coat while the dog is tugging me. Atop the hill, I can see a clear view of my house and the steady stream of white smoke flow out of the chimney.

The little terrier named Rex marks his territory and starts pulling me back towards warm. He runs straight to his water bowl when we get inside, and my girlfriend holds up a taco and a margarita with an adorable smile on her face.

“Hungry?” she says.

“Starving, hardly a lunch break today.”

“Awh,” she says, sincerely.

Without asking, she pours me a hefty helping of margarita into a foam cup. She motions toward the food while she takes a big sip. Wednesday is Taco and margarita night for Michelle and me—and Rex. It’s a mid-week treat to help us get to Friday.

Michelle’s sweetness fits me like a warm coat in July—she’s always smiling. She loves to talk, and I love to listen. Rex loves pinches of hamburger meat and tortillas handed incognito under the table.

We eat in the living room to the sound of a football game neither of us care about. I have my feet on a stack of magazines I have never read or purchased. Every house in America has a stack of magazines that no one knows where in the hell they came from.

“I’d like you to look at the car, hon, it’s making this light ‘ratatara’ noise.”

“Can you repeat that?”

She glares at me—she knows I’ll look at the car—she knows I never tell her no. I’m lucky to have her.
“Change the channel to the news, I’d like a little depression with my margarita,” I say.
“You’re wild,” she says.
She tells me all the time that I’m wild.

After enough tacos and margaritas to make our jogger neighbors go into cardiac arrest, we turn up the TV and take turns petting Rex. The guy on the news is going over holiday safety tips and says there’s a good chance of snow for the rest of the week and on into the weekend.

“Oh hon, wouldn’t snow be fun? I bet Rex would love to chase us around in the snow.”
“Would Rex like to help me bring over extra fire wood for all the snow?” I smile at her.
I tell her I’m going out before I get too tired and it gets too cold, to investigate this “ratatara.”

***

I pull her little Toyota into the garage and listen to it idle while I clear room to work and find my shop light and extension cord.

When I popped the hood, I was relieved and almost aggravated at how obvious it was—a grocery bag had become crammed behind the grill and was making a perfect “ratata” noise. The bag came out in three or four chunks, and I figured I’d look the car over quick while I was there. I’m glad I did. The fan shroud that covers the fan had become loose and most likely added to the noise. The oil was half a quart low, and the air filter had a few too many acorns for me. I topped off the oil, the power steering fluid, the brake fluid, and blew out the air filter—made sure I didn’t leave any tools lying around the engine, and slammed the hood.

Back inside, I had a final cup of margarita waiting on me as I showed her the mangled plastic bag.

She was giggling at this point—she’s always been a lightweight. She grabbed the bag and started running toward the living room shouting “ratata, ratata!” Rex was
snapping at her feet as she jumped around.

I love laughing at her when she’s goofy—I like to see her that way—not necessarily tipsy, but goofy.

The channel on the TV had changed and was louder than when I went to the garage.

“Glad you changed it, was getting too depressed,” I said, trying as usual to revive a joke that had long passed on.

“Yeah,” she said. “I found this old movie that I haven’t seen since I was in college—I just love Sixteen Candles.”

“Oh, yeah. Got the drunk Asian kid in it.”

I took off my heavy coat and fed Rex for the night.

“We’re a whole lot of fun, aren’t we?” I said. “Winding down at 9 o’ clock?”

She didn’t listen or respond—she was locked in on that movie; I believe it was the scene where the main character’s sister was sloppy drunk right before she walked down the aisle. I stole some of her blanket, put my around her, and we fell asleep like that.

***

I guess around midnight, I awoke to the tips of my feet freezing cold—she had stolen the blanket as usual and cocooned herself down within the couch cushions. My moving around made her stir a little. “Come on babe, let’s go to actual bed,” I said. She nodded. I grabbed two pieces of oak from the back step and stoked the fire. I drank a small glass of water and met her in the bedroom.

“Good night babe, love you,” I said.

“Goo nigh, lu . . . y . . .” rolled out of her mostly asleep self.

I’ve always been tempted to ask her confusing questions when she’s like that: “Was it Newton or Copernicus who theorized gravity?”
Rex stays on top of the covers between us—making a little trough of blanket with his little, chubby body. He shouldn’t have to pee until the morning, I thought to myself. If it gets cold enough, he’ll go lie in front of the fireplace belly-up as if he’s been shot.

That night was some of the best sleep I’d gotten in a long time. The kind of sleep so deep, and dreams so vivid, you don’t want to wake up. I won’t forget that dream—me and some buddies were rummaging through the woods at night trying to find Johnny Cash’s real grave.

I didn’t wake up to my 7:30 alarm, but to Michelle kissing me gently on the forehead. We snoozed for several more minutes until we were both startled by a ringing.

“T’ll get it,” she said.

She came back less than a minute later with the good news that it was my boss calling to let everyone know work had been cancelled today due to snow and very icy conditions.

“Damn, did it snow sure enough?”

She pulled back the curtains and looked out the window. “Ha, yeah! About an inch or so,” she said.

We can both be sort of lazy people; we like sleep. Within a few moments, were back in bed.

“Let’s sleep for another hour or so, and then I’ll get up and make us coffee,” she said. “And I’ll put more wood on the fire too.” This surprised me. She normally doesn’t mess with the wood. This snow and sleeping in has her awfully giddy, I thought to myself.

***

I woke up to her lips very close mine, right where I like them. She had coffee on her breath. She had woken before me and beaten me to the first cup.
A Thief at Midnight

by Hunter Krebs
This issue of *New Voices* is lovingly, gratefully dedicated to our seniors, Paige Fowler and Chase O’Dell, for their hard work over the years. Congratulations and best wishes to you both! We will miss you!
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