



The Rubicon

Troy University Department of English
Student Literary Journal: Issue 3, Fall 2010

The Rubicon

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Table of Contents

1	<i>Poetry</i>	1
	[3] by <i>Stephanie Fockler</i>	1
	2008 by <i>Cameron Hodge</i>	5
	Felicia by <i>Candace Turlington</i>	5
	Savannah's Hair by <i>Candace Turlington</i>	6
	MUSICA NOCTIS by <i>Nathaniel Westfall</i>	6
2	<i>Prose</i>	7
	Autumn Bones by <i>Elijah David</i>	7
	Hard Lies, Harder Truths by <i>Stephen J. Davis</i>	9
	Home by <i>Kristle Lawrence</i>	12
	The Birdhouse by <i>Cody Muzio</i>	13
	There are Demons, and then there are Demons by <i>Candace Turlington</i>	16

1 Poetry

[3]

by *Stephanie Fockler*

The lectern-calling
 A proudly cultivated platform stance
 Sets up for a justly, righteous, blustering gust
 Running through the nave, turning back from the high beams
 Fanning the blaze of fervor
 That seeded the caverns of an empty soul
 Squeezing out its diseased innards hoping
 The freezing outside will
 cut them out.

Centered – high, middle, low
 brain, heart, sex

a sobbing jibber
 in the dark

Freud (and progeny)- do you offer solace? eventually?
 don't look too long

Let's have a little distraction
 From all these unanswerable, pressing questions
 The flickering pages
 tap on by
 Compounding distractions
 Not too close but just far enough
 To pretend necessary connection in a flesh-less world.

Choose my religion
 on Facebook
 in a drop-down menu
 "Methodist or Latter-Day
 today?"

It says:

fearnot fearnot fearnot

just don't look too long
away from

the fire

Scarred, weary organs
Wary of more pain
Mutated in one, will seek to save the others
By joining those who share the same deficiency,
And otherwise, not straying too far from the communal fire,
The fundamental half-way point:
a compromise
between expectation and reality
and making the safe bet.

the empty seat at the head of the table
has everyone confused
wondering what goes there
after all the fathers have left the table
leaving their unrecognizable children
and taking with them their poling centers

The Everlasting Shout is
howling from the dark

Let's only say what we mean
Because the truth can only save us
Because we all know the truth
Staring out at us
From the stranger faces
Of our beloved one's.

Let's never change our minds
Because God forbids hypocrites.
If so, I've been a hypocrite all my life
and god, I hope to continue to be so.
"Do I contradict myself?"
So I do.

How can it be helped?
I hear all these voices ringing in my ear
I see all these voices blinking on the screen
No words come from your mouth anymore
That don't come through
A million different ways
Before you spoke.

All that I know
may as well
be the
wind
learn
a little
to
understand
understanding
nothing and never
will
My whole
soul has become a
hurricane -the eye
holding nothing
and staring blankly
to the sky
dumb and listening to
the of useless murmur
peacefully
thoughts
that rise
and
die off
turning back again

spiraling
with the egotism that everything is a sign
just for us
our self-evolving god

"I am what I am."
none of your business
I'm a freaking burning bush
What do you think?
Bushfire or God
is the question.

the wind feeds the flames
a pretty, hypnotic light
burning brightly
in the night

the animal
the Beast
howling at the end
of the long trek into night
stalking our guilty selves while

someone watches, laughing
gleefully at other, self-created
monsters: well-entertained.

The illusionary point
burns me of my stupidity
and vanity
and dumb –centered- view
of throbbing organs that are used
to answer all the questions.

just a little dustwhirl of the universe.

pretty blue dot
in the endless
pale blue spot
of the cosmic arena
of the flashing pinball machine
fraction of a spark
wacked with plastic hands
divine or not.

The world spun so fast
It slipped right out of
Atlas's grasp
Barreled through Olympus
(jumped over Mt. Sinai
skipped past a rock in the desert
rambled by an olive garden),
Meeting no Immovable Force
There, and so just went right on.

A billion things are coming
right at you, offering
the easy way out, to live
in this age's most convenient fashion.
"It's so convenient, saves time
saves money, to spend
time and money on this!"
That ADD promise
making the gray matter
strange from its own use

Myself has become a hurricane
It's so terribly convenient.

2008

by Cameron Hodge

You hid me in your
Bathroom for days at a time
Kept secret behind the
Deodorants and fragrances.
Learning how to escape.
Crawling through the pipes
That riddled the insides of those walls.
Teaching me how not to lose my hair,
Or go grey.
Forgetting the lessons from Sunday mornings,
Because when you're older
Those mornings are for driving.
Yes, it was there,
In that small space,
Where I lost what it meant to be a boy.
Washed down the bathtub drain
Like the dirt you washed from
My feet.

Felicia

by Candace Turlington

candle cloaks the room in
cloudy, soft light
sounds of a sitar
cradle my sullen soul -- strange
how sadness reminds me of you

Savannah's Hair

by Candace Turlington

stillest fire
 angled to perfection
 light caught in between
 proves its ferocity

MUSICA NOCTIS

by Nathaniel Westfall

Vivid, dark, mysterious sound-
 The chords that never grace the day –
 Into my heart your rhythm pound,
 Hypnotized, the darkness sways.

I love your soft inviting call,
 The way your notes do sing in glee,
 They way they echo down the halls,
 And answer in sweet melodies.

2 Prose

Autumn Bones

by Elijah David

The autumn wind blew across the campus. It was a change, the first harbinger of winter's coming death. The wind whistled in the magnolia trees, sounding in them like a shaman's breath in bone flutes. The wind was crisp and stirred memories in the minds of the students on the Quad as much as it stirred the leaves on the ground. They thought of warm drinks on chilly nights, of hay rides in the country, of bonfires and of scary movies. Memories of costumes and candy waltzed in their heads and mixed in a drunken swirl with vague images of parties like a Halloween punch.

Two students were having a dispute near one of the magnolias. Its shadow hid her like a mesh blanket, crossing her face in false luminescence while he stood with arms crossed in the pale sunlight.

"Come on," she called to him. "You know you want it."

He shook his head, refusing her kiss. He knew what happened when girls tempted you into shadows. You always ended up regretting it, and the blame was always yours. Never mind the crowd of people, he thought. A scene would arise if he went into the shadows with her, and so he would stay in the light.

The trees continued in their role as the wind's instrument and the man closed his eyes to relish the wind. This was his time of the year – the time when life was being drawn from the earth by its own systems. The brilliant colors of the leaves would soon betray the death of the world and people would go about their petty celebrations, making light of death though they did not think of it as such.

The woman stepped forward and reached out one long, bony arm to tug at his flannel sleeve. He remained. She emerged a bit more into the sun's rays, all the more intense for the crunch that surrounded them in air and leaves. Now her left side was fully lit, save for the face that still remained shaded.

"You're being difficult," she teased.

"And you aren't?" he quipped.

She blew her hair out of her eyes with a *huff*. "Why won't you kiss me?"

"I would be perfectly happy to kiss you," he replied, "repeatedly, if necessary. But I will kiss you where and when I want to, and I will not kiss you in the shadow like a skulking schoolboy. If I kiss you I shall do it out in the open, where all may witness the deed if they choose."

They remained at their compromised *impasse* for another few minutes. Eventually the students gathered on the Quad found their ways to other destinations. As the clock chimed exacerbating recordings of bells playing what might have been either

“I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In” or Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” the two by the magnolia found themselves almost alone. The only other occupants of the Quad were the stray cats on the steps of the building to the east and a young man with a lost look on his face. He was obviously an international student or a freshman, possibly both.

The woman tried once more with awkward poise to extract a reversal from her opponent. He simply shifted his arms so that his fingers could form their habitual intricate lacing on his chest. He meant this to insinuate further solidarity, but she took it as challenge and once more pulled him toward her. If it had not been for the impish screeches from the cats on the steps, he might have remained in his place. As it was, the cries distracted him momentarily. He was actually moved this time and successfully relocated to the murky shade of the magnolia. No more did the sun attempt penetration of the foliage, deciding rather that scorching some undergraduates a few blocks over was more deserving of his time.

The man worried in the moments of his translation that he might find himself at journey’s end impaled upon the branches hanging in his path, but somehow she swung him clear of these obstacles. Despite his momentary uneasiness, his hands never left off their lacing.

“I have you in my power now,” she sighed.

“Indubitably,” he uttered.

Momentarily she gave off trying to extrapolate his meaning, simply leaned in and kissed him. He stood and allowed the affection to be bestowed upon his lips.

“Now, that wasn’t so bad, was it?” he asked.

“It would have been better if you had actually put yourself into it,” she responded, putting her hands on his.

“I suppose you putting me into didn’t count?”

She tilted her head as she attempted to work her hands into the lace of his fingers. “It’s not the same if one person does ALL the work,” she retorted. “You should loosen up a bit. It’s not like I have the kiss of Death or anything.” Her last words were emphasized by her exertions. It would be a catastrophe if she did not succeed at prying apart his hands.

Actually, he thought, she’ll thank me someday if she fails.

The other student on the Quad was now soothing the cats, generating contented sounds from the felines. International student, then, thought the man. The international students had a better handle on animals than most freshmen.

He felt his grip begin to slip from its firm position. Distractions! Damn these distractions! He returned his focus to the interlocking of phalanges, but his attempts were in vain. She had gained an advantage, and she was not one to pass up an advantage. As she finally pried his hands apart, he sighed. He might as well see what came of it.

She had his hands apart and over her head, with her lips prepared for the secondary intercourse with his before she noticed the change in his visage. He did not move, allowing her to shove the bones of his arms aside as her scream tried to shatter the bones in his ears.

She rushed to the only consolation in sight – the international student by the cats. The man beneath the tree shrugged fleshless shoulders as his latest attempt at nonality fled into the arms of another.

Oh well, I’ll try again tomorrow.

Hard Lies, Harder Truths

by Stephen J. Davis

I am going back to hell, thinks Sonia Bondurant in a sudden moment of self-clarity reserved for those who are soon to die. She feels that somewhere down the line in her twenty-six years of life she has made a grave mistake.

But like all moments of clarity, it passes in a dreadful heartbeat and is gone—leaving her in the back seat of the cherry-red La Salle with nothing but the chug of the La Salle’s motor and the heavy breathing of the men squashed in on either side of her. She closes her eyes and leans back against the leather seat. The heat in the car is oppressive, cloying, like a giant glove. She feels at any moment the hand will close in, tighter and tighter, and she shudders and blurts out, “Stop the car.”

The driver looks back. “You know we can’t do that, Miss Sonia.”

“I’m sorry. I just . . .” She fans her face, feeling beads of sweat there.

The driver cuts a glance back at the two brutes on either side of Sonia. They shake their heads in unison, small imperceptible shakes. “Sorry, Miss Sonia. We got our orders.”

We got our orders. Sonia has heard it all before. All of her life, she’s heard it.

Big Daddy.

She remembers the night she took off, finally fed up with her father’s orders and rules and strictures. She’d thought of leaving without a word, but instead she’d telephoned him at Penn Station just before she’d hopped the 10:15 to Charleston.

I’m leaving, Daddy.

Honey . . .

Don’t say anything. I can’t do this. I can’t live like this, with the way you do things.

Sonia, I don’t think that’s very safe . . .

Goodbye, Daddy.

She had hung up then, and for once she had gotten the last word. Or so she’d thought. But of course she was wrong. Big Daddy always knew how to find her. He was nothing if not resourceful.

She’d been living in a small house in Tampa when they came knocking on her door. Four of them—tall men with huge, round, aggressive heads and seriously sunburned faces, standing stiff-legged in the hall. She had tried to flee but they had stopped her.

Miss Sonia, they had said, *there ain’t no use in this. Your daddy sent us to collect you.*

And collect her they did. They stowed her in the back of their La Salle and had set off North, and Sonia knew the two-day drive to Rhinebeck would be tedious and silent. There was no use in pleading with these men. They answered to one man, Big Daddy Bondurant, and his word was God’s to them.

Still, the heat in this car is suffocating, and Sonia feels that if she doesn’t get out of this car now, she might—

This is all she has time to think before the shooting starts.

Her eye is caught by a sudden burst of light from the left. Then the glass on the driver’s side door disintegrates. A line of holes stitch across the side of the La Salle like a sieve. The driver pitches sharply to the right with a sudden gasp of breath, and

the car suddenly fishtails. Another line of holes erupt on the La Salle's hood, and the windshield caves in. Sonia throws her hands up, clapping them over her face and bracing herself for the impact . . .

The La Salle flips into the air end for end and comes down with a glass-jangling thud and rolls over. There is a coughing explosion from the ruptured gas tank as the car comes to rest.

Sonia is alive. She has been cut in several places by flying glass—none of them are bad by themselves, but there is a lot of blood—not all of it is hers, but some is. Yet she is alive. The crackle of fire is in her ears like thunder. The thug on her left is slumped against the door, and in the flicker of the flames, she sees his eye has been shot out. The driver is dead, too, his throat laid wide open.

The man on her right is still alive, though, trying desperately to grab for his pistol. His arm has been shattered to pieces. He looks at her, his face a red soup from the flying glass, and he is moaning something to her through his savaged lips—it sounds like *Stay. Stay.*

Sonia can't stay. The baking heat of the fire is getting worse. She tries to open the door on her side, but it has crumpled shut. Panting hoarsely, she throws herself to the other side. The window had imploded in the crash, and she pushes herself out onto the cool wet grass of the ditch they landed in.

She pushes herself to her feet and staggers up toward the wall of trees on the lip of the ditch. She glances back over her shoulder—

—and the bushwhackers are coming.

She drags herself into the woods, crouching low behind a hoary old elm. She peeks around the corner as they trot out from the other side of the road. There are three of them that she can see—men in black trenchcoats and fedoras. Sonia licks her lips. Have they seen her? Have they—

They open fire on the wreckage. Sonia thinks she hears a scream from inside the car . . . and then the La Salle goes up with a loud thud. Sonia ducks back behind the tree as the whole world burns bright for a moment, and when she chances a look again, the car is now a blazing pyre in the night.

The triggermen are now fanning out beyond the car, and Sonia recognizes the formation. She scrambles to her hands and knees, resisting the powerful urge to leap and scramble away at once—it would give away her position. She just had to fight the panic and wait and see what they did—

They stand there against the fire-licked night, looking out towards the forest. They do not speak as the La Salle leaks flames at the sky. In the orange glow of the light, she sees their faces—she does not recognize them.

She waits there for the longest time, and finally they start to turn away. She watches as they stroll back across the road, their tommy guns tapping against their legs . . .

She leaps, blind reflexes seizing her, and sprints into the woods. She thinks she hears one of the men call out, but she can't be sure. Not until she feels something bullet past her inches away—it is a bullet. She wheels, skids—and hears the air erupt in gunfire.

She hits the earth and sprawls like a loose bag of flour. The trees around her splinter and chip as a .45-caliber leadstorm chops through them. She leaps forward,

scrambling wildly into the darkness, not knowing where she is going, not caring. Her breath comes in whistling sobs. Frosty air jets out of her nose like exhaust.

Her father had sent these men. He had sent them to kill her.

The force of this realization hits her like one of the assassin's bullets. She stops dead in her tracks, not caring that the men have stopped firing, not realizing she is now in the middle of a dark forest with no way to know where she is. All she knows is that her father, Big Daddy Bondurant, finally decided to take care of his wayward daughter problem—permanently.

There is no moon, no stars tonight. She knows the men are not going to venture out in the pitch-black woods with no way to find her. They will not risk shooting themselves up in the dark. She is safe, for the time being.

Safe.

The last word Daddy had said to her.

Sonia's legs give way beneath her, and she starts to cry.

Home

by *Kristle Lawrence*

Lying here, staring up at the stars, my world seems so small and simple. The night is cool and clear. The pastures and hayfields stretch out on all sides, flowing like velvet beneath the twinkling canopy of stars. I can still see the lights glowing in the kitchen window of the house. My parents have been in bed over an hour. I lie here on top of a round bale of hay staring up. I inhale the sweet and earthy smell of the hay as it presses sharply into my back. Here, I am home.

Here at the end of this country highway at the home I had lived in for nineteen years, the world is that small, comforting place it has always been. Here, on this bale of hay, I am the little country girl who loves cows and football. I am just as I should be. I am the product of a farming family which is still continued through my grandfather. Both parents hold normal, low paying jobs. My maintenance mechanic father and teacher mother love me unconditionally and support my love of my college marching band and my university. I love home.

Home reminds me of who I am when the world tries to change me. Home reminds me how I have been taught to be a confident and self-reliant woman, but a lady overall. I am reminded that it is here above anywhere else where I am invited to embrace what makes me unique. It is here that my faults are accepted and my finer traits are glorified. I can laugh here and love here as if my heart were unbreakable and as if I had never been hurt. The pain and the regrets melt away. I miss home.

The beauty of the night sky reminds me that I am beautiful if for no other reason than simply because I know who I am and embrace what has brought me here. It is here on this sleeping farm, my confidence is restored. I have no reason to fear or bow to anyone. I am strong. Life has made me so. The values that my family has instilled within me radiate from the live beating heart which throws itself against my ribcage. These people taught me how to love and how to care for others. It is here on this hallowed ground that I learned how to love. It is the dedication and hard work sewn into this surrounding earth that gives me a reason to be proud. This is home.

Though I stare up at a limitless universe, I do not feel small. I have been created, raised, and encouraged to change the world. I have what I need thanks to this blessed place I call home and the blessed people I call family. As I lie here, I thank God for who I am and for all that has made me so. The night closes in as I slide down from my perch. I breathe in one more deep draw of the crisp night air. I take in the beauty of this place and listen to the whispers of who I am here in this place. I make my way slowly towards the house and feel the blood of the generations in my veins. I hold my head high, and smile. Home is my paradise.

The Birdhouse

by *Cody Muzio*

He woke up refreshed and feeling like he'd just slept on the moon and been kissed by the sun. That was how he described a good morning. He sat up calmly and looked out the window. He noticed the trees waltzing in the gentle breeze. A bluebird landed on his window sill and whispered to him, not wanting to wake his roommates. He spoke in return, kindly wishing his new friend a pleasant morning. He stood and walked to his desk, where he saw the time; it was 11:30. He had slept most of the morning away, he thought, but what was left was going to be a beautiful afternoon. The sun was shining brightly, and the weatherman had said the day would have a high of 70 degrees. He put his earphones in and set his computer to play through his usual playlist. The songs were a unique mix of video game soundtracks, indie bands, soft rock, and a handful of dancepop songs that were popular at the time. He fixed his usual breakfast of cereal and milk. He always liked to mix Fruit Loops and the marshmallows from the Lucky Charms into what he called Lucky Loops. His roommates would groan when they woke to find a box full of marshmallow-less cereal, but it was delicious and packed with all the sugar one would ever need in a day, so he did it anyway. When he finished, he got dressed in a collared shirt and shorts and slipped out the door ready for an adventure. He whispered excitedly. "Let's do it."

He had heard there would be a concert today in the main theater on campus. He had heard the band play once before, but not the symphony orchestra. "Really, they're the same people playing in each, but the style of music is different, and isn't that what matters?" he asked. He'd never been to a concert before—not with a full orchestra, anyway, and he was giddy. He jauntered up the street from his dorm to the concert hall. It was the way he always walked—a sort of cross between a jaunt and a saunter. He made sure to stop at every tree lining the path and jump to see if he could touch the branches. He wanted to climb them and jump from one to another like a monkey, but his societal normalcy restrained him. He saw that the moon was out, something he had always thought meant some sort of good omen, but he noticed the dragon-shaped cloud next to it was about to swallow it whole, something he couldn't quite guess the meaning of. He saw that some of the trees on the walkway had been covered in toilet paper, and this stole his attention away from the sky. He laughed aloud. He passed one boy he'd seen on campus a few times before but whose name he did not know. The boy looked preoccupied and buried in his thoughts. He felt sorry for the boy; he always thought the boy was sad, like he was stuck and trying to escape something. "Let's hope things pick up for him," he said, shaking his head sympathetically. He said a quick prayer for the boy and kept walking, and thinking about how cool it would be to be able to fly. As he neared the building that housed the theater, he retrieved his wallet from his pocket so he could use his student ID card to get in for free. He walked through the monolithic columns of hollow plastic that decorated the building's façade, and thought only briefly about how big and cool they were. But he didn't have time to think on them too long; he was on a mission. When he entered, he walked straight in as if wearing blinders, flashed his card to the lady at the desk, and proceeded to the seat to which the usher directed him. Having

felt suitably like a detective, he settled into the packed theater as the music started to play.

The music was beautiful. He had heard nothing like it in years. He closed his eyes and watched the notes take physical shape and become incredible new worlds for him to explore. He saw birds flying freely, playing tag with each other in the sky. He saw machinery exploding in a naval battle that looked like it belonged more in one of his video games than in a historical war. He felt rushing winds and thought he was flying. Moments later, however, he realized he was actually on a rollercoaster when he felt himself loop upside down. Then the music slowed. "That was..." he whispered, but he couldn't think of a word to finish. Breathtaking, stunning, inspiring, incredible, marvelous, nothing quite seemed to fit. He thought on it for a minute, but shrugged it off. Then the director stood up for one last address to the audience. "This next and final piece represents the connection between a child and his imaginary friend. While you listen, remember: the most important people in a person's life are the ones he speaks to when there's no one around." The director stepped down and the music began. He craned his neck forward to hear. It wasn't that the music was too quiet, but it was unlike anything he'd heard before, and he wanted every note to be planted in his brain so he could harvest their emotion each new morning. The music fell and rose and moved this way and that, and he swayed each direction with it. It was as if the maestro had him as a marionette, so in sync was his body with the flow of the song. The piece closed with a bang, and he wiped a tear from his eyes. The music had stopped in his ears, but in his heart, he could feel it continue to echo. Something had clicked inside of him. He knew. He didn't know what he knew, but he knew that he knew, and that was enough.

He got up, clapped heartily for the musicians, and made his way out of the theater to see that it was a little darker than he had expected. Checking his phone, he saw the concert had gone far longer than he'd expected. It was dinner time. The cafeteria was the obvious solution to the hunger he began to feel upon seeing the time. It was across most of the campus, but he didn't mind walking. As he walked, he noticed a chunk of the crowd also going the same direction. One family had likely come for the concert but was looking around the school while they were there and was heading to the cafeteria, as well, so he walked with them. He hated awkward silences, so he turned to the young boy in their group and started a conversation.

"Hey, man. How's it going?" he asked.

"Good," the boy responded.

"Did you like the concert?"

"It was pretty cool."

"Yeah."

"Wouldn't it be awesome if these trees were made of candy?"

"Sorry," the boy's mother chimed in, "Chip has such a wild imagination."

"Oh, no, I agree with him. It would be... awesome," he said as he glanced back at the theater.

He swiped his ID card at the cafeteria and greeted his friends. He walked around the room examining the food the staff had prepared for the night before grabbing a brownie and ice cream and sitting down at the end of their table at the last seat available. It was his usual seat with one friend across from him and everyone else to

his right. He and his friends laughed and joked. As usual, the conversation began with classes and people they knew before it progressed to the topics everyone actually came to talk about. They discussed the things they loved. They argued over video games, with one shouting about his latest speed run of "Halo 2" on "Legendary" mode, while another claimed bragging rights for having beaten "Battletoads." He watched his friends bicker and laughed with the rest when one was put in his place with a snappy comment. He was rarely impressed, though. "These guys don't know what they're talking about. We've done more impressive than that," he said to his left. The conversation never stopped at video games, though. They talked about all the finer points of pop culture. In music, there was little disagreement. If there was an argument, all parties could come back to the constant of the group: They Might Be Giants is the best and most underappreciated band in history. Movies and TV always left more room for debate, however. This time the discussion was minimal, though, and the consensus among the group quickly became, "Megan Fox is good looking, but kids growing up on the Transformers movies today are missing out on the classic Transformers from the 80's and 90's." This seemed a conclusive statement; not much else could really be added, so the group disbanded and all headed their separate ways.

He entered his dorm and climbed the steps to the fourth floor. He remembered he lived on the third floor, though, so he giggled, slapped himself on the forehead, and went down a flight. He entered the room and glanced at the clock on his desk. It was 9:15, and both of his roommates were already asleep. He opened his desk drawer and pulled out a nightlight he'd had since he was a child. Its simple, smiling form defined his youth and had always gone everywhere he did. He'd brought it here to college, too, but hadn't used it until now. He wasn't scared of the dark. He just felt like he needed it all the same. He plugged it into the wall, flipped the power on, slipped into bed, and turned on his Game Boy to play Pokémon before getting to sleep. He thought about how he was going to be the very best like no one ever was, and about what he was going to do once he caught them all. As he went boldly where no Pokémon trainer had gone before, he slowly lost consciousness. He turned off his game and rolled over. The blue, glowing canary nightlight in the corner of the room was the last thing he saw every night as a kid before going to sleep, and he wanted tonight to be no different.

"Goodnight, buddy. Today was an awesome adventure, wasn't it? Tomorrow, I think we'll go to the zoo Jordan's been talking about. But for now, it's time to sleep. See you in the morning. Goodnight, Chip," he said as he closed his eyes.

The bird winked, and he was happy.

There are Demons, and then there are Demons

by Candace Turlington

The only light they could see came from a porch 500 yards away. She knew it was bright directly in front of the house, but way over here, there weren't even any shadows to be afraid of, only darkness so black they chose to walk, dragging their feet through the dirt to avoid tripping over anything. She pushed a tiny button on the front of her cell phone, illuminating the screen. Instead of lighting the path ahead of them, it temporarily blinded her and elicited hushed exclamations from her friend. More out of fear than reverence, they kept their conversation to a minimum and whispered when communication was absolutely necessary. Neither of them would admit to the other how scared they really were, but the one with the cell phone couldn't keep her hands from trembling. She knew what lay waiting in the darkness, and as usual it had jump started her "fight-or-flight" response, though she knew if it came to fighting she was done. A rustling closer than she was comfortable with pushed her into her friend's shoulder, causing them both to yelp in surprise. Cell Phone Girl whined to her friend.

"This phone is crap and any second I'm gonna bust my ass on one o'these headstones, and then I'll cry, and then something evil will follow me home, and then shit'll just suck. You shoulda left the car facing this way with the lights on."

"Yeah, but you don't see anything with the lights on. It's gotta be dark."

"Well, I don't see anything, so... can we go now?"

"How's the medium in you feeling about this?"

She tried to shrug off her friend's casual demeanor and the chill tickling her spine. "Bad. Real bad. This... This is bad." Though Cell Phone Girl couldn't see it, she knew her friend was smirking as she continued down the path further into the darkness.

She hadn't really wanted to come here in the first place. She only agreed because of some masochistic need to put herself in harm's way, especially in the gray areas concerning her soul. Even as a small child, she'd continuously sought out spiritually threatening situations. She couldn't remember the number of times her mother had found her locked in the bathroom, candles lit, Ouija board at her feet, attempting with terrifying success to contact the "Other Side" as most call it. She couldn't remember the number of times her mother had called her Wiccan friends over to help cleanse the house. And she had no idea how many times her mother had cried herself to sleep in fear the girl's life and soul. But she knew her friend was aware of this addiction, and Cell Phone Girl couldn't help but feel as though she'd allowed herself to be taken advantage of.

Yet here she was, traipsing through yet another seemingly deserted cemetery with someone who wanted to use her dangerous gift as entertainment, and that this friend refused to take any of this seriously was the most dangerous part of all. Cell Phone Girl had seen what demons do to people who summon them for fun. She tried to push the images from her mind; mauled bodies with broken bones jutting out in all the wrong places, lifeless eyes perpetually frozen in horror, mouths twisted in agony. Faces of people she'd known, people she'd loved, flashed through her mind; her

mother's cold blue eyes piercing through the chaos. "I'm sorry, Mother" she whispered into the crisp air.

"What?" her friend's voice jolted her back into the present. Cell Phone Girl tried to ignore the chill gathering around her arms and the smoke appearing at her feet. She pretended not to notice the shadows looming behind her friend, impossibly darker than the blackness that already surrounded them. She suddenly found herself wishing she hadn't become so attached to this girl.

"I said I'm sorry, Becky." She barely had time to see Becky raise her eyebrows before the tallest of the shadows grabbed her by the neck. Becky floated in front the shadow, the cold fingers crushing her throat, stopping the death rattle from escaping her lips. It couldn't, however, and felt no desire to, stop the blood from flowing between her perfect teeth and down over her chin, eventually falling into the creature's other hand. It raised the bloody hand to the hole in its face, and the bottomless pits Cell Phone Girl always assumed were eyes were somehow deeper than ever. She shielded her ears from the snapping and wet ripping sounds she'd come to expect; even after all these years, hearing flesh and muscle torn from bone still made her stomach uneasy. She tried to block out the crushing and grinding of bones, the hungry sucking as the creature's tongue pulled the marrow from inside them. She collapsed onto the ground and curled her legs in front of her, grabbing her knees and pulling them to her face. Something warm and wet spilled onto her jeans, and Cell Phone Girl realized, with something resembling apathy, that she was crying. She felt disconnected from herself as she thought about how close she'd grown to this girl, Becky, and how much she was going to hate herself for not refusing to come here tonight. She pulled herself to her feet and let her face fall into her palms. The sounds of the feast had subsided, and a heavy hand came to rest on her shoulder. As she turned to look the creature in its nonexistent eyes, a quiet smile crept across her face. The creature nodded in acknowledgement and vanished without uttering a single word. Cell Phone Girl rummaged through what was left of Becky's tattered and bloody clothes to find her keys. She picked them up and walked toward the car, a contented smile dividing her face, jingling the keys like a happy and carefree child.

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Index of Student Contributors

D

David, Elijah 7
 Davis, Stephen J. 9

F

Fockler, Stephanie 4

H

Hodge, Cameron 5

L

Lawrence, Kristle 12

M

Muzio, Cody 13

T

Turlington, Candace 5, 6, 16

W

Westfall, Nathaniel 6

