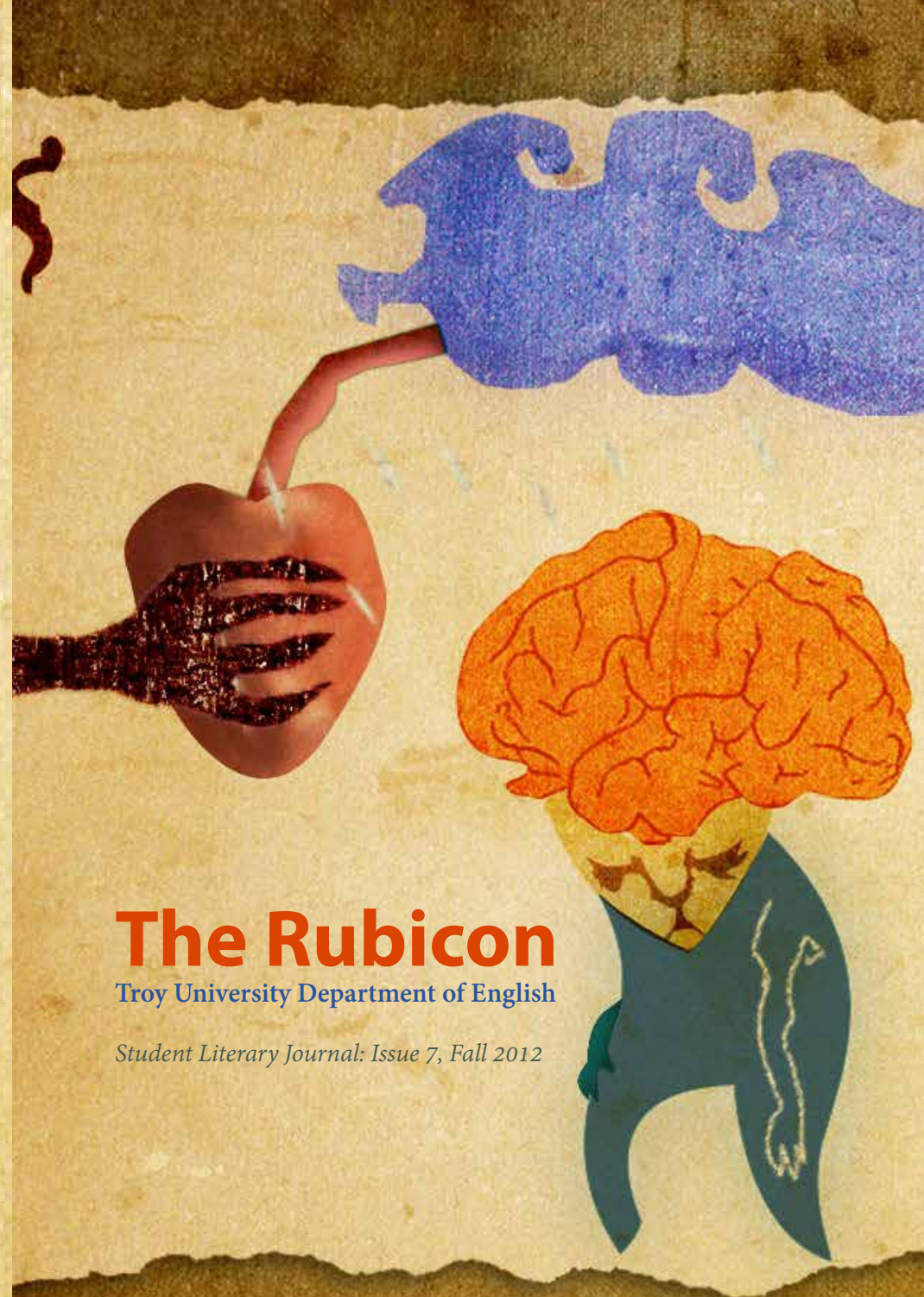




The Rubicon

Troy University Department of English

Student Literary Journal: Issue 7, Fall 2012



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If you have any questions or need any assistance, please contact the editorial staff at litjournal@troy.edu.

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The Rubicon is published twice annually by Troy University. ISSN 2153-6279 (print) / ISSN 2159-1733 (online)

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Fall Prayer

Nikki DeRidder

The winds of fall were upon the world.

The reds, oranges, and yellows lay scattered on the ground.

Some even clung to her hair,

But she didn't care. She never had.

The hazel eyes shifted between the gray and green to match the tumultuous seas.

She looked at them as a sign of beauty on the face of one who was forced to wear a mask to hide the pain.

The gray-blue eyes beheld her weeping as the mask one day slipped.

They saw her for the beauty within, and for the beauty she did not know she had.

His heart was big as was hers.

They both had known the pain that its break could have.

She was ready for fall to usher in the love,

But if he was, he was silent as the grave.

Whispers among the leaves of fall,

She fell in love and would give it all.

His reluctance left her to hold it in;

The three words to never leave those rosy pieces of skin.

Instead she was left to cry,

“Oh Fall, beautiful wonder of the year,

Give me a love that I can hold forever dear.

I fear that if I shall not have it I shall truly die.”

She was left to hide behind her mask.

She was quiet. Her quietness was like the grave.

She never knew how he felt

And it slowly made her begin to mourn the love that had caused her heart to melt.

The fall claimed him and she was left alone.

It had cursed instead of blessed and she felt that beside his grave was her home.

They found her one morning curled on the grave.

She lay there cold. Forever a maid.

They opened his grave and placed her there.

Fall gave her the forever love by using the Earth to bind them.



Poltergeist
Jordan Hammond

Poltergeist
Candace Turlington

I feel akin to ectoplasm
Neither here nor there
No real proof of my existence
Simply lingering in this ethereal nether realm
Longing to be discovered in a chance photograph
Or willing body

Soul

Runas C. Powers, III

The inner flame that burns,
The wheel that turns,

A heart beats pace,
The emotions on our faces,

The feelings that you have,
Things that make you laugh,

Mind body and spirit,
A poet's lyric,

Soul searching for God
Is a quest
At best

Serenity, and peace of mind,
While accepting love is blind,

Soul.

Determination and pride
When we walk, we glide,

Our stride,
Our strength,
And daily length,

Realizing life is a variable
And life is reality,

A dream,
But not a scheme,

Soul.



Soul

Jonathon Guice

Sunlight

Layla Torres

Flying high in the sky
Seeing all the clouds pass by
To and fro, here and there,
I breathe in the delicate air.
I'm soaring fast and my wings are spread.
I'm living life but facing death.
Looking down, I see woods of brown
With plentiful green, and a spark of yellow.
I notice a young lady, with her young fellow.
Slowing down to examine the bliss,
I watch the simplicity of their kiss.
I stop in a tree and sing my favorite song.
This tree shall be my home.



Sunshine
Ciara Driskell

Nothing compares to the beauty

Melissa Morris

Nothing compares to the beauty
Of Mother Nature's wonderful creations.
Flowers, pops of resplendent color,
Burst open like fireworks.
Mother Nature gives them sunlight,
Then pours down rain to quench their thirst.
Boom! Strike!
Lightning strikes a tree
Allowing the little seed
To eventually spurt up, up, up!
Into a strong, healthy tree!



The Beauty
Caitlin Ventiere

The Beauty... I am Blind with Weeping

Kyle A. Stanfield

Why must great beauty
cause the deepest sorrow?
Why must torturous self-immolation
be that which births the phoenix?
Only a world in darkness
can create that painful beauty.

Only sorrow can show such beauty
the way that only night can show the stars.
No song written of another ever compared
to the beauty of one written in memory of.
No song written of another ever compared
to the beauty of one when the other has nothing.

Sorrow... lamentation...
The Beauty... I am blind with weeping.
Blind, I am so blind!
The emotional flood waters
cascade over my eyes,
and I am blind...
with weeping.

A Man Divided

Amy Veneziano

Song of a Brain

Oh! The constant strain when you're a brain
You've got to keep things going!
There are nerves to hear and wastes to fear
You've got to keep on growing!
Not enough tissues for how I could weep
Not enough blood to bleed
Not enough cells for all of this work
Information just keeps flowing!

Yes! The life of a brain is busy at best
Infinite jobs to do
Inside a body there's always a test
And life is forever new!

Song of a Body

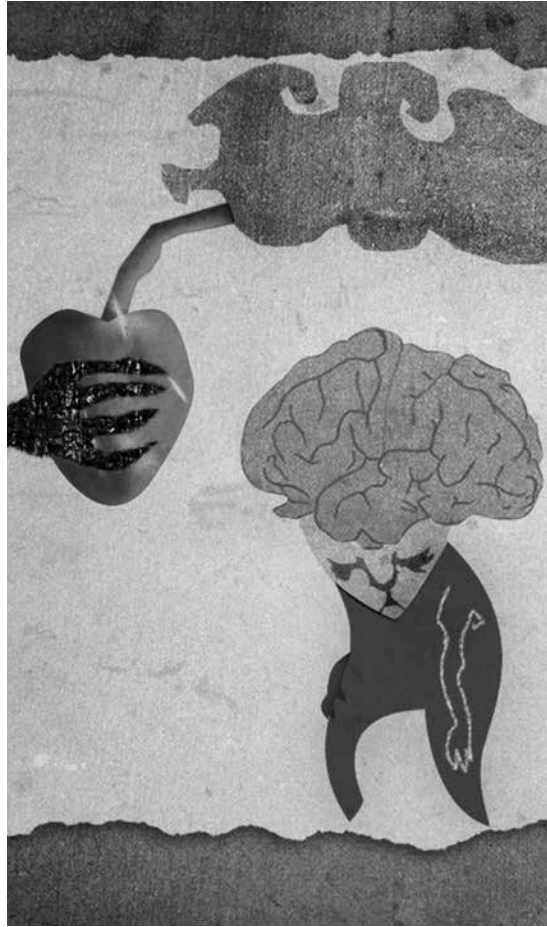
Ah! The sensations of skin, going within
The feel of a cool autumn day
My bones, they can move
And they like to groove!
To words that my mouth gets to say.

No! Don't you speak of a day
Of the world without me
I'd really rather not!
I'd fight to survive
I'd hope to revive
And always choose thrive over rot!

Song of a Heart

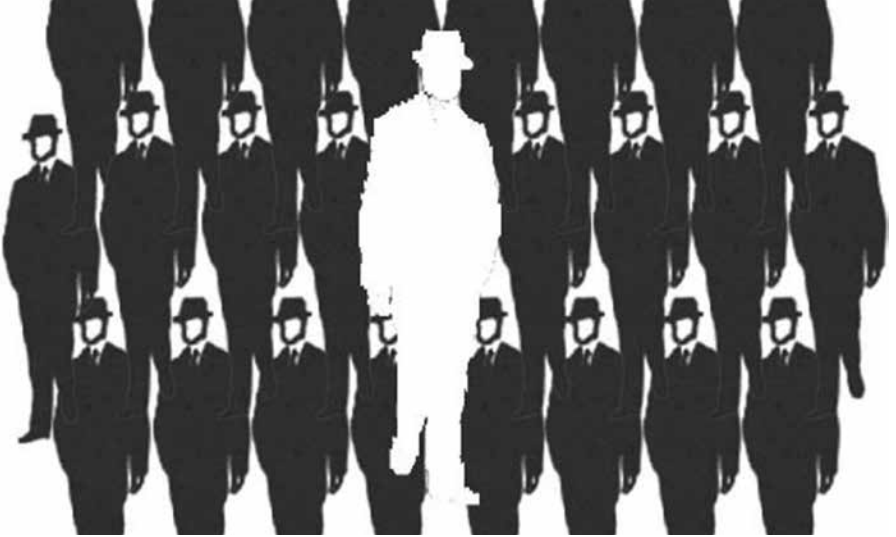
For I keep the pace, as a pump with no face,
But I do feel this way and that
And I'll hold a grudge or be the first judge
But I also love and forgive.

I supply life to this body and brain
And they both think they run the show!
I could give up any time that I please
But I care for them more than they know!



A Man Divided

Vuong Nguyen



Conformity

Elen Shirley

Conformity

Logan Leverett

My grip is weak on the lip of the precipice that overlooks the void.
 I turn back to judge the depth that I must fall to be as one with the rest.
 I see all of the conformists, the ones who control and manipulate every possible variable
 Within their lives, to match those that they seek to appease.
 I stare within, and realize there is no pity left to feel.
 There is no comfort that can console me.
 I don't fit in with these people. I'm me, they're everyone, and everyone is the same.
 Their screams echo far louder than my own, my own resonate,
 But they're never free from the confines of my soul.
 They put up a façade, and what a horrible joke it is.
 They lie to themselves, and to everyone.
 No new knowledge is extracted from their misery.
 My grip continues to fail me, but my victory is at hand.
 I reach up with my other arm and pull with all of my might.
 I climb from the void, the catharsis washing over me.
 I stare down at their smiles, the reassuring niceties that they point to one another.
 They slip further into the void, swiftly descending the depths.
 They continue to smile, but they begin to understand that they're going blind.
 I turn away from them, they can't be helped. Not by me.
 Their fate lies in their hands.

Game of Inches

Kristle Lawrence

They gather together every Sunday. A brotherhood confined within one hundred yards and one garage in the “game of inches.” The Armchair Quarterback who “took the team to state back in ‘72” sits in his place of dominance. His throne is the over-stuffed recliner that squeaks every time he moves. He rules over his peers with beer in hand. His loyal subjects attend to his ranting about “State” and the glory of ’72 from their sunken seats on the time-worn sofa. It had probably been green at one point, but years of winning seasons and losing seasons, 7,635 hot wings from Big Jo’s wing shack, and 450 pizzas’ worth of grease have rendered its once pleasant, pastel tone a more faded and blotchy shade of green. The couch bears its occupants dutifully, like an old dog sleeping at the feet of his master.

Their castle is no work of architectural wonder. It is a garage littered with a few Christmas decorations, some long-neglected power tools, a beat up Husgvarna push mower, and walls covered with the paraphernalia of a devoted fan. The posters, the pennants, the Fatheads, and mementos of games gone by are tacked in places of prominence. The car has long been banished to a portable tent in the yard to make way for the second-hand furniture and all the trappings of a genuine man-cave. The old fridge hums and clanks. Hank threw it out when his wife demanded a new one. He managed to restore it to some of its former usefulness just in time to stock up on Bud for the regular season. The surround sound and plasma screen were an excellent gift the family got to enjoy, but it only took a few months before they disappeared into the dark world of the garage, never to be seen again.

It is in this haphazard world of greasy furniture and Jerry-rigged refrigerators that these men found their paradise.

A couple of washed-up athletes stare at the shrine devoted to all things football. The linebacker turned history teacher/father. Then comes the center turned accountant/husband, and the water boy who never really amounted to much more. The accountant was able to give it “the ol’ college try” for a year or two before drinking himself straight out of academic eligibility. He says he could have been something. The gaudy glittering championship hardware located on the finger next to his wedding band confirms he really could have gone somewhere. “Shit happens,” is all he says these days.

The crowd gathers to observe their Sunday ritual. Their fantasy teams have been drafted and the bets have been laid down. And so the games begin. They banter back and forth. Every dropped pass, every completion, every first down, and every field goal is met with a response. Every mistake is the subject of trash-talk. Every yellow flag has no time to hit the ground before the garage full of experts has handed down the verdict. Every stat is the subject of an argument that always quells just before it comes to blows. The couch-coaches call every play and scream at the T.V. their dissent at the bad play calling. Every time his team fails, he offers an excuse. But how quickly that excuse turns into a reason when the team

Game of Inches

Martin Whaley



makes the play, completes the pass, converts on third down. Amid shouts of anger, pain, joy, and disbelief the game carries on.

A case and four quarters later, the game draws to a close. With ‘bated’ breath, each man clutches his bottle for moral support. Driving to field goal range with less than a minute on the clock, the offense is poised to strike. Each man offers his expert opinion of what to do. Is it too little time or too much time? With ‘bated’ breath, the garage-bound spectators await fate. They check fantasy scores and keep their eyes on their players. “I need just two more points from the kicker,” says the center as he places

his phone on the table. He hopes for a field goal attempt. But, the unit does not take the field. With the clock ticking down, there is no time for debate, and the ball is snapped. The players launch themselves from the line of scrimmage as they meet the defenders. No one is open. The quarterback rolls as the pocket collapses around him. All is lost, think the men. Or is it?

A break. A slip. A split second of indecision. The wide receiver gains an inch of separation. Before protest can escape their lips, the ball flies. In this place, life itself hangs on this moment; the room is silenced. The ball cuts its arching path across the screen and drops...

...into the arms of the wide-receiver, who clutches the ball to his chest and falls to the turf in the left corner of the end zone.

Touchdown.

Two men sigh and take long, gulping sips of their beers. The others slap hands and pat backs while offering snide comments and more trash-talk to the losers.

Armchair Quarterback perks up and searches the faces of his comrades. “So who’s the lucky man today? Who drafted 45?” Each man checks his roster and shakes his head.

“Well honey,” says a feminine, but confident voice from behind the couch. “I drafted number 45, and you just lost the league to the love of your life.” They all turn to see Armchair Quarterback’s wife, her face plastered with a self-satisfied grin. She wipes her hands on a dish towel and walks back inside, leaving the men to their “game of inches.”

The Birthday

Jamie Bennett

The first time I saw them I was on my way home from work. I'd finished early and decided to go home to my wife. Only, she wasn't there. She was with him, eating lunch at a popular diner on Main Street as I drove past. I didn't think anything of it. We were all good friends — she being my wife, and he being our best friend. We all grew up together, so I knew I had nothing to fret about. I waited at home for her, not at all worried.

The next time I saw them, I was picking up coffee for the office. They were coming out of the local liquor store with bottles of champagne and wine. They looked at each other and smiled. She kissed his cheek as he held the car door open for her. I watched them drive away in the direction of his house. When she came home, she kissed me and then went to take a shower, saying that she'd had a long day.

The third time it happened, I was out with my fellow colleagues, and I spotted her across the street. She was with him again. They were entering the fancy hotel across the street from the bistro I was at. The *Amor Absconditus*. They entered the hotel together, in the middle of the day. I stayed at the bistro for another hour, conversing, but watching the hotel. When I left, her car was still in the parking lot. When she came home, she kissed me, and asked me what I wanted for dinner. She smiled and hummed to herself as she made her way to the kitchen.

I asked her how her day went.

"Good," she replied. "I had coffee with Linda, and then we went to a movie and out to lunch."

I paused at that. It wasn't true. I had seen her with him. I couldn't understand why she would lie. Yet, I knew. I knew what they were doing, and I couldn't understand how they could betray me.

The next day was a Saturday. She convinced me that we should go out for lunch. She got dressed-up in a heavy black lace gown I'd gotten her for our four-year anniversary the year before. I wore a blazer and a tie. We went to the fancy restaurant where I proposed to her. *Abditus*. The entire afternoon she smiled and glowed. She brushed her hand against mine, and gave me shy smiles that only served to make me angry. I felt my rage grow as I paid for our meal and drove back home.

She seemed to sense my mood and asked me why I was upset. I didn't answer her; instead, I drove back in silence. I parked the car in the garage behind the house, slamming the door as I exited. She followed me into the backyard, whispering vehemently at me, asking me why I'd ruined the evening. My fury boiled over, and I grabbed her by her shoulders. I asked her how she could dare ask me what was wrong, when she was cheating on me with my best friend. Her eyes widened, and she denied. She said she didn't even know how I could accuse her of such a thing.

I lost all control. I slapped her across the face. I told her that I'd seen them for the

past two weeks, meeting behind my back. I told her she couldn't lie to my face when I'd witnessed her adultery with my own eyes.

"Admit it!" I said, lowly, anger heating my face.

She shook her head at me, holding her bruising cheek, "It's not what you think, let's just go inside and we can talk about this in the morning." She pleaded.

"Admit it!" I demanded again. She denied that there was anything to admit and, again, begged to go inside the house. I snapped. I grabbed her around the neck, squeezing with all my strength. Tears clouded my eyes as I repeated over and over again. "Admit it!"

She fell limp in my grip.

My vision cleared, the rage lifted from my mind. I released my hold on her, and her lifeless body sagged to the snow-covered ground. Realizing what I'd done, I looked at her in her fancy lace dress, which contrasted sharply with the snow. None of this would have happened had she just admitted that she was cheating on me.

Not knowing what to do, I reached into the pockets of my slacks, and searched for my keys. I dragged her body, which was much heavier in death, to the back door. I sat her down in the patio chair, while I went to open the door. Flicking on the kitchen lights, I heard a chorus of people yell, "Surprise!" Confused, I looked around. There he was, holding up a bottle of champagne. Around him was a crowd of people: my co-workers, my family, her family. There were people holding platters of food, their uniforms had the name *Amor Absconditus* stitched into them. Behind everyone was a big banner proclaiming "Happy 30th John!" I looked at them, and then I looked outside at her body propped up in the chair, black lace dress askew, her hair flung wildly about her face. My body went numb, and all I could see was her begging me to just go inside. I was so sure, now I knew I'd been wrong, but it was too late to tell her that. Too late to apologize, she was gone.



Inheritance

Caleb Humphreys

The crowd in the somber room trickles away until only you and she are left. It's fitting that you are the last to say goodbye, but you have no words for what you want to say. Out of habit, you reach for the pocket watch nestled in your vest pocket. Touching the warm, silver cover brings you clarity. Momentarily. It also brings you memories.

As a child, you stare, mesmerized, when your father opens the polished silver cover. The watch is small and out of place in his calloused hands. Once it's opened, your father, too, appears mesmerized. His gaze follows the second hand's circular journey around the numbered face. After he is satisfied, he closes the cover and stores the watch back into his pocket.

You know that the watch is special.

You want to hold the watch. Examine the intricate design, search for an inscription that you are sure has to be there, uncover the mystery that you know it contains. But, no matter how many times you ask, no matter how much you beg, the answer is always the same.

"In time, son. In time." The answer, repeated so often, becomes immortal in your memory. Eventually, you stop asking him because the answer, like the ticking of the watch, never changes.

You wait for the time to come when the pocket watch will be yours. Secretly, you expect that there will be an arcane ceremony where you will be presented with the watch and be initiated, you hope, into some paternal organization.

In a way, there is a ceremony. But it is not for you.

The watch is simply handed to you before your father's funeral.

You are older and less enchanted with the watch and its secrets. Older, but you still have a childlike naiveté, much like the girl in the room with you now.

You notice how small she looks. The casket is much too big for her. Like the hospital bed that she was in the last time you saw her, just a few days ago.

"Let me see it. Please!" she begs you.

You almost answer the same way that you have answered her a hundred times before: the same way your father answered you. But, you stop yourself. Seeing her small, weak body is the only urging that you need.

You see the IV snaked into her wrist when she reaches out to take the watch. You feel an immense fountain of sadness well up inside of you. Overcome, you sit on the side of the bed and wait as she studies your most prized possession. The watch is unnaturally large in her palm. After a few minutes of quiet examination, she looks up. Her pale blue eyes are wide and questioning.

What can you tell her that will bring her peace? Nothing that she hasn't heard before. So, instead of telling her that you never discovered the watch's secret, and that the only



mystery was why you have to watch her die while you live on, you motion for her to lean her head towards the watch. Together, your bare heads almost touching, you listen to the faint ticking: the sound of seconds and minutes passing with incessant regularity.

A tear escapes from the corner of your eye and rolls down your wrinkled cheek. She notices you crying, and her hand finds yours. She squeezes, frail, but strong and reassuring.

You wonder now why all things can't be as consistent as the ticking of the watch. Standing over her casket, you can feel the watch ticking against your chest, creating an odd rhythm with the slow beating of your heart.

You pull out the pocket watch. The once intricate design has worn smooth over time. You open the cover, and look at the second hand as it moves slowly, irrevocably around its well-traveled path.

You close the watch, and place it under your granddaughter's crossed hands.

And then you gently close the polished mahogany lid of the coffin, and wish that it had been you.

Inheritance
Kaitlyn Nordurft



The Gloomies
Stephanie Davenport

The Gloomies

Josh Richards

Adam supposed it made sense seeing the street abandoned because it was Tuesday night. The city stood dreary and depressing, both qualities amplified by the pain in his head.

Sam, his soon-to-be-wife, worked nights at Fuller's Gas Station and pulled biomed-major duties by day. Too much work, Adam thought, but when he had expressed concern (gas stations were icky places) she had shushed him with a finger to the lips.

"Stop being a woman," she said. Then, she kissed him, ending the conversation.

He needed to talk to her now. She would be furious, of course—her seemingly endless patience did have a trip line: worry.

When he flunked college, she hadn't been upset. And when he had told her he wanted to be a writer, she had encouraged it. So why was he now three hundred miles away from her in some dark city? Because, he thought, of my stupid dream.

She would have kicked him had he said that out loud. According to Sam, his dreams were not stupid. They were dreams, as good as any others, and a whole hell of a lot better than the ones other people forgot about. She had a talent for keeping him going.

Adam decided that he would be the cause of worry no longer. He only needed a phone. But from the looks of it, that would not be an easy thing to find. There was no cell phone chatter anywhere and, personally, he didn't own one. If he had, it would have made no difference. The muggers would have taken that, too.

He rubbed his head again and found the pain still there. A payphone was always an option – difficult, but feasible. He only needed, in this plastic-card generation, to flag someone down and beg for quarters. There was also the option of knocking on someone's door, except, there didn't seem to be any doors.

He found a sign reading E CHESTNUT ST and followed the sidewalk, the cold concrete pressing at his heels. Even his shoes, hand-picked by Sam herself, were gone. Adam clinched his fist, and then he relaxed. He had no car keys, but he would have felt safer knowing he'd parked nearby. He remembered the frantic search for parking and finally finding a place half-a-year away from the building. No big deal though. He didn't need the car. He didn't need a parking spot, he didn't need his shoes, wallet, watch, or whatever else they stole. Didn't need his dignity either because he had the good fortune of getting hit over the head and passing out. Just one WHACK and he was gone.

Right now, he only needed a phone. Just to hear Sam's voice.

He continued east, a picture flashing in his mind, a big poster. White letters were plastered on its green background. Most of them were blurred, but he could read a few words. The top said: EAST. Below that, the rightmost half of the second line read: 256 MILES. He decided it was probably the distance back to Sam. Finding his way home was a nice thing to think about. Hearing her voice would be the next best thing.

Then, finally, life appeared. No people, but life just the same. Lights beamed out from

a large display window, casting rays on what looked to be an oak tree standing alone in a courtyard. It was hard to tell through the fog.

On the big window was the word GLOOMIE'S. A peculiar name, and eerie, considering, but it couldn't be too bad. At least the light was on.

He opened the door. A little bell above the door dinged, startling Adam. The place seemed casual, and he felt overdressed in his black business attire. No one was inside, but he sat in one of the booths anyway. A woman, probably in her sixties, came through the double-doors behind the front counter. If this place really was casual, her attire failed to show it. She wore a nice blue dress, coated with flowers, which made her look younger somehow.

"First customer I've had all night." She was making her way between the tables in the center of the room. "If you wanna order, we ain't got anything cooked. So it'll take a bit longer."

"I'm not hungry," Adam said, surprised at the calmness in his voice. He had been half-expecting he would scream. "I just need to use your phone, if that's okay."

"Phone's over on the counter, but it's been on the fritz lately so you might have to work at it." She came to the side of his table, as if she were about to take an order. "By the looks of you, you might need to work a real good bit. You're one of those young kids, don't know how to use phones with cords attached to 'em."

Adam turned his eyes to the counter. Sitting there, on the left side, was a phone. The wire was very much attached. He shuffled his feet impatiently, but he didn't want to push her out of his way. "Cellphones bug me. I'm a landline type of guy."

She nodded and took a seat at one of the tables, resting both of her elbows on it and propping her chin up. She looked like she was lost in some faraway place. He couldn't blame her a bit for that. The phone was cold. He pressed it to his ear, expecting to find no dial tone, but finding one instead— a loud one.

First, he tried her cell phone. It wasn't likely, but maybe she had it in her pocket. There was no answer. No voicemail, either.

He summoned up the home phone number from muscle memory and tried it next. It rang three times. The line clicked, and there was muffled voice. "Hello?"

Sam sounded like she had been sleeping.

"I'm okay. Stuck up here, trying to find my way around. I – um – there's a lot to say and I'm not sure where to start, but I promise I'm okay and I didn't mean to worry you and I just want you to know that –" He paused briefly. "I want you to know I love you." He felt the tears swelling up again and imagined being without her. Then, he put it out of his mind.

There was a sigh on the line, stuck somewhere between a yawn and annoyance. She didn't sound too worried.

"Hello?" Her voice had the low rumble exclusive to tired people.

"I said I've got a lot to say. I'm not making excuses for anything. I was mugged –"

"Hello?" Another click – the call had been cut short. He sat down on one of the stools,

feeling suddenly weak.

No problem, just call again.

The phone returned no dial tone.

“Didn’t hear you, huh?” Her voice had a raspy pleasantness. She hadn’t gone crazy on the cigarette-train, but she had definitely taken it. “Happened to me earlier, been trying it ever since. I’m surprised you got a tone. Haven’t gotten that thing for the last four hours or so.”

“I heard her,” he said. “But she couldn’t hear me. Now I’ll never be able to tell her.”

“It’s a terrible feeling, that’s for sure. I tried to call Henry earlier – my stubborn husband – and the same thing happened. It was like -” She paused, thinking, “like I was miles away and trying to yell at him across some river.” Adam had to chuckle because she couldn’t have been more right. Miles away...

“You said you were mugged?” She was facing toward him now, legs crossed.

“Yeah, in a dark alley, just like in the movies.”

She grinned and picked at her dress. “At least you’ve still got your humor. Got your life too. Better than some people.”

I know, Adam thought. Sam would have said that too. He drummed his fingers on the counter. “I’ve gotta find a phone or she’ll be worried sick” His mouth was dry. “Is there a payphone on the street somewhere?”

“On the corner - not too far from here. Just head east.” She made her way behind the counter, popped open the cash register, and brought out a few quarters. “I imagine you’ll be needin’ a few of these.”

“You’re a mind-reader.”

“Nope, just a woman.” She grinned. “Listen, you seem like a nice enough kid, so if you need some place to stay, just say so. We’ve got a few air mattresses in the back.”

He nodded, took the quarters, and said thank you. He was at the front door when she spoke again.

“I’m Milda, by the way.”

Adam turned and smiled at her. “It suits you.” He threw up his hand in a half-salute, and she returned the gesture. “I’m Adam.” Then, he left the light of Gloomie’s behind. It had gotten darker outside – foggier, too. Frightening, but he pressed on.

A silly phrase came to mind, one that Sam had picked up from her mother. It was ironic: A butterfly a day keeps the gloomies away. Sam’s mom had told her they were protection from bad things – from gloomies.

The only thing Sam loved more than looking at butterflies was drawing them. She was at her happiest when she drew. He pictured her now, sitting in that lawn chair, the breeze tossing her hair left and right, and the cutest look of concentration on her face. It had been easy to fall in love with her.

Repeating the phrase over and over in his head was comforting. Soon, he arrived on the corner.

Standing by the sign that indicated East Chestnut Street ran into North Lake, he looked across the street. It seemed there should've been a building on the other side, maybe a coffee shop or a little ice cream place. Instead, there were train tracks. Past the tracks were a few billboards. Beyond those...was nothing – desert. There might have been an oasis out there but, unless it was a payphone, he had no use for it.

He scanned and scanned. His eyes fell upon a sign posted on one of the billboards - the big poster, and this time no blur. EAST, it said. PARADISE. 256 MILES. Below that: GLOOMIES, ALL YOU CAN EAT – WE GOT STEAK TOO.

His memory – the real memory – came back

There hadn't been a mugging at all, but there had been a big WHACK.

He went to a lone bench by the train tracks and sat, preparing himself. He leaned his head on the back rail, still clutching the quarters in his hand – the ones he would use to call home.



He tries to stare down at his feet. It is difficult, though, because his neck won't move.

There are scissors now. The man holding them leans over the foot of the table. Actually, it's a stretcher. And this guy is a paramedic.

Not the shoes. They were expensive, Adam thinks. Sam bought me those. She wanted me to follow my stupid dreams.

Too late for the shoes though. They're already gone, banished by giant, shiny scissors. He tries to move his legs, but nothing happens. They seem to be...obliterated...like someone screwed them on wrong. A horrifying sight, but he is more horrified by his lack of screaming.

The voices above him – all around him - are muffled. They come in pieces. Someone mumbles something, and it gets dark.

Seconds later, the light is back. Someone is thumbing through his wallet. He has the absurd feeling to tell this guy that if he wants the wallet, he can just take the damned thing—there's nothing in it, and it might be worth two cents on a good day.

Everything tastes like blood, and there are no smells, like being stuck in an unimaginable place. He supposes that he is.

Now the blood is in his lungs. As he starts to choke he hears another voice. It may have said "he's crashing," but Adam is not sure.

Where is Sam? He searches his memory. Trying to park the car. Trying to get to this stupid conference. Trying to follow those same stupid dreams.

And the accident...the accident.

He opens his mouth to ask if he is dying, already knowing the answer. Nothing comes out. He tries again, this time to ask if someone has called Sam. He wants her there. He wants to tell her he loves her, to tell her that it is okay not to miss him. He wants to tell her

she doesn't have to worry.

The haze comes even stronger. There she is, in the lawn chair, drawing – that smile on her face. He smiles himself. His lips do not move.

He thinks, one last time: I have to tell her that I love her. I have to tell her not to worry.

And then, another thought passes, so faint it barely registers: a butterfly a day keeps the gloomies away.

Then...nothing.



He raised his head and looked out to the desert. There was no need to wipe the tears from his face. He gripped the quarters so tightly that they cut into his palm.

A hand touched him on the shoulder. It didn't startle him. He expected and looked forward to it. It was Milda, and he already knew what she was going to say. But he let it happen anyway, because hearing a voice other than his own was comforting.

"You remember too, huh?" She sat down beside him. Several moments passed before she spoke again. "I already know what you're going to say, and you already know what I'm going to say, so I'll try something different. The answer to your questions: I don't know; sometimes we can't know... and sometimes it's best not to know."

He nodded. It was very dark now, as if there had never been a sun. He understood exactly what she meant. A long silence passed between them before Adam broke it. "They'll be here soon."

She smiled and her eyes followed suit. She said nothing, but put a reassuring hand on his right knee and looked out across the tracks. The fog was everywhere.

"You're still gonna stay, right?" Milda said.

"I'd never leave her." He looked at her and she looked at him, a look as if they'd been lifelong best-friends. He supposed, in a way, they had.

"It's still running, I guess, but Henry always said I was a stubborn old cow." There was a pause here - another blank look like the one she had in the restaurant. "I ain't taking it, that's for sure."

A train's sound broke through the stillness. It screeched to a halt in front of them and opened its doors, the light warm and inviting. Neither of them flinched.

"Not today," Milda said. Then to Adam: "I wonder if Henry's still running the restaurant. Probably right straight into the ground, I'd bet money on it. He's an idiot...but I miss him like crazy."

"He'll be there."

The train's doors clicked closed, and then opened again - a last invitation to wherever it was planning to go.

"Not today," they said together. There was a loud whistle, and the train departed. A few seconds passed, and the noise was gone.

Adam was giddy with excitement, even if he was crying. He would get to see her. He hoped she would be drawing.

In a perfectly-outlined, gold-tinted radiance, she appeared on the other side of the train tracks. She wore only her sweats, but still she looked beautiful. She was singing a little tune. He wanted to tell her he loved her and not to worry, but she didn't look worried. She looked happy, and that made him happy. There she was, being typical Sam. Drawing, as she loved to do.

Then she was gone, but he was reminded once again of what it was he waited for. Milda was crying too. She looked at him and said: "Happy?"

He nodded. "Happy."

"Then we'll do this again tomorrow."

"Yeah, I look forward to it." He recalled Sam saying hello on the phone. She had said it three times. He tossed his quarters across the train tracks and wished on each. He had three coins: hello...hello...hello.

"What'd you wish for this time?"

"Can't tell you, you know that. If I tell you –"

"It won't come true, I know. You say that every time."

The darkness came down now with the fog, grabbing at the bench, like a vise. Adam squeezed Milda's hand; just enough to let her know she had no reason to be afraid – her best friend was with her.

Then it was there, choking them. Adam stared out at nothing in particular, staring into his own memories – Milda's trick. He thought of something and, strangely, it made him chuckle.