The Scarab

Oklahoma City University’s
Annual Anthology of Prose, Poetry, and Artwork

30th Edition

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*The Scarab* is not responsible for returning submitted work. All submissions are subject to editing.
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**Expectant Mary**  
*By Glenda Skinner-Noble*

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My Muse
Kallen Pitts

She is like A Storm. Thunder so loud that you become intimidated by her voice. A flash of lighting as though you have been blinded by the short lived impact of her silhouette. Her crash fills the sky, and you feel as though you have succumbed to fear, joyful with every word she utters.

She is like the wind. Slow or fast, she picks you up, and for a moment you share an elegant waltz, hoping it will never end. You feel as though it has been so long, yet just like that she’s done with you. She is the tempest and you are thrown back out to sea.

She is like the ocean. You never know when you’re going to be swept away by her innocent tide. Her tide of love that sweeps you under, and you drown in ecstasy. After the convolution of her typhoon she is calm, calm enough to carry you to shore.

She is like sand. Her actions which are so fine, yet there are so many, when you look at her as a whole you are breathless from the vastness of her beauty. Though she may be under an immense encumbrance, through the pressure, heat and strain you see her arise the most beautiful glass representation of triumphant love. So delicate, so beautiful, wanting to embrace her, knowing that if you do, you could shatter her and be left with nothing but broken shards of glass and deep lacerations that you believe only she could heal. So you learn that with such beauty comes pain and you will get hurt. All you are left with is to stay away and admire her beauty from afar, hoping that the sea does not carry her away.

She is like the forest. As you stay away, run and hide, you are entwined by her nature. You are infatuated by her sweet petrichor and how in the midst of all her tall dreams you are comforted because you were so close to the roots of them all. Unfortunately, the ivy and thorned branches of her past, present and future can entangle you, yet you are at some ease knowing you are still in her presence and embrace.

She is my muse. A day hasn’t gone by that I don’t wish her the best. Like a young boy who loved a woman, I am left with a question of what happened and what could have been. I’ve never been able to tell you how I felt towards you, yet you told me before I ever figured it out. Still affected by the aftershock, I find stability, knowing you are happier now than you ever were with me. Never knowing what once was could ever be again. I’m so glad we found us that way and that you did bring out a part of me I thought I had lost, and though it was your decision to go, this is my decision, to stay. No matter where your feet take you, there is a place in my heart you can always promenade back to.
Untitled by Marina Kravtsova
Beautiful Warrior

Bryne Harris

dedicated to my mother and her mother

Mother knows how to fight
and she needs no arms
save for the ones to save you
from the badness she's seen
from the bad man's truths
from the bad woman's lies

Mother is best friends with ghosts
that dance around for salvation and survival
they extend their hand, she takes it and bows
they move away, then move in and are one
because we are always like this with history

Mother knows how to use words like arrows
sometimes she's wild and accidental
sometimes she's learnt and better aimed

Never say no to Mother
because she has spent her life saying yes
begrudgingly, reluctantly, without meaning

Never fight your Mother
because she is spending her life fighting for you
working for you, trying for you,
living for you, dying for you

Never say no to Mother
because she said yes to your life
and she held you and if she hadn’t
then you may not be here to read these words

Mother taught you life
and you learned between her words
that there was death and that there was pain
there was goodness, and there was rain
and that not all rain was bad,
she let you be happy, she let you choose to be sad
Mother is scary some days
because you can't see Mother in her anymore
because she's not what you remember her as the night before
because you forget that Mother has a life too, one that goes unnoticed
because you don't understand Mother gets hurt and wounded
by something you said, by something others said, she was just like you
and it is
Mother's lack of tears that scares you, Mother's indifference that kills you
Mother's confusion that impairs you, Mother's smile that fulfills you
but the day she returns stronger and repaired
you see her eyes shine and her laugh is normal
how beautiful—the laugh of Mothers

Mother is a beautiful warrior
because she didn't give up when
America says change or die
and she says be yourself, don't hide, don't lie
but why, but why

Mother fights for beauty
but she doesn't wear make-up for war paint,
her face is bare and unhiding, you don't scare her
but what is beauty without building it; without making it?
Mother knows beauty; it's in her blood
she says we have beautiful blood
that must have been why they wanted to see it

because there is nothing more beautiful
than the fact we are here, that we are trying,
beauty in that struggle, she knows, she lu-lus until
the nights are bare and dead except for her, because
those ghosts need a song to dance to,
and they never taught her to stop
At the Zoo
Neilee Wood

“What’s that it’s got?” my father asks.
“It’s a mouse.”
And the other people realize it too,
That the condor’s got a limp
Sticky ball of fur hanging from its beak;
You can see the tiny paws, the tail;
A matted spot of red elasticity where
the condor has broken through.
The mothers and aunts and my father
move away, crinkling up their faces,
But the children stay and watch
this most ancient form of recycling,
And the condor has no idea that these lanky creatures
consider his ritual disgusting.

Green
Lauren Shaffer

When the eye of the storm glares into the face of unsuspecting blue,
A slow burn through the atmosphere that even daylight cannot compare.
When the sun is pushed aside by figureless shapes of white and grey,
Green are my thoughts, as green as the sky is now.
I let them float among the reflection of a blank canvas that was once touched by serenity.
Variations of the familiar pigment dance and intertwine before my very eyes and I am lost in the intimacy and intensity of what it truly means to be a woman.
It is an impeccable affair.
On birthdays, my uncle always bought me a balloon, and after presents and bows, we went out onto the sidewalk, out into the cold, embraced by the blue house, and released the balloon into the air.

It rose up and up, a blue dandelion seedling, windswept and buffeted until it vanished into the night sky with the stars scattered like sprinkles, and it was like some strange message in a bottle, cast out into the waters of the wind for someone to find.

And now, here I come again, out onto the sidewalk of the campus, out into the cold, my ears freezing, embraced on all sides by these smiling girls who have written down their fears and prayers and tied them to the strings of colored balloons. We release them now, a flock of dandelion seedlings, spiraling off into the night sky and the sprinkle stars, out over the roofs of the houses to the south of campus, and I stand and watch as they grow smaller, buffeted on the wind, and I close my eyes, listen to the laughter around me, and imagine that I am flying.
McFarlin UMC by Marnie Hall
Autumn in August
Neilee Wood

If you were to look at the trees, you would say it was autumn. The spindly branches are crowned with leaves like monarch butterfly wings.

But the calendar reads August, and the trees are gasping silently, blighted under the tyrannical heat of the Oklahoma sun.

They are drained husks now, their roots reaching deep down, clutching after something that is no longer there.

And if you were to look at us, you would say we were doing well, considering, but we feel our skin drying out, feel ourselves becoming scratchy and gnarled as we reach out, our roots only clutching dust, and we find we are as delicate as butterfly wings.

And because we don’t know what to do, we stand still and dumb in the sun, and like the trees, we burn.
QUILT

Tanner Strunk

Pink-skin flowers made to look like butterflies

Spring-green leaves with pointy hues of life

Earthy undulations slide & roll
  Between the docile petals & fluttering
   signs of rejuvenation
Floating on a sea of white

Passing over the shoreline
Our butterflies iterate the famed metamorphosis

Now seamed with leafy brethren
Blossoming anew on the black-sand beach

Unity

A Girl who was a Tree

Anna Bauman

“Nothing into something,
Something into nothing.”

Body is bound,
sealed in layers of bark.
Dusk brings
dawn, and I
am writhing. Rooted

in weary waters

That flow full
bound towards falls.
I dare
destroy the ties
feverishly fastened to my

feet. Rooted in dying earth,
I writhe. Reaching
for my bound feet.

Troubled Waters  by Tommy Bond
DREAM Act Song
Judith Huerta

This is a poem about a future tale
Sit down and listen, don’t utter a wail
Once it happens we will all prevail
The event will rank high on the Richter scale

There are qualifications you have to exceed
One is good character, so no smoking weed
Graduated from high school and received a diploma
Maybe a GED, mine came from Oklahoma
Should have entered the States before the age of 15
And made a 2 year degree your daily routine
Second option armed forces, possibly a Marine
And with the police you must remain unseen

You may ask what I speak of
It’s the DREAM Act you see
Now go out yonder, go out and vote sí

What will happen once you vote yes?
Stay relaxed I’ll tell you, you don’t have to guess
With this possession we will progress
We can drive and work without having to stress
If we get pulled over, we won’t get deported
We can get off with a ticket, I only hope we can afford it
A fake I.D. will no longer be required
We can pay taxes, although it’s not desired

LPR – Lawful Permanent Resident
It takes 6 years you can ask the president
After that citizenship is what comes next
It’s not that complicated, don’t look so perplexed

We will contribute to the U.S. of A.
More smart intellectuals we will display

Who do I speak of, to whom is this dance?
Undocumented immigrants who came for a second chance
They came to advance.

Undocumented and Unafraid  by Judith Huerta
THE SUN NAMED MOON
Davis Good

I
Your name is divinity—eternal graven image
Of some dark god forgotten by man,
Forsaking any question why your journey began
You spin on the invisible rim of gravity, a presage
Of the oblivion that will return to swallow intention.

II
Your name is serenity—chasing the invisible tail
Of your own silent footsteps going before
And following behind; mountains of ocean gore
Spill on earth’s shore, staining the invisible trail
Of destruction left in your fearful rejection of stillness.

III
Your name is clarity—ever-shifting face
Of light tempered with darkness, an old broken
Mirror ever half-seen, half-unseen; the lesser token
Casts abroad its borrowed glow in place
Of greater light to strive against the stars

IV
Your name is purity—clothed in the snowy white
Of sinews, scars, and skin already bled
By stony missiles thrust into your cratered bed,
Who naked every night is led in the sight
Of the great horned owl and the laughing jackal.

V
Your name is eternity—the orb orbits the orb
Orbits the Orb in praise of infinite space
And sings with wild impunity while dancing in place,
“Never dream of the arc that will absorb
Your own, no matter how red its fires shine.”
VI
Your name is fertility—a cold, colorless waste
Of marble dust and the namesake of monthly blood
Dried and pounded into chalk, filth, and black mud;
Womb of graven goddesses without a taste
Of air or the gentle touch of seeds in spring.

VII
Your name is mystery—slender and coquettish darling
Of earth, whose flesh too fond of fondling eyes
Remains too cheap to sell without disguise,
That dwindling shade you clutch about the scarring
Of your frame betrays your bones to the sun’s flame.

VIII
Your name is lunacy—the pale fleshy flavor
Of your lidless eyes is slave to hollow tongues
And thankless lips; pouring into withered lungs
Your purest white kisses, you waste the favor
Of each lunar dawn that weeps over your horizon

IX
Your name is humanity—celestial oneness born
Of shattered terra, mangled and misshapen world
Perfect in form and symmetry: an infant curled
In the womb of space descends into the coming morn.
Of light and in light she sings and dreams that her name is—
Momma Says

Danielle Kilhoffer

Momma says strong will won’t get no husband
Follow the rules, do as you’re told
Wayward girls always get their come-up-ins
Never the boss, no matter how old

My blue eyes, always the culprit
Your brown-eyed gaze was never so bold
Crossed the line, now won’t get no lovin’
Don’t speak up now, do as you’re told

Cold, cold
Do as you’re told
Cold, cold
Do as you’re told

Light to Heavy Showers  by Joshua P. Cassella
Sometimes

Danielle Kilhoffer

Sometimes an invisible light
Bestows on me strength
And I draw up from within myself comfort
That I am, in this moment,
Half of you
Living, breathing
In a world where you are no more

Your great soul I carry with me
A mighty star beaming forth,
Radiance of my own hopeful spirit
Obliterating shadows, creating new worlds
Glimmering, brilliant, undimming, bursting!
And contained in, of all things, me
This is What My Truth Looks Like

Tara Brenner

My feet not rooted, but feather quick
My toes, slender inchworms climbing mountaintops
My legs, stone column strong
Carved from a blueprint of ancient woman
Banded iron kneecaps to hit the ground running
Or praying
There’s silver in my thighs
It is worth the scaffolding you will build to mine it.
It is a valuable thing.
My belly, an Eskimo in winter
I am a fire in an igloo
A hearth in your home.
My breasts, ribcage armor
Soft as sheep’s down
Inviting like leaf piles
Jump in.
My arms, wire mothers
They will hold you against my cloth heart
My heartbeat hard knock
A door bell
I want to come into you.
My neck, rhino tough to keep thick skin
Long like an ostrich or a giraffe,
Short like mine.
My nose, my father’s
My eyes, my mothers
Azure storm clouds on red deserts
I have windy tears for you.
My smile,
Your favorite lighthouse
It’s yours for keeping.
The search of a prison cell is done in careful angles.
Left, right, up, across
Use mirrors
There could always be a sharp object where you can’t see your hands
And inmates never care when a staff member gets cut with needles
Or razor blades

Follow your gut
Where you would hide an object,
A convict has already thought of it and more
There’s pornography in between Christmas cards
Tattoo motors in bars of soap
Drug balloons in bottles of shampoo

The entire endeavor is a twisted scavenger hunt
Of curling around metal bed frames
And digging through property boxes
In an attempt to find the big three:
tattoos
drugs
and shanks.

The first time I ever saw a shank
Was against a coworker’s neck.

A plastic hanger through a pencil sharpener or a carved down toothbrush
Is the knife’s more terrifying sibling.

When the inmate in cell 204 got angry over a confiscated art book
I stepped in front of the trainee
as quickly as instinct
bore my teeth and snarled back.

I won these demon eyes
from territory fights in iron bars.
Keep your gaze against the gladiator ring,
and watch yourself kid.

This place will make wolves out of lion tamers.
Cougar Shoes by Marnie Hall
Hope by Tommy Bond
“Salliemaejones!! I love ya child, but ya don’t have the brains God gave a screwdriver.”

Mama was right. I didn’t think before I did a lotta things, so she said that a mazillion times when I was growing up. Mama always saw everything in life as black and white – right up until the day she died. You did things either the right way or the wrong way, according to Mama’s view. There were never any gray areas for Mama.

She was a beautiful woman. Not vain – she never wore make-up or went to the beauty parlor. She had a natural beauty. Piercing blue eyes that could see everything you did – sometimes even before you did them. Black hair and pale skin. She was what was called “Black Irish.” Her ancestors came from Ireland, but Mama didn’t believe in fairies or leprechauns. She stood close to six feet without her shoes. Daddy always called her his Celtic queen.

When I was little, and someone asked my name, I always told them, “Salliemaejones.”

I didn’t realize I had three separate names. Sallie – Mae – Jones, until I started school, ‘cause Mama always used all three when she spoke to me. And usually it was ‘cause I did something really dumb, in her estimation. Seems like every time I did something Mama thought was dumb, she caught me right in the middle of doing it.

I was a tomboy and wouldn’t wear shoes unless I was forced to. “Salliemaejones, I love ya child, but ya don’t have the brains God gave a screwdriver. You’re gonna have feet like shoe leather if ya keep going barefoot.”

Worked for me. I could walk on rocks, climb trees and do almost anything without hurting my feet. My older brother, Curtis, couldn’t go barefoot one minute without something bad happening. I can count on one hand the times he went barefoot and what happened. He stepped on a bee and got stung. He stubbed his toe and almost tore his toenail off. Wore a bandage and walked with a limp for three weeks, till his toenail fell
off. He stepped on a piece of glass and cut his foot. He caught a splinter that took Mama three tries to get out. Curtis could have owned part of the Mercurochrome Company for all Mama used on him.

But for me, going barefoot was heaven. One time it snowed a good six or seven inches, and I was enthralled by the fat flakes gently floating down.

“Salliemaejones!! I love ya child, but ya don’t have the brains God gave a screwdriver. What in Sam hill are ya doin’ outside, barefoot in the snow?”

Once, Mama took me to the dry goods store to buy material. There was this bolt of black material that was so soft. Mama lightly smacked the back of my hand. “Salliemaejones, that’s velvet. Stop feeling it ‘cause you’re gonna crush it.”

To me that’s exactly how that snow felt when I stepped on it. Like velvet. And I guess I crushed it ‘cause I left eight or nine footprints in it ‘fore Mama dragged me up on the porch and back into the house, scolding me all the while.

“Salliemaejones, I love ya child, but ya don’t have the brains God gave a screwdriver. Ya could’ve caught your death out there.”

I sat beside the fire with my feet in cold water to make sure I didn’t have frostbite and my toes didn’t turn black and fall off. I slept with a Vick’s salve and horse liniment poultice on my chest covered with a big piece of Daddy’s old wool sweater the moths had got to. I didn’t catch my death, and my toes didn’t fall off.

In the summer months Curtis and I played in the hayloft. It stood about eight feet off the ground. Underneath were the stalls Mama and Daddy used to milk the cows. In front was the cow lot where Daddy would pin up the cows. To get up to the loft you had to climb a ladder nailed straight up the back wall. A two-foot-square hole at the top of the ladder opened into the loft. The front of the loft was open so Daddy and his helpers could put the hay in the loft from the back of a pickup truck. Somebody would lift up a bale from the truck bed, and the person in the loft would use a hay hook to catch it and slide it across the floor. The bales were stacked four high in the loft.
Curtis and I had a lot of fun playing in that hayloft. The bales of hay were hills to hide behind playing cowboy and Indians or ships when we played pirates. One day a couple of Curtis’s friends and I were playing hide and seek. I had wiggled myself in a little pocket between two bales of hay with another one on top. I was hid good, and I knew they wouldn’t find me. Straining to hear them coming, I realized it was real quiet in the hayloft. I heard laughing and knew the boys had left me, and were off to play without me. I wiggled out from my hiding spot. I knew by the time I climbed down the ladder they would be long gone. Doing what any smart-thinking kid would do, I ran and jumped out the front of the loft.

Mama musta seen me come sailing out of the hayloft. “Salliemaejones!!!” she screamed. She was out the door and into the cow lot by the time I hit the ground.

“Salliemaejones, I love ya child, but ya don’t have the brains God gave a screwdriver. What on earth made ya jump out of the hayloft?”

“Curtis and the others ran off and left me. That was the fastest way down to catch them.” That’s when the pain hit my left foot. I started to cry.

“What is it? Did ya break a leg?” She began to check me over for broken bones.

“Mama, what happened? Is Sis okay?” My brother and his friends ran up. They must have heard Mama’s scream and come running to see what had happened. As soon as I heard Curtis’s voice, the tears stopped. No boy was going to see me cry.

“I think she’s just sprained her ankle. Thank the good Lord the ground was soft. Otherwise, she’d a broke her leg. Let’s see if ya can stand.”

I stood, and with Mama’s help, limped to the house. Mama soaked my ankle in vinegar and wrapped it in brown paper. Then she pulled some strips of cloth out of the drawer that had her old sheets in it and wrapped my ankle tightly. I limped around for a couple of weeks. I, too, thanked the good Lord.

One of the best things about summer was when Aunt Myrtle, Uncle Ned and our two cousins, Little Myrtle and Dubby, came to visit us from the big city of Wewoka. Aunt Myrtle and Uncle Ned owned the one-
and-only general store in Wewoka. They lived in a big, beautiful house right on Main Street. Little Myrtle and Dubby didn’t know a thing ‘bout living on a farm. What they learned each time they came to visit, they forgot by the next time they came.

Mama asked me and Little Myrtle to gather the eggs. Dubby wanted to go with us. He liked to feed the chickens. He always held the cracked corn in his hand and let the chickens peck it out. Then he always cried ‘cause the chickens pecked him. Mama took a basket she always used to gather the eggs and handed it to Dubby. The basket was almost as big as he was.

“Dubby, you’re gonna have to carry those eggs real easy now. I don’t want ya breaking any of them on your way back to the house.”

“Okay, Auntie, I be careful.” He proudly carried the basket to the hen house.

With the hen house being a little past the cow lot, we ducked through the barbed wire rather than go through the gate.

Dubby was too short to reach into the dozen or so nests, so Little Myrtle and I got the eggs. A settin’ hen was on a nest, so I reached under her to get the eggs. She was settin’ ‘cause Mama was trying to hatch some chicks. The hatchin’ eggs were marked with penciled circles so you could tell them from the fresh eggs. Hens on the nest meant you were gonna get pecked and pecked hard. She got me on the arm ever time I reached under her, but I got three fresh eggs. Little Myrtle and I gave our eggs one by one to Dubby. He carefully placed them in the basket. We gathered a dozen.

“Dubby, you want me to carry the basket back?” Little Myrtle was concerned he couldn’t carry it back without dropping it.

“No, I do it.” He very carefully carried the basket back to the fence, stopping every few minutes to check the eggs. Little Myrtle and I helped each other through the wire. We held the wire for Dubby and the basket to come through. The basket was a little too big for both him and it to come through, so without thinking, Dubby pitched the basket through the wire.
I gasped, and Little Myrtle cried, “Dubby, no!” just as the basket hit the ground.

Dubby’s eyes got big as saucers. Little Myrtle and I looked at each other and then at the basket. In among the brown and white eggs were puddles of yellow yolk. I started to laugh. So did Little Myrtle. Dubby’s chin began to quiver, and he started to cry. I hurriedly hugged him. “Never mind, Dubby. It was an accident. We’ll clean the eggs before we take them in to Mama. I don’t think all of them broke.”

I carefully pulled the unbroken ones out and washed them off at the faucet. Little Myrtle washed the basket out, and we put the five unbroken eggs back in the basket. Dubby carefully carried the basket to Mama. “Here, Auntie.” Mama looked at the wet basket with only five eggs, then at us. She wanted to ask why the basket was wet, but just about the time she started to ask, she figured it out ‘cause her lips twitched.

“Thank you, Dubby. I’m gonna use these eggs to make you a chocolate cake for supper.” Dubby grinned big at that and ran off to play.

Later I told Mama and Daddy what had happened. Daddy had a good laugh, but Mama wasn’t too crazy about losing seven good eggs.

Right before they were to leave, Little Myrtle left the gate to the cow lot open, and the milk cow got out. Since it was my job to go get her, Little Myrtle and I headed out.

Daddy hadn’t hayed the pasture yet, so the grass was up to our waists. I was chasing the cow, and Little Myrtle was trying to stay out of the way, when all of a sudden the cow flushed a jackrabbit. It was a huge one, and it jumped clear over the top of the grass.

Little Myrtle screamed, “My God, Sallie, there goes a wool-uff.”

She took off running for the house, red hair flying and long legs clearing the grass. I watched her with my mouth hanging open. She thought the jackrabbit was a wolf. The milk cow forgotten, I collapsed on the ground, laughing until my sides hurt. I finally got the laughter under control, and said, without thinking, “Myrtlejeanjones, I love you child, but you don’t have the brains God gave a screwdriver.”
The milk cow was on her way back to the house. Heading out after her, it hit me. I was being Mama. That stopped me. What I said was automatic to something I thought was silly. Little Myrtle didn’t think what happened when it happened to be silly, but I did. Maybe. Just maybe, Mama had a point. Would this change me being me? I didn’t think so. And I was right.
In the silence of the room, the safe door opening sounded like a tiny bomb had gone off. No matter how many times she had done this, Andy’s heart always missed a beat. After looking around the room to make sure it was still empty, Andy pulled the door open the rest of the way. A slight smile came to Andy as she loaded the cash into her bag. The grandfather clock struck midnight as she closed and locked up the safe. It would be weeks before the owners of the cash realized it had been stolen, and by then Andy and her crew would be long gone.

“Better get out of there, Blondie. Gil spotted the owners. They’re down the street,” Brad said through the blue tooth. Andy only got one warning; she only ever got one warning. Leaving the room without making a sound, she quickly ran to the back door.

“You fix the alarm yet?” she asked Kevin as he replaced the burglar alarm’s cover. Kevin always cut the alarms after Andy picked the lock. Because Kevin literally cut a wire in the alarm, it meant that he had to patch the wire while Andy cracked the safe.

“Done. You were fast,” Kevin said, seemingly unnerved by her ghostly approach. Andy knew he had gotten used to her coming up behind him from nowhere a long time ago, or at least he pretended like he did.

“Yeah. They used their area code for the combination. Big mistake. Now let’s go, Gil gave the warning.”

Andy locked the back door just as she heard the front door opening.

* * *

“We got a gig,” Brad said to the crew as he walked into the room.

It had been six months since their last gig. The thieves on the crew weren’t like normal thieves; they
were thieves for hire. They never kept what they stole, but instead were paid big bucks to steal it. It was Brad’s crew; he decided what they did and didn’t do. Because the members of the crew were all already on Interpol’s wanted list before they joined together, they had to be careful that the job wouldn’t put them at risk of being found out. This meant they mostly did house robberies.

“Which poor rich sucker is going to get robbed today? Please tell me we are going somewhere south? I’m sick of this cold climate,” Gil said as he turned off the Knicks vs. Pistons game they had been watching.

“Sorry, Gil. The job’s here in NYC. We’re to go in and steal the contents of a safe owned by the CEO of the Excalibur Hotel in Las Vegas.”

Deciding to join the conversation, Andy said, “So we’re talking an apartment.”


“Great! Climbing a hundred floors up an elevator shaft. Who doesn’t love a bit of exercise before breaking into an apartment and cracking a safe?” Andy said sarcastically. Truth was, she loved her job. The adrenaline of not knowing whether you would get caught or not was addicting. She loved her job even more back when the work she did was legal, but she tried not to dwell on that.

“Hundredth floor. I guess that means I’m on diversion work. Does stopped elevators, lights out, and fire alarms going off sound good?” Kevin said.

“Sounds great as long as you can do that and stop the apartment alarm.” Brad said.

“Yeah,” Kevin said. “The nice thing about an apartment is that I don’t have to be in the room to turn off the alarm. In fact, I can turn the alarm off before Andy even gets to the apartment. Only thing is I’m going to need to be inside the electrical room.”

“Gil and I will get you in,” Brad said. “Gil will then take a lookout position on the street, while I take one in the lobby.

“Man, I always get outside,” Gil said.
“And it’s starting to snow too,” Brad said with a mischievous smile.

“So any chances of you switching with me are out of the question,” Gil said.

“One of the perks to being team leader is I don’t have to wait outside,” Brad said.

“So when is this gig taking place?” Kevin asked. “Do I have any time to update my gear?”

“Afraid not. We are doing the job tonight. The owner is due back from Las Vegas in the morning.”

“Our client didn’t give us much time,” Andy remarked. That was unusual. Usually their clients wanted to give them plenty of time to make sure that the job was done right.

“The client said it took a while to find a good team to do the job,” Brad said. “Now we’ve got 2 hours to come up with a plan, rest, and pack. We are moving in the morning.” They never stuck around after a job was done.

Andy looked at Kevin and whispered to him, “This whole thing seems a bit odd to me. With so little time, it’s like the Client wants us to mess up.”

“I don’t know about that, but there is definitely something rotten here. But you know, Brad, once he’s decided on a gig, there’s no convincing him not to do it,” Kevin whispered back.

“Will you two love birds stop whispering to each other and pay attention,” Brad said, irritated at them.

Andy rolled her eyes and smiled at her husband before she focused her attention on the blueprints and figuring out the best course of action.

* * *

At eleven o’clock sharp Andy entered the elevator. She was wearing a coat over a very skimpy dress and a black wig. She had embarrassingly explained to the doorman that Mr. Lee had asked for her for the night, but was unable to meet her. Lee was a common last name, and it would have been unusual for there not to be a Mr. Lee in a building this size. With the doorman not expecting her back till morning, and with quite a bit of money, Andy was set.
“I’m in,” she told Kevin through the blue tooth.

“I’ll take you to the fortieth floor where a Mr. Lee lives, but from there you better climb,” came Kevin’s voice. “The camera feed’s cut, you can change now.”

Andy took off the wig, coat, and dress. From within her purse she pulled out her climbing outfit, harness and safety hook, mini battery operated drill – just in case, one never knew when it would come in handy – and money sack. She was glad big purses were in, but she wished they were just a little bit bigger in order to hold a rope. She hated free climbing, even with the harness and safety hook.

Forty floors up Andy jumped up and pushed open the emergency exit on the top of the elevator. Once out, she hooked herself onto the very thick and sturdy elevator rope. Slowly Andy began climbing using only her hands and feet. There was a maintenance ladder on the wall inside the chute, but Andy didn’t want to use it in case it had an alarm. When she was half way up, she heard the fire alarm going off. The manager would spend the next hour trying to figure out what was going on and making sure the tenants were happy. This would buy Andy some more time and make sure there was no one around to see her break into the apartment.

An hour after she left the elevator, Andy was at the hundredth floor. “I’m here,” she told Kevin.

“Okay, opening the chute doors.”

“Thanks Kev.”

“And Andy, please hurry.”

“Is everything alright?” she said.

“I don’t know. Brad hasn’t been responding to any of the check-ins. I can’t get a hold of Gil either.”

“Should we abort?” This mission seemed less like a good idea by the moment.

“No. It’s probably just a problem with the bluetooth. I’ll check them out when we get to the new house.”

“I don’t like it…but fine…I’ll let you know when I’m in,” Andy said. As much as she didn’t like it, if
they ditched now when there was nothing wrong, Brad would withhold their part of the money. Since this was the only way Andy and Kevin could get money, they had to go through with it.

Unhooking herself from the rope, Andy held on with only her hands. Kicking her legs out she swung around the rope a few time to build up momentum. Finally she let go of the rope, flipped through the air and the now open doors, hit the ground and rolled to a standstill on the floor. It was a good thing she had taken all those years of gymnastics as a child, or she would never have pulled that off.

The fire alarm on the floor had stopped, but the red light was still flashing as Andy made her way to the apartment. It was eerie, but nothing out of the norm for a job like this. Quickly as she could, Andy picked the lock.

“I’m in the apartment,” she told Kevin through the bluetooth. “You should see this place. It’s huge!”

The apartment was filled with antiques from all over the world. There was a vase from India, a nineteenth century tea set from England, even hieroglyphics from Ancient Egypt.

“Business must have been good this year,” she told Kevin, but there was no answer.

Finding the safe where she found most safes, the office, Andy was surprised to see that it didn’t have a combination lock, but a keypad. Grabbing the drill from her belt, Andy began to take out the screws. Once the keypad was off, she opened the safe and pulled out the money. There was little in there compared to the antiques in the house, but that wasn’t her call. Screwing the keypad back, Andy headed for the entrance hall.

“Heading out,” she told Kevin, but still no reply.

As Andy entered the hallway the door opened.

“Police. Drop the money and put your hands up,” said the detective as he entered the apartment.

Throwing down the moneybag, Andy stared straight ahead. There was no point in trying to escape. The building would be surrounded. And as good as Andy was, she wasn’t that good. The others must have been caught. That’s why they hadn’t responded. In less than twenty-four hours Andy knew they would be in Interpol’s hands. She and Kevin would be lucky if the CIA didn’t ask for their heads after the treason they had
committed. As and for Brad and Gil, well they were walking dead men since before Andy knew them.

Sighing, Andy let rookie detective gloat while the police cuffed her. The future would be a grim one for her and Kevin, but not a surprise. After all, it had only been a matter of time. It was always just a matter of time before they got caught.

Allie by Marina Kravtsova
American Dreams

Jason Herrera

The sun is honey on my skin, the breeze silk through my hair. As the warm scent of my neighbor’s honeysuckle temporarily clears my mind, I sit. Everything goes so quickly, but on this porch, time becomes thick and runs slowly. The trees are on fire with autumn’s touch. The faint tinkling of my wife’s wind chimes act as the street’s soundtrack. The lazy, rhythmic sound drifts down the lane and I’m sure people are charmed by it. I stare at the Cadillac in my driveway. Reflected in it is a distorted view of this placid perfection.

***

Sometime later as I sat on my porch, I realized, I made it. I’m living the American dream. It was beautiful in its false simplicity. My kids, wife and I were happy and we had everything. So much of everything. Nothing in life was hard for me. I rarely had problems that lasted for more than a week, and even those that did were unremarkable and forgotten. Thinking slowly like that was amazing. I could enjoy the breeze in the minutes that become hours.

On that lazy Sunday morning where I realized my utopian state, my wife Elizabeth got a call from her mother. Her father was in the hospital. He had had a heart attack. Betty cried. I held her tight and told her to drive to her parents’ farm in the eastern part of the state.

“Bets, take the kids. I’ll have to finish some work tomorrow, but after then, I’ll be there,” I said as reassuringly as possible.

“It’s a four-hour drive, Carl. I don’t want to do that alone — not now. I just want to punch something!”

“The kids will be with you and it’ll be over before you know it. Besides, you always say long drives clear your mind. And don’t punch things.”

I don’t know why I was pushing her to go. I didn’t want to go and I sure as hell didn’t want her and the kids to leave. I felt that it needed to be done. Gotten out of the way, I guess.

“Take the Cadillac. Remember how the kids love the trip?” With this, she smiled a bit.

They left that afternoon.
The phone rang twice.

“Hello, is this Mr. Carlton Francis?” His voice was clear and authoritative.

“Yes,” I said breathlessly.

“I’m afraid there’s been an accident.” With those words, everything became muffled. I could see everything in painful clarity, but hear very little.

I had a crazy thought: leave, disappear, hide. I’d take my car and drive as far as it would take me. I’d go west. I was still young enough. I could start anew. I’d take nothing but the clothes carefully selected this morning from my Foley’s wardrobe. It all made sense. I would never know what happened to them.

“Mr. Francis?”

His voice seemed to command me to the hospital. He would know if I fled. I mostly dismissed this crazy thought.

I rushed to Brookhaven Hospital. It’s an hour drive from my house. I took my wife’s Ford. As I drove, I felt a multitude of emotions. Sadness, anger, guilt. They became an amalgamation of all-around bad feeling. Understanding my feelings didn’t make me feel any better. I wanted to punch something. I slipped deeper in guilt. I was heading east but I wanted to turn around. Go west.

They had me wait while my family was in the E.R. I didn’t know what to do. I could have used a drink, but I needed to keep the painful clarity intact. I looked around the waiting room and saw suffering worthy of TV. The only person who didn’t look wrought with something or other was an elderly man. He didn’t look like I must have on the porch, but he was rather calm. I sat beside him, hoping some of his calm would rub off.

“Hello,” I said.

“Hi.”

“Would it be too much of me to ask why you’re here?”

“It wouldn’t be,” he said, “but I don’t think it would be too much of me not answer.”
Ever since I was able to talk, I spoke a lot. Talking is a way I calm myself down, so although I knew the man didn’t want to talk, I did. In that state, I’d be damned to not talk. I’d go insane. I devised a semi-witty retort.

“Okay, would this be idle chatter? I’m really worried for my family. If they died, I’d be an orphan.”

“You’re selfish,” he said.

“At least I can admit it.”

He sighed. “Listen kid, my wife is back there with her third heart attack. We’ve been married fifty years. If she dies, I’ll be alone. We had no kids or grandkids to hold. And until last year, we lived in an apartment. I can’t do this alone. I never was good alone. But admitting this selfishness is easy. Do something about it. If your family is fine, then there. You have a chance to increase your selflessness.

I started to weep. That painful clarity was gone. If my family is fine. Why the hell would he say that? I don’t understand the elderly. Then he spoke again.

“I didn’t mean to make you upset. I hate giving advice because I always give it wrong and I give it too often. But this helps me when Rita’s back there. Just concentrate on something. Look at something ugly in this room. Like that pot.” He pointed at a fake plant and its pot. It was hideous and ornate. “It makes the time go by faster. I promise”

“And if that doesn’t help, just breathe in and out. It’s relaxing.”

With those bits of advice, I relaxed. I drifted into the twilight between awake and asleep. Hours, minutes and seconds passed by quickly and at the same rate. I felt drugged yet aware and in control of my thoughts. Whatever happens, life will go on; it will have to. These were the only thoughts I was thinking. Thoughts of my totaled Cadillac, insurance deductibles and my family were hidden. After sometime, I heard my name.

“Mr. Francis? I’m Dr. Locke. I have some news for you.”

Somewhere, I could hear the faint tinkling of my wife’s wind chimes.
GO! The game begins. I dash into the darkness of the woods, jumping over rocks and stumps, darting around mossy trees that try to stand in my way. I throw myself under a low branch and almost lost balance. Within seconds I regain control and pick up more speed. I can feel the thudding in my chest but resist the temptation to turn around, because no matter what is behind me, I have to keep going. I spot a tiny house high in the trees, realizing that I am in a familiar territory. Unfortunately, I also know this is a well-known area by many, and is usually the most expected place to hide. Unaware of where I will land, I sprint off of the path into the wild. There is no turning back or stopping, because I am being hunted.

Finally, I come to a halt at a rock with sharp, unwelcoming edges. My heart will not stop drumming in my chest, causing more paranoia to take over my body, fearing that someone might hear it. I slump down to the ground, avoiding a jagged spike shooting out from one side of the rock. I can’t help but think how this magnificent rock could be so rough and hard when it is surrounded by such beautiful nature.

As I continue to stare at the naked rock, I start to feel the hair slowly rise on the back of my neck. I completely forgot why I was hiding. Forgetting why I started running in the first place, I begin to panic. Afraid that someone may be close, I wrap my arms around my shins, making myself as tight as possible, pushing against the crooked rock, taking the pain from its roughness, knowing that it is extremely important to stay alive. I tuck my head down into my knees and begin to wish that I could just be invisible. Haven’t you ever just wished that for one moment you could be invisible and feel a little relief that absolutely no one can see you? Well, at this moment, I wish I could use an invisible coat or something, but unfortunately, I’m not that magical.

After what felt like hours, I hesitantly unwrap the extreme tightness of my arms and legs, feeling the sudden lightness as I relax for just a few seconds. I peer around the edge not sure what I may find, but stare in every direction to make sure no one is out there. All of my senses are alert, triggered by the slightest rustle of
branches or faintest sparkle of a raindrop. I can feel the heat as I step out from the shade that protected me, reminding me that I am no longer hidden. There is no time to enjoy the sun, for I must keep moving to stay alive.

After darting and dodging and dashing, my sweat becomes heavier and my eyes can’t stop squinting, realizing that the shady trees are becoming fewer. Once I reach the edge of the wild, I look out and see perfectly little quaint houses, brightly colored with contrasting shutters. I can hear the wind whispering to the houses, too soft for my own ears to understand. I have never witnessed such a still scene, catching the grass dance or a dead leaf brush along the pavement. There is no one, and yet I do not feel alone.

I know what I have to do, but I am terrified. I only feel safe within the wild. All of it- the wild’s protections- from the tightness of branches, to the camouflaging darkness, to the giving trees that allow me to hide in its pockets, to the leaves that cover my tracks, to the wind that shields my loud breaths. The intelligent nature understands me, and I understand it. How could I throw myself out into the open? How could I be that vulnerable?

I can feel the heaviness in my feet, weighing them down to the ground, not wanting to move, pressing them deeper and deeper into the earth’s soil. All I am thinking is that with one tiny, light step I could be vulnerable. Nothing out there is sheltering me, helping me. I have nothing out there. I know I can’t turn back, that I have to keep going, but this one decision could end everything, and I don’t know if I am ready to make this decision

But I step out anyways.

The wind stops whispering, the grass stops dancing, and the leaf falls into a sewer drain. There is nothing. Then I am spotted.

He shoots towards me, grinning through his teeth knowing he found his victim. I take off to the right, thinking just leap one foot after the other- right, left, right, left. I breathe in through my nose and out through my mouth, focusing on not letting my asthma flair up. I can feel the muscles deep in my calves tighten, slowly knotting, causing a great amount of pain shooting up my leg. I can hear his footsteps get louder and louder,
signaling that he is getting closer and closer. I turn the corner onto the main street and dart forward.

The angry wind pushes against my face, slapping me as I shove back. The trees stare at me as I run by, disappointed that I didn’t just stay in their protection. My feet are still striving forward- right, left, right, left. Unexpectedly, my body goes numb from the cold, only feeling the painful heat in my throat as I try to grasp on air. My chest rises and falls quickly, almost like I am forgetting how breathe. I know my asthma is taking over, but I can’t let it. I try to convince myself that I will be ok.

“He is not going to get me. I can outrun him.”

Suddenly, I spot it, what I have been looking for this whole time, the one thing that can keep me safe and will allow me to win the game. I get closer and closer but feel him right behind me. I can hear his heavy breathing, shouting at me that he is going to get me. If only I could reach a little farther, just one touch and I would be safe…

And then the game was over, and I returned to my normal fifth grade reality.
Statue by Alexandra Roy
Non-Fiction
The Almond Cart
Danielle Kutner

The blunt sound of a taxicab’s horn barreled into my ears as the car’s tires screeched to a halt, the bumper a few inches from my shins. I jerked my eyes from my lofty tourist’s map of Manhattan long enough to give the huffing cab driver an apologetic wave before taking refuge on the nearest sidewalk. I’d spent around an hour walking through New York’s muggy summer heat on the hunt for St. Mark’s Place, a neighborhood my travel guide referred to as “the time capsule of the bohemian East Village of the 1960s.” It was a yellow sliver on the map, nestled between the white washed walls of the East Village’s administrative buildings and the stacked brownstone apartments along 8th Street. Managing to slip away from the pack of native New Yorkers that I usually explored the city with, I decided I’d visit St. Mark’s to experience whatever it was about the neighborhood that had inspired countless artists and do a little souvenir shopping along the way. I couldn’t leave New York without picking up some vintage David Bowie or Talking Heads memorabilia from the neighborhood that gave rise to their music.

Pushing past the swarms of pigeons through the divide of 8th Street and leaving the pale Greek steeple of St. Mark’s Church behind, I found myself bombarded by the scent of cinnamon and wasabi. Reluctantly, I trudged forth and managed to spot the faded gunmetal sign that read “St. Mark’s Place,” with a line of blue spray paint obscuring the last few letters. Unlike the renovated East Village I’d come to know, St. Mark’s Place appeared to have evaded any city-ordered demolition. Thick layers of authorless graffiti, posters, and signs were unceremoniously strewn up the sides of the brownstone buildings in a city-block long mural that followed me as I searched for a place to sit and refuel.

St. Mark’s was nearly empty, aside from a long line for patrons spilling into the street in front of a refurbished Japanese restaurant called Kenka. Kenka’s wasabi-grilled beef tongue and fried oysters were the culprits behind the sour scent that assaulted me before I crossed into St. Mark’s. My stomach lurching at the very idea of a beef-tongue kabob, I approach a modest wheel cart parked a few inches from the curb in front of the restaurant advertising “Bag of Roasted Almonds Two Dollars” in crudely painted letters on the front.
“Can I get a bag of almonds?” I asked the mustached man in his late forties casually leaning against the cart.

“What kind can I get? I do cinnamon, vanilla, and ginger,” he replied in a thick, baritone accent, brushing a fine layer of cinnamon powder off of his red apron.

“Just cinnamon, please,” I answered, handing him two thoroughly crinkled dollar bills out of my pocket. He nodded, and dumped a bag of almonds into the mixing contraption attached to the top of the cart. When the mechanical hum of the mixing machine ceased, he bagged up the almonds and handed them over. After exchanging our respective “thank yous,” I sat on the stairs of the empty stoop behind the cart and began speculating about which of tiny windows above me had once belonged to Andy Warhol or Bob Dylan. Nearly half a century separated the street that lay before me from the St. Mark’s Place I’d read about. For all I knew, Andy Warhol could have found his inspiration in the room that now served as Kenka’s storage freezer.

As I tossed one of the still-warm cinnamon almonds into my mouth, the man behind the cart turned to face me. “You like ‘em? I make the best of them in the East Side, you know,” he asked, wiping his forehead and tossing his red apron to the side.

“They’re good,” I replied, deciding that I’d have to make it a habit to try more of New York’s street cuisine.

“You live in the city?”

“No, I’m visiting. I’m not staying too far from here.” I answered, bluntly. I hadn’t expected to be interviewed over lunch.

“Oh! Then you’re a visitor to St. Mark’s. I’ve lived here my entire life, you know. You like music, right? That’s why everyone comes here. I don’t like punk music very much, but I did see that Joey Ramone guy toss his Fender out of that window after they played CBGB’s,” he said flatly, gesturing to the brownstone to our left, “and that was pretty exciting.” I jumped at the mention of familiar names and nodded. After confirming that his story had gotten my attention, he continued.
“I was fourteen and working at one of these sunglass stands. Some wild looking guy was yelling at a crowd of leather clad women below the building, and the next thing you know,” he paused, tossing his hands up in the air, “a nice looking Fender guitar was taking an impressive swan dive out of his window.”

Mike, sparing no details, began retelling outrageous stories about the week the residents of his building cleared out in order for Led Zeppelin to take pictures of a rather untouched brownstone across from us. He fondly described singing along with the enormous crowd of his neighbors as the band practiced in their hotel room on the 18th floor. As he was explaining how his hair used to be as long as Robert Plant’s, an electronic squeal resounded from above our heads.

“Then there’s Stephen,” he said, gesturing to an elderly man in a dutchboy cap sitting on the fire escape above us, “and he’s been here longer than I have. Bob Dylan opened for him a few times before he got himself a record deal.” On the fire escapes above us, St. Mark’s was far from empty. While Stephen played, a woman several floors above us hung several feet of dyed canvas over the cast iron fencing. Near the 60th floor, the faint sound of brass instruments drifted down to us. Several residents simply lounged on the platforms across the street, sipping coffee and eyeing the traffic below. It seemed awfully busy for a time capsule.

Mike spent the afternoon as my impromptu tour guide, explaining how every inch of St. Mark’s had been the setting for some monumental event in music history. From his cart, he began to pry back decades that separated his neighborhood’s golden era from its modern face. He exposed the long-time residents’ fight to preserve St. Mark’s as a starving artist’s paradise where residents can continue to fill in the history where the books and exhibits fall short. Though not everyone looks fondly upon the crumbling foundations and cheap rent, the bohemian dream of St. Mark’s was alive and well in floors above the street murals, new restaurants, and gift shops.

As Stephen crooned out the last of Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone” above us, I figured I’d better avoid gathering moss myself and thanked Mike for the almonds. Strolling toward the museum shop, I found that it had closed for the day.

“You were going to the shop? They sell these posters of Dylan for something like twenty bucks. I bet if
you took a few minutes prying up some of these advertisements, you could find anything they’ve got in there,” he said abruptly, before waving me off. Suppressing the urge to start digging under the layers of advertisements for that long lost Dylan poster, I left St. Mark’s as it began to fill with evening commuters. As I turned the corner onto 2nd Avenue, I began to wonder what sort of history lie concealed by the freshly renovated East Side and how many roasted almond carts I’d have to visit in order to find it.
The Woman I Never Knew
Abigail Vestal

I knew Shawn Hutchings, one of the kindest women my family had met in the small town of Broken Bow, wouldn’t survive the cancer that had slowly been killing her for almost a year. Everyone knew it, but no one liked to talk about it. I just didn’t know that I would be there at the hospital the day she would leave us. My mother had pulled me out of my sophomore English class, told me that she was called by Shawn’s husband, Mike, and that Shawn didn’t have much time left. Mom, our Methodist pastor, the Reverend Margo Vestal, needed someone to go with her to Tulsa, to give Shawn a final prayer, and I, her youngest child, was the only candidate available.

Five hours later, I hated myself as I sat there in the family waiting room with Shawn’s children, Hunter and Hailey, and all of her relatives. I didn’t deserve to be in there; I was Shawn’s friend, not her family, yet there I was beginning to cry as they came in and told us Shawn had passed, my face beginning to grow hot and red. It broke my heart all the same, like a grenade going off in my chest, and I couldn’t stop the damn tears that kept flowing. I quietly excused myself, slipping through the sobbing family, and ran into the hall. I found a chair and sat to myself, a black-eyeliner stained tissue crushed in my fist. An older woman approached me, her face streaked with recent trails of tears, and began to talk with me. She was one of Shawn’s aunts, I suppose.

“You know,” she began, “your mother is an amazing woman for coming out on short notice. She must do this a lot, doesn’t she?”

I nodded. This wasn’t the first time my mother had been called to a hospital. “Yes,” I managed, my voice croaking. “She is amazing. I just…” A realization hit me, and hot tears welled back up in my eyes again. “I honestly…don’t know how she does it.”

It was right after that that my mom came out of a room across the hall, Shawn’s room, with Mike trailing after her, his face a somber red and eyes bloodshot. My mother’s face was only a bit flushed, but her emerald eyes didn’t show any signs of tears or grief. After speaking a few words to Mike, she immediately
came over to where I sat. I reached my arms up to her, like I did when I was a small child, and she hugged and held me tightly. She didn’t let go for the longest time, and I had never been so grateful.

Until that day, until I found myself crying and fighting with myself to stop, my body shaking, I had no idea that this is what my mother went through for a living. Of course she did weddings and baptisms too; all of these were equal portions of her job. She had just given a final prayer for a gentle woman, telling her it was okay to let go, and stood with Mike as his wife expelled her last breath. Yet, she wasn’t crying at all. My mom didn’t shed one tear, at least none that I would ever see.

Even on the car ride home, both of us were stoic and I was afraid to break the fragile silence that grew stronger as we drove, like a barrier. All I knew was that I had seen more than my maturity could handle, but I still couldn’t grasp the distance between me and the woman behind the steering wheel who still had her composure. I could only tell her one thing that I had been dwelling on: “Mom? Death sucks.” It made me feel small relief to hear her laugh.

I had been stronger at the funeral. I figured my mom maybe separated herself from the situation so as not to cry, so I did the same. I only let one tear escape my eye, though when it was over I still was thankful when my mom hugged me outside the church doors. Again, she amazed me; she had done the whole funeral without being flustered, yet I was still fighting my best not to cry again.

Death, at that time, was hell for us living, but my mother had experienced more than just that. She had visited more than one hospital, nursing home, or a sickly elder in their own household. She had lost both parents at different times, a brother-in-law she had attended college with, and several people she had known in her hometown. But death wasn’t the only thing she experienced; my mother has raised three children, faced judgment and ridicule, and dealt with a Dutchman named Rick DeBrujin. She has gone through it all, but she still stands strong. I had never known my mom had been the definition of the word ‘strong,’ and sometimes it feels like I had never known this woman at all.

She had always been from the pulpit of a church, of styling salons and face powder, and it used to be that I had just wanted to be like her physically; she had grown up tall and skinny whereas I grew to be short
and stumpy. Her hair had always been a brighter scarlet, while mine had been dimmed with a mousy brown. Instead, today I want to be like her person: not afraid, tough as hell, and bold.

My mom raised all three of us along with her husband, Ron Vestal, not one getting more attention from the other. She was always a mama grizzly if anyone harmed her little cubs, even still today when we aren’t cubs anymore. Despite her love and care, we became spoiled in our own ways; we complain about things we have no right to complain about, have our hateful moments, and rebel in meaningless ways. Although we have upset her, she never showed it to our faces, proving that a mother can be patient and calm in her children’s worst moments.

Being a female pastor is not for the weak. You will find those who don’t believe women should speak in church, nonetheless preach. They won’t only target the pastor herself, but even their children can be affected, and we were not an exception to this. For the last five years, my brother and I have not had one eye appointment. There had only been two eye doctors in Broken Bow (and its neighboring town of Idabel); one was arrested for possession and the other found my mother being a pastor distasteful. She had met her share of smiling-faced liars who, when they didn’t get their way, would go behind her back, using gossip and hatefulness like a wicked knife to get back at her. Luckily, though she could have, my mother didn’t stand alone; her husband and youngest daughter were always standing beside her. She took all of this in stride, hate and enemies, but she did it with outstanding grace.

Her eldest daughter, my older sister, had met a Dutchman named Rick DeBrujin in Hollywood over Labor Day weekend. He swept her off her feet and the rest of us on a stressing ride we will never forget. After marrying, Rick showed a different side to my sister after she had moved to Holland with him. They fought worse than they ever had, and Rick took it upon himself to speak to my sister with cursing and demeaning words. My mother, the never-weakened grizzly, returned the favor over the phone. Despite what my sister had ever said to get Rick stirred up, my mother would protect her firstborn. In the end, our mother had won, her eldest cub was back in America, and Rick went on to live his own life, never to speak with us again.
I had watched my mother all of my life, and now I replay everything again and again, knowing that I could learn to be stronger, though I have had my share of failed attempts. The truth is I will never know the secret to my mother’s unyielding strength; it is my Pandora’s Box with a padlock, and nothing I do can pick it open. I tell myself not to be a Delilah and badger her for her secret, but the temptation grows over time. For now, though, I just live my life and always wonder and learn from the woman I never knew.
How Big are Your Muscles?

Lauren Snyder

Every person knows a certain individual who has made an immense impact on him or her, and this particular individual usually leaves a lasting impression to help guide the lives of his or her loved ones. For me, that certain individual would be my aunt. On a sunny March evening in the year of 2010, my beloved Aunt Shaun quietly passed away after battling leukemia for three and a half years. Like anyone else would do in her shoes, my aunt hoped to slay the infectious beast viciously clawing within her fragile body. She fought the disease long and hard, and she fought to live; she fought for what was right. With this being said, my Aunt Shaun left me with the impression to fight for what is right in life. Most people can define his or her own belief on what he or she perceives as “right.” Fighting for what is right can come in any form, from holding the door open for someone, or picking a June bug up off of its back on the ground, or flipping a penny over heads-up for someone to have luck for the day – these are all instances in which one chooses to “do the right thing.” Doing what is right doesn’t always have to involve the literal usage of “fighting.” For me, however, I believe that fighting for what is right means to courageously act with unselfishness and modesty in order to pack a true and genuinely good punch in life.

First, where does the courage to “fight” tie in with these “doing what’s right” situations? Let’s go back to my aunt’s case. Due to the cancer, Aunt Shaun was not physically strong – in fact, she was so weak that she resembled a withered leaf. But in terms of inner courage, inner strength and inner passion, my aunt had the largest muscles in the world. She fought to live, she fought to breathe, and she fought to lift her moaning body out of bed every morning to take care of her three young children (my cousins Hutton, Carrington and Anniston) and to spend time with her husband (my Uncle Chuck). For this reason, my aunt taught me the true meaning of courage. What Aunt Shaun was able to accomplish while her disease clung to her like heavily dried cement deeply influences me, and I hold a profound amount of admiration for her. I sometimes sit down and think that my life is difficult if something doesn’t go according to plan, and I sometimes whine and sulk if my life isn’t turning out perfect. But nothing that I have ever experienced can compare to what Aunt Shaun
had to endure. How could I have the audacity to sit and complain and feel sorry for myself when, in consideration, I am lucky to be alive? Throughout her entire ordeal of fighting cancer, Aunt Shaun was able to put on a smile and live with happiness, optimism, hope and, above all, courage. I have learned that true courage and strong-will arises straight from the heart, and I understand that to put up a fight, I need to believe in my own confidence, bravery and valor. By learning from my aunt’s courageous tenacity, I now know how to truly “fight” for what I believe in and how to fight for what is right.

Consequently, to be able to fight against hardship with courage, I believe that the essence of unselfishness is vital for fighting for what is right. In my life, I have been challenged with my own obstacles. When I was a junior in high school, I suffered from an internal organ injury while playing in a soccer game. I spent five days in the hospital with a tube stuck down my nose and throat, a tube stuck in my side, an IV that infiltrated in my right arm and two IVs stuck in both hands. Needless to say, I felt that I was in the worst predicament that could ever fall upon anyone. At such an unexpectedly momentous occasion in my life, it was impossible not to question: why me? Why did a terrible accident have to happen to me? Why did I have to be the one to go down? In other words, I was feeling selfish. But I also think that anyone who is thrust into a life-changing incident becomes wrapped up in himself or herself for his or her own sake, safety and well-being. With my dilemma, however, I learned to acknowledge the importance of being unselfish. I was selfish to believe that my suffering was worse than what any other person had to endure before, and I was naive enough to wallow for a long time in my own self-pity. Did Aunt Shaun ever feel sorry for herself? I’m sure she did - but she never let her predicament get the better of her. She never let her disease get in the way of her ability to show kindness and compassion to other people. Aunt Shaun actually came to deliver me a bright blue (and quite warm) snuggie in my hospital room because she wanted to see me and make sure that I was doing okay; even with her own pain and distress underway, she put her matters aside and chose to nurture me instead of herself. My aunt was quick to be considerate of other people’s problems, and she taught me to fight to make other people’s dilemmas right before my own. If my aunt was able to fight for what was right in this way, then so could I. I fight every day to remember that there is, unfortunately, always going to be someone in a worse predicament than myself. From here-on and so-forth, I cherish selflessness, generosity and, above
all, unselfishness as faithful principles to help remind me that I am not the only person in this world with problems.

Subsequently, if I am going to be unselfish in my life, as well as courageous, then I also believe that a certain amount of modesty is necessary in order to properly fight for what is right. For instance, vanity, boastfulness, big-headedness, arrogance and egotism are all examples of how not to make a difference in somebody’s life. Deliberate self-absorption is not fighting for what is right; deliberate self-absorption is fighting for absolutely nothing. From my experience with a serious injury, I have recognized the significance of understanding modesty and humbleness. As a teenager, I had the mentality that nothing bad could ever happen to me; I thought I was invincible. After getting hurt, however, I was humbled to the point in which I acknowledged that nobody can be invulnerable. In my opinion, a true hero or heroine is somebody who can overcome obstacles without having to brag, boast, or show off. A true hero or heroine is an average, everyday person who is humble enough to realize that there is a much bigger picture to life that goes beyond containing only him or her. Sometimes my life feels a little burdened, but I always remember to keep my chin up and to remain modest with all the happenings around me. My Aunt Shaun was a genuine heroine for the immense amount of humbleness she displayed with her sickness. I am a heroine too, because I fight for what I believe is right, and I believe that modesty holds much more power in creating a good person than does haughtiness or conceit.

Not only have I matured into a young woman who holds faith in fighting for courageousness, unselfishness and modesty that enable me to “do the right thing” in life, but I have grown into an understanding human being through concepts in which my dear aunt unknowingly taught me. I value the courage and tenacity that shone through the sickness my Aunt Shaun had to cope with, and I value how she taught me to fight long and profoundly hard to live a life to the fullest. I also value the principle of unselfishness in understanding that I am not the only person who has ever had to suffer with injury or pain – I was taught the importance of fighting against caring for only myself. Lastly, I have learned the true meaning of modesty through my own invulnerability. Each of these aspects of life has strengthened me in mind, body
and spirit. My aunt’s strength, in turn, helped prove to me that I could be strong too. I believe that I can pack a pretty good punch in life now that I know what I’m fighting for, and my muscles are growing larger and larger with each passing year. I believe that my muscles are pretty big. Aunt Shaun’s muscles were even bigger. How big are yours?

*Face of a Boston* and *Boston’s Ear*
by Amanda Gathright
Woman Who Touched His Cloak  by Glenda Skinner-Noble

Blame. Greed. Despair: Rise Above  by Tommy Bond
Contributor Biographies

Debra Bailey graduated with honors December 2011 with a Master of Liberal Arts in Creative Writing. Along with other short stories and several plays she has written and had produced, Bailey has completed her first full-length novel, which she has submitted to publishers. She is a Creative Developer with the Chickasaw Nation’s Division of Arts and Humanities.

Anna Bauman is a junior English Major on the Writing Track. "A Girl who was a Tree" is inspired by the myth of Daphne, who turns into a tree in order to escape the god Apollo. Anna’s poem reflects her thoughts after having turned into a tree.

Tommy Bond is a film production Senior graduating in May. He loves making films for the same reason he loves art and photography - the ability to tell stories, to inspire emotions, and to trigger memories. He loves the challenge of capturing what he experiences with his senses, then trying to convey to his audience what he saw, heard, or felt through a new medium.

Tara Brenner began writing and performing poetry for audiences back in 2007. Since, she has competed with poetry nationally every year since 2008 as a member of the Boise Poetry Slam and as an individual competitor at the 2010 and 2011 Individual World Poetry slam. A former Idaho native, she is currently enrolled as a gradduate student at Oklahoma City University and in pursuit of her Master's degree in Applied Behavioral Studies and LPC licensure.

Ali Cardaropoli is a senior English Major. She writes Young Adult Stories and Comic Books. Ali is the secretary of Sigma Tau Delta and is a member of Kappa Phi and the Wesley Leadership Team. Upon graduating from OCU she hopes to continue her studies with a masters in Creative Writing.

Joshua P. Cassella is a 25 year old artist and freelance illustrator born, raised, and currently residing in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He is influenced by humor and illustrated literature, and creates art that is an expression of the skewed worlds people make for themselves in their own minds. He is currently a senior pursuing a BFA in studio art.

Jessica Garvey is a sophomore English / Studio Art major. She enjoys reading, writing, and drawing, but especially loves to lose herself in fantasy stories and comic books. She plans to write and illustrate her own some day.

Amanda Gathright is a sophomore working towards a BFA in Studio Art. She is from the Moore/OKC area and is also considering a minor in Art History.

Davis Good is a junior majoring in Music Composition with a minor in English. He has strong interests in mixing art forms, frequently using his studies in music and literature to inform one another. Following this trend, he recently set his poem "The Sun Named Moon" as a cycle of nine songs for soprano and piano. He would like to thank Dr. Keegan for the poetry assignment that lead to this exciting creative venture!

Dawn Jackson-Grooms is a senior pursuing a BFA in Photography, and is due to graduate in December 2012. While she enjoys using digital media, she has developed a passion for direct exposure and pinhole techniques as well. She will be a featured artist all summer during the LIVE on the Plaza events every second Friday and her first gallery show is scheduled to open May 11 at Istvan Gallery in OKC. She is also opening her own photo studio and mini-gallery within Istvan this summer and will soon host art camps for metro children, hoping to bring a new generation to a greater understanding and appreciation of old photographic techniques.

Marnie Hall is currently a Junior at Oklahoma City University, where she is a B.F.A. Studio Artist with a Photography Minor. She plans to use her photography along with her art, working primarily with wildlife subjects.

Bryne Harris is a 19 year old English major. He is an American Indian from the Choctaw, Crow and Northern Cheyenne tribes, and he enjoys scouting and listening to electronic and pop music from around the world. He dedicates his poem to his mother and grandmother, two of the strongest Native women he has known, who have taught him to appreciate people for their personalities.
Jason Alexander Herrera is a sophomore English literature major. He enjoys reading, gardening and cooking. After graduating, he would like to write and publish cookbooks, short stories and —maybe when he’s feeling adventurous— novels.

Judith Huerta is a senior Photography and Spanish major. Recently, she has become involved with a movement where she has learned that it is her time to come out of the shadows: to come out as an undocumented student. She may run a risk of being deported, but the alternative would be to continue watching the youth lose all hope of attaining a higher education. And because she refuses to do that, Judith will continue to pursue the D.R.E.A.M. Act.

Danielle Kilhoffer is a junior music composition major who also dabbles in poetry every now and then. Some of her favorite poets include Emily Dickinson, Oscar Wilde, Edgar Allan Poe, and E.E. Cummings. Danielle has set both of her featured poems to music this semester. She plans to further explore the fusion of poetry and music through art song over the summer, writing music for her own work as well as the poetry of others. In her spare time, Danielle enjoys reading, wakeboarding, and eating Indian food.

Marina Kravtsova is a Cell and Molecular Biology Major with a minor in Chinese Language. Her interests include Origami paper-folding, ballroom dancing, and photography as well as drawing. She plans to earn an M.D. and practice medicine.

Danielle Kutner is a junior Political Science / Philosophy major and English minor. She enjoys writing creative non-fiction, traveling, playing music, and aesthetic philosophy.

Ali McCurdy is a Dance Performance Major from Medfield, Massachusetts. She loves realistic fiction books, especially the Hunger Games series. She also loves to cook and travel and has a secret obsession with Disney World.

Rev. Glenda Skinner-Noble, B.A. in Religion, OCU 1994, and M.Div., The Methodist Theological School in Ohio 2007, will complete a BFA in Studio Art in May, 2012. Her continuing education in studio art is another avenue of ministry for her, experiencing art as a form of prayer and reflection. She enjoys sharing her art as a way of connecting people with a faithful and loving God and also enjoys teaching others how to create art for themselves as a way of intersecting with their Creator.

Kallen D. Pitts is a 21 year old junior BFA Acting major at Oklahoma City University. He enjoys composing music, writing, Philosophizing and tinkering with gadgets as well automobile engines. He plans to become a musician, writer, actor and entrepreneur in years to come.

Alexandra Roy is a Studio Art Major. She was born and raised in Oklahoma City. In addition to art, Alex enjoys running and photography.

Lauren Shaffer, originally from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, is currently a junior studying art education. She loves to write and read when she is not busy studying or working.

Lauren Snyder is a sophomore Nursing major from Edmond, Oklahoma, and she will be entering the Kramer School of Nursing in Fall of 2012. Lauren loves spending time with her sisters and parents, and enjoys scrapbooking, drawing, and listening to soundtrack music.

Tanner Strunk is a sophomore World Religions major who is completing the requirements to take the MCAT and attend medical school. Some of his interests include Olympic-style weightlifting, in which he competes, and poetry.

Abigail Vestal is an English major in the creative writing track. She has always enjoyed writing, mostly fiction, and she tries every day to work hard at her writing. Abigail dedicates her piece of non-fiction to her mom, a woman who inspires her to be a good person and to work hard for what she wishes to do.

Neilee Wood is a junior Cell and Molecular Biology major and an English minor. She likes writing poetry and short stories in her free time. She plans to attend physician assistant (P.A.) school after graduation.