“Providing a creative venue for student expression.”
The Peel is a literary arts magazine created and run by the students of Appalachian State University. It is divided into five committees – poetry, fiction, non-fiction, art, and graphic design – each of which play an integral role in the magazine's production. All submissions are reviewed anonymously and by the appropriate committee. Those pieces that are selected for publication reflect the views of the authors and artists only. Funding for The Peel is provided by the Student Activity Fee and Academic Affairs.

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A Note from the Editor

Although I have held many leadership positions in the past, I never thought I would have the opportunity to oversee an organization such as The Peel. In founding this magazine, it was/is my goal to bring students of common interests together to create a product that can be enjoyed by the entire university. I want to give those students not in the English and/or Art departments a venue through which they can showcase their literary and artistic talents alongside the works of those who are majors. In doing this, I hope to increase diversity on campus while broadening horizons.

The students at Appalachian are phenomenally talented and deserve to be recognized; perhaps this magazine will broadcast that. I look forward to seeing the school's response to this effort and know that the publication will not only expand, but also improve with time. I am deeply thankful to all those involved, particularly those persons who have been with me from day one. As a group we have faced and overcome many obstacles in the formation of this vision. I am proud to say that we have neither faltered nor cracked under pressure but instead risen to the challenge and performed admirably. Thanks to my right hand man and woman, my committee heads, committee members, and all of you who submitted. Special thanks to those not directly involved but motivational nonetheless. I couldn't have done it without you.

Amy Saltmarsh
Amy Saltmarsh
Summerland
Samantha Vandermeade

Driving down that old highway, with the warm May breeze rushing in through the lowered windows and the hot dash vibrating against my bare feet, has become the memory I see when I think back to the summer I turned sixteen. The world was our canvas, and it was splashed with the colors of our lives; that summer: the navy and gold of the school uniforms that we discarded the moment school let out, the purple polish we bought together and painted onto our toenails, and the jewel tones of the beaded purses that were so popular that year. Laura and I did not look at each other; like the singing along with the lyrics of a song, this ritual came to us with the unconscious ease of something that has been done a thousand times before. The difference was the world outside the vehicle; that day was the first real day of summer.

These mountains aren’t called the Blue Ridge for nothing. The nearest ones were covered with the vibrant green of new summer, but as in any season, the receding layers somehow fade seamlessly from green to a dark blue to lighter and lighter shades until they seemed to fade right into the sky like there is nothing out there but miles and miles of mountains—which is more true than not. As we drove along, bright shafts of sunlight which seem to be solid columns of light occasionally stab out of the white clouds so that you almost feel like you’re under a forest canopy, light filtering through. And every time I look to the sky, I’m just the tiniest bit astounded that it goes up so far.

The smell of freshly mown grass, which was wet and dewy only a few hours before but had since been dried by the sun, tickled our noses with its pungent earthiness. The slightly musty smell of the truck’s upholstery mixed with the sweetness from the half-empty soda bottles and the fruitiness of an open tube of raspberry lip-gloss, but those smells were almost overwhelmed by the aroma carried into the cab by the whooshing wind. The smells of newly budded leaves, planted fields, and tractor exhaust waft together until one is indistinguishable from the others and the combination can only be described as spring in the mountains. Following a weather pattern unique to the clime, the low thirties of early morning had rocketed into the mid-seventies of afternoon, and the sleeves of the white shirts we wore under our polo shirts had been pushed up past the elbows which dangled out the window lazily.

The highway stretched out in front of us like a road to another place. A long stretch of empty, unoccupied road began just in front of the truck, its yellow lines moving towards one another until it formed a triangle of open blacktop; but the peak of that triangle didn’t quite close because the road swung to the left and was concealed behind a hill and seemed to hint at something exciting to come, just around the bend. As we hurried towards that bend, that new vista, a gust of wind whipped my hair into my eyes so that my vision was obscured just as we made the turn, and so that I tasted not only the smooth chocolatey remains of an after-school snack and the grape soda that had stained my tongue violet, but also the metallic, chemical taste of my hair.

The part of the county that is settled and inhabited whips and winds through a series of valleys in a testament to the difficulty of cultivating and building on the slopes of the mountains. The occasional house or cabin is perched precariously on the side of one of these mountains, but never more than halfway up. Any higher and it would be impossible to navigate down the mountain for half of the winter. I imagine that from an aerial view, our houses and stores and barns and churches wind like a great procession through the dips and depressions in the land, but I couldn’t say for sure, as I have never seen the county from any higher than the top of a mountain. But the view from even that high is breathtaking, almost as if you could jump off the summit and land right there amidst those rounded peaks.

After we swung around that one bend, another seven appeared in close succession until the road tightened into winding turns that would make anyone who wasn’t an experienced native dizzy and sick. Luckily, we were veterans, and the movement, while slightly reminiscent of a rollercoaster, just swung us back and forth easily. The back roads, panned in by rocky inclines and dense plant growth, can sometimes confuse and disorient even the most seasoned mountain driver until you’re not quite sure which direction you’re facing or where you’re even going, creating the façade of a temperate jungle. At times, you were so close to the hills and mountains that if you reached your hand out the window, you could brush the ferns and bushes that overhang the road; other times, an open valley provides a vista from which, on a clear day, you can see miles and miles of mountain scenery and follow the road you must take with only your eyes.

We spent forever that afternoon driving. School had let out at noon and we had nowhere to be. We drove down one side of the county and back up the other, a large ring around the perimeter of our worlds. It was a perfect day, a day worth remembering. We receive far too many days like that in this place, where the weather is divine and the landscape could be interchanged with the picturesque snapshot on the front of a postcard, only the reality is so much more vibrant than any ink could ever be, days when it is almost criminal to be inside, out of reach of the glorious sunshine and the refreshing breeze, when driving until you ran out of gas is the best thing you could possibly do.

We pulled into my driveway only when the light was slipping down behind the mountains, turning those blue ridges into deeper shades of navy and indigo. The gravel crunching beneath the tires and insects humming in the night greeted us like in a natural symphony and the world seemed so perfect as it had hours ago, jumping out of the car with an additional crunch and the metallic slamming of the old truck doors, Laura and I looked to each other and acknowledged the day with only a nod. It was the only response needed; we both knew what we felt and it would spoil the balmy night air to break the silence.

I’ll never forget how invincible we were that summer or how that one beautiful day has blurred into the setting for all of my most precious memories in those mountains. The rushing of the wind through those open windows blew our hair into our eyes and faces and made us feel like we were going faster than we really were and those beautiful mountains surrounded and sheltered us because they were imposing and enclosing, but mostly just because they were home.
Soirée
Henry Finch

Summon nannies (Veronica, Marie).
Smear on cream.
Wear six or seven accessories.
Raise nose.
Wave men and women in.
Swim in wine,
converse on successes, rare vases.
Wince as music commences (Raise nose more.
No, more.).
Summon nannies (Veronica, Marie).
Raise arms in ire.
Issue canons:
New music. No, nicer music.
More wine.
Converse on crass men
or vain women.
Evince some concern as one man careens in various courses.
Cram caviar in maw.
Use cameraomuse on man, woman, arm in arm.
Raise arms in ire as music ceases.
Remain serene. No,
scream.
Summon nannies. No,
Summon Veronica.
Raise nose.
Accuse Veronica.
Scream. Use noises as arrows.
Aim razors.
Use canons.
Can Veronica. Sneer.
More wine.
Summon Marie.
Remain nice, since Marie carries music in arms.
Name Marie “Soirée Savior.”
Raise Marie.
More wine.
Muse on some naive man.
Mince monies. Seat.
Mix coins, cream. Simmer.
Serve over warm rice.

Love & Co.
Diane Vachon

Your love is not an excuse
to lose me.
What is the difference
between your love and my love?
Yours is “real love,” wholesome,
with cuddling and kisses on foreheads and eyelids.
What is mine then?
Raw love?
With liquor shots in the morning?
Bastards and rocking bedposts?

I know your bedpost rocks too,
but your rhythm must be that of sweet euphony.
Mine must be a Phillip Glass discordance,
sounding like melodies conducted in adolescent garages.
Your pillows and percale
must be pristine and white,
covering you so tastefully as you move.
Much better in comparison
to the fake leather flakes
covering my backseat body—
naked and charged.

You say your love grows.
I hear of warm evenings
wrapped up in expensive bouquets
and rich merlot with dinners by candlelight.
And I suppose my love, in numbers, grows as well.
I’m sure you hear of my midnight ventures—
tangled in cheap weeds of
plastic bottles and TV dinners.

Our love is not so different.
Mine takes me out of reality
and yours is taking
you away.

Love & Co.
Diane Vachon

Diane Vachon
I was twelve then
don’t you remember?
we were both there, together,
in that long, narrow hall.
(so tiny).

you must remember
I’ve been twelve forever
like you, you know.
I know –
you said so,
so many years ago.
(we were twelve then, too).

I steal from you again
this time – as I have
as I am bound to all my life,
I steal from you
or someone else.
always something,
and I hid all I have
in those fleeting moments
between birth and life,
life and death.
where else could I have?

a small head bursts with ideas,
a large head has none –
no more than ever.
only vague notions at best –
ever willing to roll around
on the freshly cut grass
of freshly cut hillsides
while wrestling with the divine.

the hands of the clock
always say the same thing,
soon enough.
with two big hands,
a clock would get
nothing done.
time slows
to a halt as
they tangle,
twist and intertwine.
at 12:12
it still shows 11:59
and pushes forward
while the face
behind the hands
runs out of time.

we tiptoe over city sidewalks
on a tightrope.
the wind whips around my face
as car horns
assault the dying trace of silence.
paddling a small pine canoe
across steel-grey water,
unbroken but by the oar
and wooden bow,
I wonder:
was I ever even there?
was anyone at all?
(I despair).

waves ripple away,
ever to meet again.
the sun sets on another
brand new day.
I think of all the thoughts
I can’t remember.
left with all I know:
I’ve been twelve forever.
“I could tell you about the river,” he said as he rocked his chair back onto its hind legs, “but we’re already in it.”

“How so?” I asked. He did not respond. Rather, he eased his aging eyes together causing the wrinkled skin on his face to relax. He smiled.

I stood up from my chair. It was wicker and precariously squeaked from my sudden movement.

“You know something old man,” I said while dropping my hands into my front pockets, “you have a way of not making any sense sometimes.” I chuckled as if to let him know it was a harmless comment but he knew that already.

I paced cautiously to stretch my legs. I had been sitting for what felt like ages. I assume it was the chair. I moved towards a framed photograph on the wall of what looked like the old man and probably his son. It was taken years ago but was a familiar pose, proud father with an arm tightly around the son who is sulking in modesty, both hands firmly by his side.

“Is this you here, in this photograph?” His heavy breathing stopped and he slowly opened both eyes, looking first at me and then the photograph, “Yes. That is the river.”

“So, are you the river?”

“Me? No.” He frowned as if it pained him to be asked such a question.

I could only sigh and hang my head to observe the wooden floor at my feet. I decided not to ask anymore questions. He had told me everything I needed to know, I could feel it.

I heard his chair return to all fours and the creak of the floor as he eased himself upright. “I have told you everything you need to know.” His eyes were fixed on the floor in front of him as he traveled towards me. He moved surely and steadily with his cane testing the ground before each step. As he neared where I stood I couldn’t help but to adjust my posture and angle my body out of his way.

“Oh, and one more thing,” he stopped and turned his head up to face me, “take care of yourself.”

I managed to mumbled out a confused, “Yes, of course.”
He exited the room and turned the corner out of sight. I leaned my back against the wall and sighed as I looked up towards the ceiling. As I started to ponder everything he had told me, I couldn't help but to turn my attention to the sound of the front door opening. Surely the old man wouldn't be leaving his house at this hour, and these footsteps were entrance not exiting.

Before I could speak I saw the unfamiliar figure of a man appear from down the hall. He stopped long enough to notice me and begin his approach. My face wrinkled into a baffled frown, “Excuse me...” I stopped. It all made sense now. My blood ran cold as it shot through my chest and tingled in my hands. I started to raise my arms in defense but I knew it was useless.

The stranger wrestled me down and our bodies twisted and tangled on the wooden floor. My vain attempt to wrestle him off ended with his arm locked around my neck, his chest firmly against my back.

“Wait,” I managed to choke out, “before you kill me,” I gasped once more and flailed in a last attempt to escape, “are you the river?”

There we were, primates, our faculties and pheromones confusing us down from the safety of branches, our feet flat on the earth at that dangerous terminus of Savannah and grove, exciting at the purples and reds smattered out on the evening, with proteins and sugars lapped on our hands between us, discourses through our veins.

We were startled by a large jungle cat and scattered chattering into different trees, and we climbed again to fire maps into that synapse between our brains.

My mother became a Loner after my father left her - now my sister calls her a Whore for trying to be free.
You sit down at a bar. You're at said bar for a meeting of sorts. A young punk dressed in blood sits in the stool next to you. He's got a Mohawk the size of a Neil Young guitar solo. He's got band tattoos. He's got a cigarette in each hand and two in his mouth and he starts talking to you and his lips are flappin' flappin' flappin' like they're never gonna stop. It takes you awhile to register that he's a talk talk talkin' to you. He's got energy like Gershwin. You're here for a meeting of sorts and this punk dressed in blood is talking to you. Talk talk talking; TALK IS CHEAP. The meeting the meeting there's this meeting you've got, see? Why won't the punk shut up? You'd attack him but what's a good blood-crusted punk without a lead pipe? And the meeting, you're here for that meeting DON'T FORGET THE MEETIN! Fuck, who are you meeting? Talk talk talkity talk.

The punk ashes one of his ciggys in the bar counter's fine maple wood. The meeting, the meeting. You were meeting a person for a meeting of sorts. Was it a man or woman? Did you know them before hand? What's this meeting all abouGODAMNIT YOU FUCK-ING PUNK SHUT IT ALREADY! Well shit, are you meeting this punk? Why did he ruin that perfectly good fine maple bar counter with his ciggy anyway? Oh that's why....he's got an anarchy "A' ironed onto his denim vest right below the Circle Jerks band logo so obviously he's got some fucking justifying political statement to make by ruining the fine maple bar couJESUS WILL YOU QUIT SPEAKING FOR A HOT DAMNED SECOND?? Finally he's stopped tal...no ... wait .... he's just taking a long drag off of one of his three remaining cigarettes. Well ..... damn this meeting to the most fiery and punk-populated depths of hell. You didn't want to meet anyway.

Or did you? Regardless, the punk must die. You take one of the cigarettes from his mouth and flick the ember into his wide unprotected eye. You think he's screaming but fuck it, he shouldn't have talked so much. He reaches his trembling hand between his boxers and pants to pull out, no, not a lead pipe, but a switchblade and with what would have been deft skill flipped it to reveal four inches of rusted metal. ... unfortunately the fluidity of his motions were negated by his fall from the bar stool onto the fine maple floor. Oh, he's frothing at the mouth and getting ready to stand up and knife you in some unpleasant organ. You pick up his bar stool and with a fair amount of force, direct one of the stool's legs into his (most likely tattooed) belly. All of the froth at his mouth is propelled into your eye. Karma be thy name. You take the sole of your foot and drive it into his PAROLE OFFICER! You were supposed to meet your parole officer at the bar! Oh, it all comes back to you. The assault case ten months back, the six months in penitentiary, the anger management therapy, the meeting on May 17th with your parole officer to see how things were going for you. And there he is! And he's, the son-ova-bitch, he's picking up his cell phone and calling some number in quite a fury; and he's smoking on a bar stool.....
Dust sonnet
Zach Smith

The places where the night envelops all,
The claustrophobic alleyways rain-wet
From which our friends we bitterly forget
Were lifted like the summer fades to fall—
Those hollows where they paced a grimy scrape
And loosed the earthly relics of their frames
And shod the wretched loneliness of names,
The snow that fell to freeze it all in shapes—
Our hands that grip the relics like dry stones
To wring until some water quits the core
Are bony-knuckled, dry as ocean shore
And ill-equipped to claw for sunken bones.
The attic dusts all things of mystery.
It tells the story better than can we.

I can scan
our immense mini-ocean, our own sea,
or aim our camera on Missus Me in a warm sun.
We can cruise
in ease—no cares.

No, we can reserve our cares
in case we scan
some cruise's
crew in a cavernous snooze. See?
A noon sun,
our camera
in use! A camera,
in our care,
seizes our warm sun
as coziness crosses us, scans
us—man, woman, our sea
cruise,
our oceanic evasion. Us. A cruise
in our noon sun. Our camera
seizes us in our cruiser, our see.
Our cares
cease. I scan
our immenseness. Warm sun
on Missus Me. Warm sun
on us as we cruise—
No. Soar. Scan
once more. Use our camera,
see our cares
wane. See?
Scan our sea. See?
Use our camera. Now. See? Our warm sun
consumes our worries. Our ocean consumes our cares.
Esso Light
Dustin Chambers

Friday Night Dancer
Sarah Humphries

Neon signs glow
like radioactive fireflies
and stilettos thump thump

to the bump bump

of the trumpet and bass.

The nine to five guys
shake off their ties
and shimmy against
our bodies of quartz.

Sometimes the pale linoleum
can get a hold of them
so they tip back a drink
to their wives in separate beds
and the shrinks that
prescribe all the meds.

And to me—
The woman who sets them free.

'Cause I'm a flash of fuchsia
on the dark River Styx,
inciting revolution
with my come hither lips,
stunning the crowd
with my taser gun hips.
A Scratch Across the Lens
Matthew Faw

soap. moldy.
SHE. Dances.
Sealed by all, ignored.
never Quitting.
Is their intellect damp? Viewers whose reason dissolves at the bottom of shot glasses.
In our eyes, her name is spelled

B-O-D-Y:
swerving
slipping
twisting
(she) glides
chills up-down
my Spine.

I AM
past TENSE. Edged seat.
hold back a touch.
I AM
provoking SEDUCTION
I AM
changing NOTHING
fingers slide into pockets
grab
clutch squeeze—
wait—wallet. Empty.
Retraction. Reversal.
Rejection.
I AM
her DISGUSTED
eyes glaring towards the entrance.
bathroom;
wash filth off.

soap. moldy.
SHE. sighs.
IS your belief overshadowed by desire? A penny for her night. No thought of her day. no MORE.

Waiting for the Shower
Sarah Anderson

Angie watches water from the shower
Swirl down the drain. Fake Spanish tiles
Barred by steady drops. The smell of cheap coffee
Brewing on the counter overwhelms the five room house.
Ruth and Frank are late for work, too late to
Notice the boy drawing on the mirror with lipstick.

Ruth searches the drawers for her lipstick,
Yelling at Angie to get out of the shower
Frank rescues his keys from the two-
Year-old in the crib, frenzied feet cringing on cold tiles.
Impatient wind buffets the modest house
Bringing with it a shower of coffee

Colored leaves. Ruth's hair was the color of black coffee
Before. Now she masks cream and sugar with bright lipstick,
Coloring her life. The boy colors the house
Covering lowly paneled walls with a shower
Of red and orange, to match the bathroom tiles.
Ruth pries her crimson #12 from him, too rushed to

Be angry, too weary of it all to
Care. Angie darkens her hair with yesterday's coffee
Grounds. She likes how the color splashes on the tile.
She is too young to hide behind lipstick
But not to young to notice the shower
Of tears that daily stains the floors of the house.

Ruth dresses to suite the million dollar house
Though everything she owns is too cheap to
Impress the head of the garden club, who showers
Her lawn in September, while sipping hazelnut coffee
On the veranda, never smearing her lipstick
Or spilling a drop on the heated tiles.

Ruth removes her shoes before cleaning those tiles
Imagining them to be in her own house
And what her boy could create with a little lipstick.
She pictures Angie and the two-year-old in their own room, brushing coffee
Colored locks and choosing to bathe instead of shower.

But even Ruth’s finest lipstick is too red to
Be near those tiles in that pristine house.
But not to sip coffee with Frank and wait for the shower.

Blood Orange
Tanya Lyn Willard

Soft linen center,
cotton white taste,
bitter on my tongue.

Peel apart your skin
exposing a virgin universe
of untouched wines and channels of red.

Every pulp puzzled and
placed in pure symmetry.

I won’t devour you.
I’ll burrow inside.
So delicate
your acid cleanses me.
Hem me in
to your most intimate parts.

By day I’ll explore every silky, skin-covered crevice.
Pulp-by-pulp, burst by burst.
I’ll rest in your soft cushion core at night.

A Thoughtful Chore
N.S. Hanks

The boy was sitting quietly against the gnarled, dead maple that marked Jacob’s hill staring at the small fire before him which made the already warm August evening unbearable. Though it wasn’t yet dark, he had only a few hours of sunlight left and building a small tinder fire seemed, to him, a good way to rest his tired arms.

Behind Jacob’s hill the sun split out a pink haze that pooled across the sky and even set the shaded East River Mountains to glimmer like a great frozen tide, blue in the distance. He wondered for a few moments about the world walled up behind mountain peaks and then stood, pulling specks of dried leaves off his dull, stained khakis, and gave a grunt as he rose, like an ancient man. At the center of the hill’s rise, a sole grave stood open like a tear in the earth. The boy pulled his eyes away from the grave and stared at the fire as it sucked and burned after the wind.

He reached high above his head and shook the dried tree limbs with an iron, rust-flaked shovel breaking the branches and twigs that fell down into bundles. The boy threw the tinder onto his modest fire and though the sudden blaze whipped cinders high into the air, he knew the light wouldn’t last. Turning back to the horizon, the sky had already grown darker. It looked bruised with purples and a black-blue that ran over the world down to drown the sun.

Digging at night would be difficult. The hole was still shallow and needed to be emptied of dirt before it could be burdened again. He had no lantern or flashlight and the fire, which was started near the tree, would not be bright enough to show more than the grave’s jagged etching in the earth.

The boy pulled his shirt off over his head and wrapping the sleeves round and round each palm, fashioned beggar’s mittens. He fumbled after the shovel and walked out past the fire into the dim.

He was lanky, no taller than the shovel he struggled to pitch, and frail. At noon, he began digging by the shade of the tree, hiding himself from the sun’s stare but the spade only glanced off of roots and rocks finding but a few fistfuls of dirt. The thick wooden veins of the dried out tree had not yet shrunk away but still stretched out broadly like a lone, arthritic hand on the hill’s peak. With each strike the shovel cut at roots and packed dirt but the earth didn’t give. He wondered if the grave should be dug quickly or if it was supposed to be a solemn thing like Church. He imagined that each clump held in it some anger or fear that could be pulled out with iron but as his small biceps struggled against each pull of the shovel and each shallow load of dirt, the boy realized that the hole only tired his body and that the mind still had its own burying to do.

Later, he began a new grave a few yards away from the old tree and it had grown quicker. The boy carved a crude, box pattern in the ground following it foot by foot into the earth and he worked as the last day’s light drained away. Standing beside the grave
pit, the boy looked proudly at his budding ditch and for a moment at the small pile of dirt and scree hauled from the ground, barely a form at all in the dark. He stared into the inky black of the grave bed and imagined that it was bottomless. He thought of the study Bibles he used to read in church: about the demons, devils and sinners in the pictures of hell, prisoners arching their necks to stare up at a ceiling of earth and screaming in a complete and eternal silence on the page. The boy wondered if they were there. If they could see him clear through the guts of the world or if at any moment he had met the Devil's damned gaze.

He shook the thoughts of demons out of his head and buried his shovel into the dirt, dragging out soggy tangles of roots pierced on the spade's tip. After while he had to step down into the pit, still fighting against the ground and even the sweat that fell through his close cut hair and into his eyes. His shovel smacked into rocks and struggled to find the dark soil that he could feel with his feet but could not see. With every thrust or adjustment to the grave's shape, the squaring off of its corners or straightening its walls, the boy took control of death in his own small, important way.

When he could no longer see his arms or the hands they were bound to, the boy let the shovel fall into a corner of the grave and climbed out onto the grassy ground above to stop for the night. He stood up and wiped his face with the wad of shirt that smelt of something and one of the students once sitting behind him yet they had all left. The schoolhouse wall was gone too and the teacher was alone. He looked out across the sky and for a moment at the small pile of black dirt and scree hauled from the ground, barely a form at all in the dark. He stared into the empty space, turning in the room. The boy's fingers pled to let loose the book and he dropped it but it did not disappear from the hilltop and memory.

What about death? Is death always so?

Not for things that never were.

The boy looked at nothing and then for the first time past the teacher at the wall where the question once wafted in a jesting banner but it was gone and he saw only the deep black of the sky or void which was dark and insane. He stared for sometime as if to find the question again, staring fixed like the stars were. He wondered if people mightn't look the same way when they looked up at heaven.

In a dream the boy sat tangled among the carved wood and bolts of his school chair. The teacher: young, beautiful and smiling, stood in front of the class. A starless sky roiled in its liquid black behind her. Her voice asked, 'What is always so?' and the words appeared in that long black sky burning white like a purposeful moon.

The boy thought about this and without the sound of a bell, stood up. The teacher stood inside the schoolhouse ministering to no one in particular. Some students still sat fixed to their desks like the days and days before and others never returned, too afraid of the black and empty sky turning in the room. The boy came to the teacher's side and said, 'Teacher, I have the answers.'

'Answers? What are they?'

'The earth always rotates around the sun.'

'She said, 'Yes, but at one time it didn't and someday it won't.'

The boy was puzzled, paused for a moment, and then said, 'Well, if that's not so then one and one is two. You have taught us this yourself.'

'Yes, but you must have one of something and one of another. And you know that things are not always so.'

The boy's fingers pled to let loose the stone-heavy book and he dropped it but it did not fall just disappeared from the hilltop and memory.

What about death? Is death always so?

Not for things that never were.

The boy chased after it with blood and wonder in his legs driving down past the stones and brambles pocked in the hillside and when he stopped at the ground's level he was tired and old. He looked around him stretching his neck and gaze to the hilltop but the teacher and blackboard were both gone and only a maple stood in her place, bared of its leaves as if they were taken by the wind too and the tree didn't smile. The wind grew still and a quiet poured over the earth and even thoughts screamed out against the dreaming. The old man saw past the tree. Saw that night was falling again and that stars were streaked across the sky like a shattered mystery. Looking there, the old man guessed that they, the stars, might always be so but soon the stars were smeared by the watery fissures undammed by his eyes and the light ran dripping from that vast canvas like the work of a hopeless painter preferring truth in the empty firmament.

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'What about death? Is death always so?'

'Not for things that never were.'

The boy looked at nothing and then for the first time past the teacher at the wall where the question once wafted in a jesting banner but it was gone and he saw only the deep black of the sky or void which was dark and insane. He stared for sometime as if to find the question again, staring fixed like the students once sitting behind him but yet they had all left. The schoolhouse was gone too and the teacher alone was standing, her face large and smiling fiercely and her body finding the cheshire's way while a wind swept up parched leaves and reason off of the ground and from the space between them in a mad slurry that tore down the hill. The boy chosed after it with blood and wonder in his leg driving down past the stones and brambles pocked in the hillside and when he stopped at the ground's level he was tired and old. He looked back behind him stretching his neck and gaze to the hilltop but the teacher and blackboard were both gone and only a maple stood in her place, barren of its leaves as if they were taken by the wind too and the tree didn't smile. The wind grew still and a quiet poured over the earth and even thoughts screamed out against the drowning. The old man saw past the tree. Saw that night was falling again and that stars were slumbered across the sky like a shattered mystery. Looking there, the old man guessed that they, the stars, might always by so but soon the stars were smeared by the watery fissures undamaged by his eyes and the light ran dripping from that vast canvas like the work of a hopeless painter preferring truth in the empty firmament.

In a dream the boy sat tangled among the carved wood and bolts of his school chair. The teacher: young, beautiful and smiling, stood in front of the class. A starless sky roiled in its liquid black behind her. Her voice asked, 'What is always so?' and the words appeared in that long black sky burning white like a purposeful moon. The tiny notebook held words and thoughts that turned heavy as stones in the boy's hands but he kept walking until soon he was at the top and it was day.
In the morning the fire’s coals cracked and wheezed letting nothing save for the smallest smoky breaths and though the sun was set high, it shone dull as bone behind a glass of grey clouds. He packed up his camp. A knife and thermos thrown into some ratty yellow blanket and bound up with a leather Sunday belt that was nearly creased to pieces. He worked his sore fingers over the bundle and while his hands hadn’t yet scabbed, the skin had drawn and the wounds stopped running. The boy looked out toward the pines at the bottom of Jacob’s hill and the mountains beyond them which were obscured by a fine mist. He remembered calling that kind of fog “grass clouds” as a kid and his mother would say that they were something else but he had forgotten the name.

He thought of walking away then. He saw himself in the distance, perhaps on a bare peak looking back at the place and thing that bound him: the unfamiliar and sad chore. He turned from his own gaze, the distant self sighing miles away, turning back to face the tree and the shovel posted a little farther off in the ground. His hands remembered the shovel and ached. They splayed out, resisting the wooden grip and throbbed as the boy moved closer. He thought about resting, waiting for his hands to heal before starting back, if only for a few days but those days would be restless. Days that counted time against him.

Yet there, standing by the shovel, he looked with some relief at the cavity cut deeper than he had remembered it the night before. Falling down into a squat the boy rolled a heavy head into his chest and squinted against a wind that drove loose dirt from the mound beside him down over his shoes. He shook away the grit and forced himself to look, for what seemed like the first time in years, at the man kept quietly under a too small blanket where shadows caved in at the mouth and eyes like a mask of blue cloth. The chilled wind came across the hill again and the man’s feet sticking out pale and bare from beneath the blanket did not stir. The boy knew he was empty, just like the grave, but still wouldn’t touch him and instead grabbed at the legs of his jeans and pulled him out from under the blanket and into the ground.

He kicked the shovel in after him and then pile after pile of dirt from the modest heap, shuffling in a grim dance that slowly buried a man and their shared past until the plot brimmed with earth. The boy stood for a few moments, allowing time to speak but keeping his own words quite as prayer. Leaving the graveside, he hoisted up his bundle lying by the smoldering camp and left. He would leave the man there, the man that started the dream. Left only to memory without a stone or cross to remind others, awaiting the real death of forgetting.

Out across the valley, smoke rose from a familiar place but the boy wouldn’t seek it. He walked down the hill and out into a glade where he saw a fence pulled down by years spent wrapped amongst weeds and thorny cables. The boy smiled like the referent moon overhead, slivered and just visible.
Contrary to Popular Belief
Jim Cleary

Graphite and Ink

Fuck Trees
Jim Cleary

Graphite and Ink
Snow fell lightly against the crystalline backdrop of the Arctic sky. A frozen, distant sun held watch over the tundra and reflected glaring light that lacked any and all warmth. Flat, unimposing, desolate. Occasionally the wind would scream along the horizon and drag long white snakes of snow and ice along with it, the shapes rolling and colliding along.

Four spires rose ahead of two men that trudged through the snow, a small green-yellow bobcat sat in their wake. Huddled figures that moved slowly and surely towards giant spider-like drills, a tangle of wires and cables that stretched and pulled as gears pumped out crude liquid fossils from deep under the ice. The grind and crack of the rigs echoed across the landscape; a rusty hinge, the sharp clash of metal on steel, the twang of wires—all hung in the air, in the wind, like the notes of a detuned piano.

The first man pulled his scarf down to reveal a face weathered by age and turned to his partner. Last lot for the day, he said, I don't want to get caught out here too long once we lose final light.

His partner grunted in response as the ground crunched and splintered underfoot, then paused in a snowdrift, regained his balance and continued on.

The man grimaced as another burst of wind sent a series of pinpricks along his uncovered face, while ahead of him the first drill teetered skyward and the long shadow it cast covered their quickly fading tracks. Up close, the noise was deafening, the clank and roar of frozen steel drowned out all but the wind.

Grab the cutters; this is the easy part. The man stared at the drill head, bobbing in slow rhythms as wheels creaked and propelled it far above him. His partner dragged out a solid pair of cable cutters from a pack that now sat sinking in the thick snow. Cut along these lines, he said. The man pointed at a series of cables that provided the drills with heat. The fluid will drain and it won't lock up 'til we're well out of here. He rubbed his eyes and forced a grin. They'll never know what hit 'em.

His partner clipped the first cable and watched putrid brown liquid pour out. The ground below hissed and melted away. Like that?

A natural, the man said, you'll get the hang of this quick. Two more cables were cut in the same fashion and before long the first rig was surrounded by a small sauna. The ground below hissed and melted away. Like that? How much further? The overseer leaned into the cockpit as the helicopter regained control and jolted those inside.

Two miles, not much longer. The pilot spoke over his shoulder and returned his attention to the console.

Another gust rocked the small craft and a low hum rose to prominence over the chop of the rotors. The overseer shook his head and stared out the window. He rubbed his eyes and cursed under his breath for contact solution that dried faster than he could apply it. Barren, dead tundra stretched in every direction as far as he could see. He checked his watch. Four in the morning.

Raising the cutters, the old man repeated the process and continued towards the next rig, faltering as a snow drift forced him to take a knee. He paused and blood pounded in his temples. His muscles stiffened and wind battered his unprotected face, causing small, coarse chin hairs to feel far heavier than they should. He licked his lips and forced himself to a stand. His knee groaned as the bones cracked in grinding protest. Warmth spread across his back as the drained syrup steamed and fell to the ice beneath. The man grunted and heaved himself through the drift and towards the third drill. His knee shook and lungs scratched as he cut the last three cables and replaced his scarf. He inhaled deeply the warm air and his heart settled.

The old man turned to the final drill and saw his partner waving him over. The rig screamed to a halt behind him as he tightened the scarf and struggled across the snow. A crack erupted like a bombshell from the first drill as gears splintered in their place and the cold seeped in, the sun dipping closer to the horizon. What is it, he called. His partner pointed to the side. Look, he said.

Huddled against the side of the fourth drill were two men, propped against the cold in poorly insulated stock jumpsuits. The furthest sat unmoving as jagged sheets of ice crawled along his brow and chin. The nearest stared ahead, agape, as shallow breaths sent loose flakes of snow tumbling down his chest.

Thin rotors cut through the air and echoed over the overcast white blanket above and below. The small helicopter, a corporate thing not meant for the extremities in which it now flew, barked as a small updraft caused the few passengers on board to lose their stomachs in their chest.

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You alright there? A man slid next to him and followed his gaze out the window. He was a runner, a lackey for the man he presently sat next to. Administrative duties in an igloo.

Just tired, the overseer replied.

The runner smiled from beneath a thick beard and held up a cup of coffee. You can never get too much of it, he said. The helicopter dipped once more as the drill site appeared in the distance. Icy fog swirled around the rigs as wind pulled small crystals of
snow into the air like miniature, radiant cyclones.

Another dip and the overseer grabbed his bench.

First time in one of these?
Up here, yes.

You get used to it. The runner wiped a splash of coffee off his jumpsuit and turned back. We don't see many suits here, especially when winter hits. What exactly are you doin' this far up anyway?

Sabotage, he said. The overseer bit at his nails as the wind continued to scream outside the cabin. A sea of white as far as the eye could see. The hum grew louder and he pulled away from the window. Higher-ups are concerned, he said. We've had a few problems of drills sites being shut down along the Brooks Range.

The runner nodded and sipped his coffee.

Some whack-jobs, the elements, who knows. He shook his head. Whatever they are, our boys are concerned they're connected to the protesters down in Texas. I didn't think much of 'em, but seems they're serious.

What's the plan then?

Security. The overseer tapped a small badge along his bag, where the outline of a monitor and antennae were drawn. We'll finally see what's causing these cut-offs.

And the other sites?

We'll swing by and take a look, he said. The overseer smiled and tapped the window with his knuckles. There was a small click as a wedding ring connected with the glass.

With luck, I can go home by this time tomorrow.

The rotors whined and a violent tremor rocked the cabin. Not a mile ahead of the helicopter, the drill site loomed as wind continued to stir the area. In the windshield a dark blur began to slow, a fading half-circle, until individual rotors could be seen. The pilot's red helmet turned to the side as he barked into his headset. Stomachs began to rise, slowly at first, as the horizon lifted towards the roof of the cabin. It was a strange silence, inside. No engine, no electric hum, just an alarm that sounded far more distant than it should - as though ears will pop in an altitude change to deafen the world around them.

The runner managed to turn his head. * * *

What do we do, his partner asked. He motioned to the figures.

The old man paused a moment as the wind died down. The sun barely touched his face, and the cold spread down his pant leg. He struggled to stand and something snapped out of place in his chest, sending a shudder through his back and painting a grimace across his face. The pilot's red helmet turned to the side as he barked into his headset. Stomachs began to rise, slowly at first, as the horizon lifted towards the roof of the cabin. It was a strange silence, inside. No engine, no electric hum, just an alarm that sounded far more distant than it should - as though ears will pop in an altitude change to deafen the world around them. Wind roared outside as the ground below charged up to greet them.

The overseer raised his head and stared at the expanse beyond. His chest hurt, his hands, the bite of the cold as ice pierced his cheek. Moving away, the man cut the cables on the last drill and the machine sputtered to a halt. We can - make one more site before dark, the man said, a good day. He turned to leave.

Leaving here? The young partner tilted his head.

Yes, the man replied. He stopped in his tracks and looked skyward. There's nothin' we can do.

Bullshit there isn't, he said, pointing to the bobcat in the distance. We can easily fit them aboard.

One of the men leaning against the drill gasped and moved his head to see who was there.

What do you want to do? The old man turned around and pulled his scarf down once more, while the first drill roared a swan's song over the wind.

We can take them back. We can't just leave them. The young partner stared between the old man and the two bodies. How long have they been out here?

One or two days, the man said. Who gives a shit? They're corporate stooges, kid.

We're taking them back, the young man said and stepped forward.

Yes, the man replied. What do you think will happen?

These people are disgusting, kid. They exploit and waste our world. Our world. We should help them? You want to know what will happen? I'll tell you what, he said, and spit on the ground. We'll go to jail. That's what will happen.

The young man felt he needed to say more, but suddenly saw himself alone in this world. Sitting frozen as a third body, nothing but the drills and the wind and the ice. This wasn't what he had pictured, not at all. He frowned and suddenly pictured his family, his parents, and he wasn't sure how come. The way his father's hair had never gone fully gray, stuck in a state of black-white limbo. How his sister never really laughed, just kind of smiled and blushed in quiet reservation. He looked between the drills and bobcat, but he didn't say anything. There wasn't anything left to say.

* * *

The runner tilted his head and stared at the expanse beyond. His chest hurt, his whole body roared in agony. He turned to his side, his eyes unable to focus on anything clearly. It was all a blur, a fuzzy white blur.

A shape not too far away - the helicopter. It smoldered in the snow not twenty feet from him. There was a groan nearby. He followed the sound; the runner was hunched halfway out the ruined aircraft, cradled in the fetal position and held in place by a loose harness.

The overseer called his name and the runner managed to turn his head.

Snow had slipped inside his jumpsuit, and the cold mixed with a sickening warmth that had spread down his pant leg. He struggled to stand and something snapped out of place in his chest, sending a shudder through his back and painting a grimace across his face. The pilot's red helmet turned to the side as he barked into his headset. Stomachs began to rise, slowly at first, as the horizon lifted towards the roof of the cabin. It was a strange silence, inside. No engine, no electric hum, just an alarm that sounded far more distant than it should - as though ears will pop in an altitude change to deafen the world around them.

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windshield and broken console, while wires snaked out and swayed in the icy gusts like disembodied veins. Ducking back out, he looked down at the runner and noticed his coffee had spilled on his jumpsuit. Can you walk, he asked.

A groan was his only response.

He grabbed the runner under his arms then pulled as his own body cracked in defiance of the action. The drill site wasn’t far ahead, perhaps half a mile.

He could make that.

* * *

Granting, the old man narrowed his eyes and turned to leave. It’s better this way, he called. He lumbered towards the idling bobcat and stumbled in a drift before continuing on.

The young man remained and turned back to the site. The two injured men remained where they were, and the one had tilted his head skyward and exhaled in shallow breaths. His eyes were vacant but as clear as the ice he rested on. Around the tris, the rigs began to splinter and crack where they stood, and their once fluid motions turned choppy and jagged. The final drill’s antifreeze pooled at the base in steaming drops, and long shadows grew ever more so as the sun melted into the distance. Pausing, he knelt beside the one man and placed a hand on his shoulder.

* * *

The overseer slumped against the cold density of the drill, and slight sensations of heat trickled along his back from the rig’s antifreeze. Beside him, the runner leaned his entire weight into the machine, while one hand lay across his chest and rose and fell in ragged pace. Every few moments a rasp of air would escape his lips, and as the overseer had dragged him from the wreck those gasps had grown further and further apart.

Someone will come, he said and patted the camera bag next to him. His own chest felt as though it were a balloon with a slow leak. The overseer looked skyward, where distant clouds cut long, opaque streaks across the sky. He exhaled as the morning sun breached the frozen horizon, and next to him the runner’s breaths steadied. Someone will come, he said again, then braced himself as a piercing gust screamed through the drill site – sending small white snakes dancing across the tundra.
We found our love to be like vultures,
Convergent evolution from different cultures.

I was New World and you were Old,
We gorged and disgorged, our love uncontrolled.

Prey to the weakness the other possessed,
We scavenged through rib bone and tore through the chest.

It came as a hunger, a love starved for blood,
Attacking our organs—an internal flash flood.

Our talons grabbed hold as our bodies threshed
Back and forth rushing straight to the flesh.

Tearing through tissue with ivory beaks
Until swollen and torpid, unable to speak.

Appetites growing at lovers decay—
Gluttony in our morality play!
Junebug: 1953
Sally Parlier

pour mon grand-père

First they shot Rudy,
because he was black
and not worth much for trade –
the exchange rate goes 7 Koreans to 1 American.

Then they shot Miles,
because he cried Jesus
and pissed his pants.
He wouldn't survive the march.

So I ran into the forest and hid.
I squeezed myself into a beetle –
something bullets can't hit.

In the morning, I felt the Earth quake
as the chain gang marched by.

I still shake
and shake
and shake.

I saw Junior in the colony
that swarmed across the hillside –
the only one they let keep his boots.

He was a giant on the parallel.
But I live in the kingdom of beetles,
grown perpendicular to their lives.

I stood on a twig and watched the march,
and Junior, with his eyes straight forward,
big feet splayed.

They can't see me anymore.

I sat with Rudy and Miles,
and all their friendly flies.
My little legs couldn't carry me
much further.

That night I slept under a leaf
and dreamt of snow
and forest fires.

Peacock Plumes
Luke T. Howell

for Félix González-Torres

Two raindrops make a puddle
Just as
Two positives make a positive.
And
Peacock plumes are trains
on white wedding dresses.
And two clocks keeping the same time
Are pornography.
Like someone who fits snug
On your finger.

A few tiger-lilies make a bouquet
Just as
A string of incandescent bulbs
Burn out.
And
A candle has the right to set the world on fire
On a night, when the low is seven below
and dandy-lions wait for the chance
to prove, they too, are just peacock plumes
that catch your eyes.
How High
Rebecca B. Farris

Cranes
Maggie Yokely

“Dream and Doodle Series” Pen and ink on acid-free paper

Giant Deep Sea Diver in NYC
Maggie Yokely

“Dream and Doodle Series” Pen and ink on acid-free paper
The Oven
Sally Parlier

1. Egg
I measured their lives into a spoon,
cradled against steel
slick with milk ooze.

To me, they are the shrut-scratch
against a wooden bowl,
bones dropped on the hearth,
clattering.

3. Ginger
I turned back,
my eyes filled with salt.
The fields glowed violet under the noon sun.

I live in the dark forest now,
the ravens scream around my hut.

I lose the years in burnt sugar,
burnt hands.

5. Fruit
The window slant light set them aglow,
apples shining in their cheeks,
little mice nibbling on the shutters.

I offer them fat red pomegranate tears
to stay here
in my pear-shaped world.

7. Chicken
The cage hangs heavy over her head.
They both understand now.

I know it's only bones they offer me,
but my larder is empty.

The oven is hot
and my sugar windows have never looked brighter.

2. Shells
I drift over the meadows,
a great white bird.

There are things that I know –
how to boil love,
how to iron out trouble.

But brothers and sisters know how
how to bind, how to hurt.

When they came to my door,
I felt my wings melt like butter.

4. Bread
I feel the forked tongue curl
in the pit of her stomach.

We know what she will do.

Like the mold that crept across the
rye,
she snuck them into the wood,
stale crumbs rattling in her brain.

6. Bowl
She tried to run away again.
Little girls always know.

But her brother understands –
we have to fill our bellies
to live in this world.

We take what is easy,
what we can get.

to say one is blessed
Alex Palmer

To say one is blessed
Blessed is luck with God
And what is God?
I knew once, but then I forgot
He's tricky like that.

I always wanted to know
I dressed up for church,
Maybe Jesus wore a suit on off days.
Maybe he bought it at a discount store
to help the economy.

I never knew, but I never stopped asking.
Then among from my teenage divinity, I found the religion that shook.
Or maybe they Quaked, but they did not cross or kneel.
I thought the girls were cuter, so I joined.

My suit was at the dry cleaners,
I tested the water by wearing jeans
Little did I know, Jeans were the popular attire.

There was no Bible, but there was talk of God
There was no preacher, but there was a voice from within.
They fed me cheese potatoes afterwards, and asked me no questions.

My head was never forced into the sacred water, my sins were never relinquished.
However as I arose to speak, among my congregation of friends,
It was I delivering the sermon, and maybe for a minute I knew what God was.
But then I forgot, he's tricky like that.
From ages four through nine, I had a long succession of pet caterpillars. While other girls were naming their dolls Mary, Bessie, and Ashley, I collected my caterpillars, seized from their hiding spots on tree trunks and mossy rocks and confined to a plastic terrarium to be burdened with names like Seamus Waddington, Marjorie Watson-Crick, and Cerulean Wigglebottom. It was the naming, rather than the capture, of each of these new acquisitions that filled me with joy. Each of the monikers was chosen because it rolled off my tongue with either a grace or rhythm that fascinated me. As I did not—and still do—not have any idea what exactly caterpillars eat, my friends came and went with alarming frequency. And though I mourned their each and every loss, each new capture was the opportunity for a new name. Species and class did not hinder me. There was no puppy called Buddy, no cat named Shadow. There was instead a Cleopatra, a Napoleon, and a Confucius.

My fascination did not end with names; rather, it encompassed all words, written or spoken. There was an inherent mystery in every misleading “ph”, every silent “e”, every accented syllable. The more complex the words, the more convoluted their arrangements, the more I loved them. I contorted them and drawled them out until they were unrecognizable. I collected them like trophies, writing them on scraps of paper and corners of notebooks, until words swam through my head like schools of brightly colored fish.

By middle school, I was gobbling up words in any way I could get at them: reading books, watching movies, listening to adult conversation. Every new vocabulary word uttered by an actor or tossed about by an adult caught my ear; every prettily turned phrase in a book prompted a new scrap of paper emblazoned with the word. But something changed. Now words weren’t just an auditory pleasure. Before words had been recorded so that I would never run the risk of forgetting them. But now they were written aesthetically, every curled “g”, every flourished last letter a joyful pleasure to see and comprehend. Writing became as critical as reading. I began to understand the power of words in the world. If you cared to write it down, it would almost always affect another human being. I continued learning, more and more eager.

A passion that I cannot remember acquiring has stayed with me throughout my childhood and into my present. Now, I study words as a student: I read them, analyze them, write them, construct them. Each and every one is a unique shape, size, and meaning. Each word embodies a thing or an idea or an emotion, abstract concepts defined and shaped by what we choose to call them. They are the gateways to thought and, more importantly, to reason, the characteristic which sets mankind apart from every other creature on the planet. Lord Byron once said that “words are things, and a small drop of ink, falling like dew upon a thought, produces that which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.” Every scientific theory, every political revolution, every literary advancement,
began with putting the idea into words, by creating an idea and cementing it in words, spoken, written, and arranged. The distress of the colonies was only a vaguely defined complaint until it was explored and set down in "Declaration of Independence," arguably our nation's most celebrated document and, just as importantly, a beautifully constructed and skillfully executed body of words. Words provoke thought and thought provokes advancement. This was what I was looking for when I chose to study words.

When I entered college, I jumped into my studies with a zeal for learning like never before. After all, I finally got to choose what I studied, and there was never a doubt in my mind it was to be that long-coveted English major. What could be more wonderfully satisfying than to be able to read and write, to use the craft of words, for a living, both as a student and as a graduate later in life?

After nearly four years, I found an undergraduate degree was simply not enough. But upon looking into graduate school and meeting with different doctors in English, as well as other fields, I was shocked to find that many considered my choice of career a foolish one. After all, a graduate student who completes a marketing degree earns, on average, almost twice the salary of a grad student with a degree in English, or so one professor told me. For every one opening in an English-related field, there are a hundred openings for a computer science major, another one said. Why choose something at which it is so difficult to succeed, something so archaic, as if something just because something was old meant it was useless.

For the first time, I was confronted with the fact that words are dying out. Sure, there will always be spoken word; we must communicate. But the written word, the disciplines of syntax and diction and linguistics, the beauty of the thing, is fading into the whirls and clicks and lights of a technological society. We speak with a mish-mash of slurred words, misused clauses, and fragmentary thoughts. One need only look back to the times of William Shakespeare, Lord Byron, and Jane Austen to see the disturbing pattern. Not only has their way of speaking fallen out of style, their names and works are sliding into the dim recesses of the past. Words like "incontrovertible," "phantasmagoric," and "myriad" are being abandoned for ones like "true," "creepy," and "lots." I once tutored a student, whom had come to me for help in a literature class, respond to a comment about the work of Thomas Hardy with a blank look.

I have continued my studies. I have refused to reshape my dreams to contour to the demands of a career in marketing. Only one thing has changed. Before coming to college, I wanted to study words; I knew that. But now, I want to teach them. In a world where people can say words like "telekinesis" and "calibration," but cannot spell them, cannot picture them in their minds, I want to teach. I want to fight a battle against the dying out of poetic language. I want my students to know who Thomas Hardy was and how to spell "sequential compression," as well as how to use it on their computers.

I still collect words like pretty pebbles, each one unique and beautiful in its simplicity. Words like "liberty" and "eternity" still evoke the same tingling sensation when I roll them over my tongue. Words like "spontaneity" and "onomatopoeia" still carry that whimsical note. I still arrange and rearrange and place them like pieces in a puzzle, trying to convey a meaning which can only be revealed through the nuances of language. I still find a childish delight in naming a pet something ridiculous just because of the way the name sounds. But now I use words for more than just childish entertainment. Words are to be used, evoked, communicated—and taught. For how can we learn but from the words that tell us the secrets of the world?