THE PEEL LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE

SPRING 2010
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>Emily Chidester</td>
<td>Cornstalk Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>Emily Chidester</td>
<td>Lauren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>Eleanor Pierce</td>
<td>Clench</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>Andrew H. Baker</td>
<td>How to Get Kicked Out of Church on Easter Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>Catherine L. Gonzalez</td>
<td>Fifteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>Justina E. Brinkley</td>
<td>Romanov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010</td>
<td>Andrew H. Baker</td>
<td>I Didn’t Know I Was Supposed to be Looking for Him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>011</td>
<td>Colby Rabon</td>
<td>Sqrambled Scuares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>012</td>
<td>Diane Vachon</td>
<td>My Father, the Almoner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>013</td>
<td>Leah E. Wilson</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>014</td>
<td>Taylor Bracher</td>
<td>Flowers in a Tuxedo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>015</td>
<td>Jamiekay Young</td>
<td>Wild Emergence 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>016</td>
<td>B. A. Etheridge</td>
<td>The Baby Boomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>017</td>
<td>Diane Vachon</td>
<td>Have No Uncle Who Lives in Vermont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>018</td>
<td>Renée V. Eble</td>
<td>Too Many Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>019</td>
<td>Andrew H. Baker</td>
<td>I Didn’t Know I Was Supposed to be Looking for Him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020</td>
<td>Hannah Ferrara</td>
<td>Caged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>021</td>
<td>Jamiekay Young</td>
<td>Naked Globe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>022</td>
<td>Colby Rabon</td>
<td>Ferry to Ocracoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>023</td>
<td>Kira J. Isom</td>
<td>Dolphin in Baja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>024</td>
<td>Kristianna Bartlow</td>
<td>Vice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>025</td>
<td>Emily Chidester</td>
<td>Germany, Shadows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>026</td>
<td>Diane Vachon</td>
<td>Understanding Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>027</td>
<td>Kathryn Kehoe</td>
<td>Atlanta Summers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>028</td>
<td>Hannah Ferrara</td>
<td>Mates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>029</td>
<td>Logan Fields</td>
<td>From the Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>030</td>
<td>Calli Woodham</td>
<td>German Spies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>031</td>
<td>Daniella Briceño Villamil</td>
<td>Frutos De La Raíz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>032</td>
<td>Jamiekay Young</td>
<td>Heroes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>033</td>
<td>Simon O’Reilly</td>
<td>Devil in CT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>034</td>
<td>Sarah Mosseller</td>
<td>Just Facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>035</td>
<td>Emily Chidester</td>
<td>Skinny Shadow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>036</td>
<td>Jaimie McGirt</td>
<td>Wild Emergence 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>037</td>
<td>B. A. Etheridge</td>
<td>The Baby Boomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>038</td>
<td>Emily Chidester</td>
<td>Germany, Shadows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>039</td>
<td>Diane Vachon</td>
<td>Understanding Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>040</td>
<td>Kathryn Kehoe</td>
<td>Atlanta Summers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>041</td>
<td>Hannah Ferrara</td>
<td>Mates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>042</td>
<td>Logan Fields</td>
<td>From the Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>043</td>
<td>Calli Woodham</td>
<td>German Spies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>044</td>
<td>Daniella Briceño Villamil</td>
<td>Frutos De La Raíz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>045</td>
<td>Jamiekay Young</td>
<td>Heroes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eleanor Pierce

At three years old I played atop the warm antique radiator of our Carlisle house with my twin, Ian, the C-section baby dragged out in the wake of my natural arrival. Dad’s metal tool box heated between us, its red top opened like /f_iery jaws when we excavated its insides for illicit toys. Ian held the rubber-gripped pliers in his /f_ist. Steel teeth separated to reveal a mouth that invited his little boy /f_ingers within.

I pleaded with him briefly to stop, a twin’s sense of the trauma to unfold. When the clench came, his baby skin pinched and puckered as he screamed for our hidden parents. Dad in the kitchen burning toasted cheese, Mom buried in her off_office at Dickinson College. I cried as he cradled his tortured hand while the radiator clanked beneath.

The April before we turned eighteen, Ian was depressed and told our parents to go fuck themselves. Mom took me aside to tell me what she echoed all my life: always look out for your brother. When we neighborhood kids rode to the Forbes Street ghetto for a party to celebrate the springtime bloom, I couldn’t budge Ian from the car. Head pressed against the leather of the Mercedes seat, he locked the car doors at my drunken pleas: come out, play.

While he sat in the dark, I set the backyard ablaze with his old party trick: a bucket of Crisco and a couple of matches. The fat burned like a geyser as the boys spit bozone for fodder.

At home Ian paced the white marble tile of the kitchen before wrenching the medicine cabinet apart. He lined yellow cylinders like martyrs and poured antidepressants into the porcelain sink, drowned dozens of whites and blues under the faucet blast. He switched on the garbage disposal. The metal gird choked. The drain clogged and sucked, groaned like the canal that birthed us, begging for our bodies to crawl back inside. To let the boy be first.

After Ian crept upstairs, I grasped the cycle of his life, spun so differently than mine: medications and therapies, always pulled out of where he wanted to be. I thought he was going to kill himself.

Our parents attended some academic conference in DC, I couldn’t remember which four-star hotel they booked. If he did something drastic, I wouldn’t know where to call.

I followed him to his room. He crashed on plaid sheets as I crouched on the floor. I stayed up all night and waited for his final clench to fold.

Andrew H. Baker

Hunched over on the couch in boxer briefs Easter morning, I bit into the end of a Cadbury Crème Egg and sucked out the golden innards like some poaching harpy eating the young from its neighbor’s nest.

All the other eggs looked on in horror praying to their confectionary god for salvation. Fortunately though, one egg was enough and I left to get dressed for church, my stomach full with their chocolate crème martyr.

Later, at Easter service, restless in my pew I felt the spirit of the resurrection in my gut and the sugar-coated savior’s power over mine as he forced his way back up my throat and onto the burgundy pulpit carpet.

I could hear the other eggs now, laughing at me in their green faux-grass /f_illed basket, shouting “He is risen!” and rejoicing on my misfortune. But it only helped them cope with the fact that their tinfoil would be ripped off next and their honey yolk sucked out as many had been prior.

CLENCH

HOW TO GET KICKED OUT OF CHURCH ON EASTER SUNDAY

Andrew H. Baker
I was lying on my back, staring at the ceiling, and you were sitting, staring at the wall and at me and at the bookcase and at nothing in particular.

“Do you want to hear a story?”

“Why not?”

The story was about your 8th grade trip to Washington and how you made paper airplanes in the Air and Space Museum and saw through the tourist traps and ran your poor chaperones ragged. I listened to most of it, and it made me laugh. I laughed partly because of the way you kept glancing at me and then away, checking to make sure you weren’t boring me. And you weren’t, of course, and you knew you weren’t. But it was nice of you to check. Ridiculous, but nice. And it was a nice story, I think. It was nice to hear you tell it.

It was later and now I was wandering around your room, examining old pictures and homework and CDs and video games, and you were still sitting, watching me and reliving your childhood as I picked it up and set it back down piece by piece.

“Do you mind if I tell you another story?”

“Of course not.”

This story was about a picture I had just found, a homerun you had made in Little League and how impressed all your friends were and how your parents treated you to ice cream after the game. You were proud of your 10-year-old self and so was I. And again I laughed and mostly listened, and again you were so anxious that I be content, and again we both knew your concern was unnecessary.

It was later still, and now I was sitting on the floor, lazily scratching your dog’s ear. You were lying on your stomach, your head supported by your arms, your feet beating the floor occasionally in no particular rhythm. You were yawning compulsively but continually insisting that you weren’t tired. And that was good, because if you were tired then it was time for me to leave.

“Want me to tell a story?”

“Sure, go for it.”

I don’t remember what my story was about, just like you probably don’t remember telling me specifically about D.C. and Little League. I do remember that you laughed and you looked like you were listening, mostly.

It wasn’t necessary for us to fill the silences with the stories. We didn’t speak because the moment called for conversation, or because of any discomfort in the emptiness; there was no awkward tension to be relieved. The stories were simply the method of learning each other that we happened to pick on that particular night. And it wasn’t through the stories themselves that we learned, but through ourselves as the stories were told. I discovered new pieces of you not so much in your past baseball prowess as in the way you tilted your head as you talked about it, and in the way you lifted your eyes to the ceiling and then lowered them to find me and reassure yourself of my approval. We told each other stories that night for the sake of laughs we hadn’t heard before and facial expressions we had never noticed, but also for the more familiar smiles and shrugs that we knew so well how to elicit.

We learned each other that night, and the nights and weeks and months and years after that, and yesterday, and we will again tomorrow. Years from now maybe neither of us will remember that night, or all the nights that have happened since, but we’ll still remember the smiles, the shrugs, the sighs—the lines between the stories. And maybe then our stories will be about the way we knew each other. And maybe as we tell them we’ll find that we’re still learning.
The pool water at our duplex in Matthews was usually dirty. My father always forgot to change the chemicals after we moved from Baltimore. He used to rub my mother’s swollen belly and wink and say that another precious life pushed him into selling policies for Royal Insurance. Sometimes I heard him waking up when it was still dark outside. I sat on the stairs in my faded pajamas and watched him holding and kissing my baby sister while my mother was still sleeping.

When he came home he rubbed his eyes and squeezed the bridge of his nose because he didn’t remember that chili needed kidneys, not lentils. My mother yelled standing over the stove holding my sister while hair from her messy bun stuck to her face.

For committing this crime my father, the almoner, hung his head staring at our grubby kitchen tiles, lifting the cans like money into her needy hands. He talked quietly at dinner and slept loudly on the gaudy purple futon in the room by the front door.

But on Friday evening he came home, smiling with take-out from Magnolia’s. And my mother was sitting in the sunroom singing along to Cat Stevens and nursing my baby sister. I folded the napkins making sure the creases lined up just right while Dad grabbed plates and Mom put Leia to bed. Dad told jokes during dinner and fed Mom from the cheap, plastic forks.

Saturday, my father and I cleaned the pool with our netted fishing poles, catching green leaves and twigs, heaving them onto the pavement. We played Olympics and I raced against his watch as Angel Martino. My mother was stretched out on the warm, plastic lounge chair asking my father to please check on the baby.

But my father waited for my hand to slap the dry pavement on the other end. He raised me up in both arms, called me his lady-in-waiting and it was all I could do to stop from asking him for a crown.

My mother describes my father the day they first met: His spry legs, pinched butt, the half-naked body stretched across a volleyball net at the Carolina court. Dark hair and eyes, he’s handsome. She showed me his Coast Guard picture.

When she speaks of him at fifty-three, she uses oafish terms: His clumsy fingers, lumbering gait, the careless impertinence, that threw her caribou skin slippers away.

She sips tea from a Havilland china cup, the white gold band slips loose on her ring finger. This is marriage, it breaks husband and wife.
The young man drives very fast through the neighborhood. He is free from trepidation and does not think of the ramifications of his actions, and it is because of this carelessness that the old man on the side of the road, tending to his flowers or plants of some sort, shakes his index finger at the young man. The old man, whose name is Humphrey, wishes he could tell the young man that he should not be driving so fast in this neighborhood where small children play, but he cannot because the young man sees Humphrey as nothing more than a senile elderly man whose years have made him hate the young man’s youth—like Humphrey’s parents must have once hated his own generation for their rock-n-roll music and their pants-wearing women and their civil rights.

This is not the case, for behind Humphrey’s weary eyes, he is still very much the same as he was fifty years ago, but with more experience under his belt. No, no, Humphrey is not bitter at all. He wants to share with the young man his experiences, teach him a few things. He wants to speak of how love is real and how carbs really aren’t bad for you and forgive and how she smiles like she’s asking to die. He wishes he could tell the young man that he should not be driving so fast in this neighborhood where small children play, but he cannot because the young man sees Humphrey as nothing more than a senile elderly man whose years have made him hate the young man’s youth—like Humphrey’s parents must have once hated his own generation for their rock-n-roll music and their pants-wearing women and their civil rights.

I looked through the peephole of my front door and saw the corroded number 3 clinging to the frame of her door. It was 6:13 A.M. I had set for 6:15, but she would hit sleep and wake up at 6:45, already behind in her day. I heard the shrill ring echoing through the velum walls of her apartment. I heard her hand slam against the screaming my head, and then silence. After two minutes, the ringing stopped, but began again on her collarbones and swept lightly around the curves of her breasts. She said let’s not go to work today and I said okay. She said do you want to go out and I told her yes and we talked for a while and I watched her. Her skin was smooth and freckled, but only in certain places. They dotted her cheekbones then stopped, but began again on her collarbones and swept lightly around the curves of her breasts. She said let’s not go to work today and I said okay. She said do you want to go out and I said let’s stay in. She told me to get two wine glasses and I played innocent and asked her, but so early in the morning? And she laughed and blushed and said yes and I told her I’d be right back. I walked back through the door of my apartment, heart throbbing in my throat, and my blood pumping her name through my veins. I had waited for so long. Saffron Lennox.

Thirty minutes later I knocked on her door. I smelled and showed her the peaches my uncle had sent me from his farm in Vermont. I told her I had heard her getting ready and though I’d come by and offer her one. She told me they were her favorite and how did I know and that she wasn’t going to have time for breakfast. I gave her three from the box. I watched her bite into one and she opened the door further. She asked me did I want to come in and I told her yes and we talked for a while and I watched her. Her skin was smooth and freckled, but only in certain places. They dotted her cheekbones then stopped, but began again on her collarbones and swept lightly around the curves of her breasts. She said let’s not go to work today and I said okay. She said do you want to go out and I said let’s stay in. She told me to get two wine glasses and I played innocent and asked her, but so early in the morning? And she laughed and blushed and said yes and I told her I’d be right back. I walked back through the door of my apartment, heart throbbing in my throat, and my blood pumping her name through my veins. I had waited for so long. Saffron Lennox.

I walked back into her apartment with two stemless wine glasses, her favorite, and an old Christmas love story with Barbara Stanwyck. I grinned and held up the movie and I thought often of Christmas. She sat in her living room with the candles lit, drinking boxed wine and watching winter love stories. She was especially happy in November.

...
It just takes a certain shade of night, an empty street, and footsteps behind me for my pupils to dilate and the panic to come. Our paces drum along together, a bass and snare, beating with our heels on the sidewalk. I image how powerful he is by his stride, but I could never dare to look at him, or glance at his shadow. My cousin described it to me once—She woke up, confused, and yelled over her shoulder for him to stop, but he said it was alright, and to trust him.

I slide my shoulder bag over to hide my ass from him. Just like when I was four and I walked up the stairs backwards because I was afraid my father was going to spank me. The tread quickens. He’s probably late or drunk, but then my mother’s voice interrupts, “You trust too easily” and I’m listening to his feet again. How would he do it, against the brick wall of the street shops, or would he take me away from here to tear me apart? The street is empty, and it’s late enough that if I screamed, no one would come rescue me.

I see the sign that squeaks in the wind outside my second story window. At my building, I crush through the door, pulse peaking. I hold my breath down the white hallway, up the spiral staircase, until the lock clicks behind me.

Andrew H. Baker

I found Jesus this morning in a garage sale bin manger, crying in painted plastic effigy. Wisemen met fates of firecrackers and a Virgin was chewed up by the dog. The sole survivor of too many Xmases.

I found Jesus on a leash held tight by demagogues and pledge-drivers. Red Dragons making fund raised fortunes in the name of a penniless savior. Prophetic words roll off the tongues of blasphemers so well. I found Jesus on a street corner speaking in hate and bass, cursing people to damnation and carrying around signs of an end. I thought he loved us all, but I could be wrong.

I found Jesus for a dollar and some change in his Solo cup. He sings Sermons to deaf ears and this sidewalk is his Mount. I think he should get a job, but maybe he’s already got one.
FERRY TO OCRACOKE
Photography
Colby Rabon

DOLPHIN IN BAJA
Photography
Kira J. Ilson
Morgan Crawford sat with her forehead pressed against the pane of her bedroom window, watching the sheet turn to fog and spread like a spider’s web across the glass. She had been there for nearly an hour, looking down from the second story of the Warren household, her eyes trained on the foggy, rain-slick street below, watching cars splash through the puddles that collected along the curb. It was soaking, lightning, driving rain as it pounded on the roof, numbing her nerves, jarring them, a thousand worries had been growing at her brain all through the humid June morning, baring into the grey matter like worms and making her head throb in rhythm with her quick, stuttering heartbeat. She drew in a shaky breath and closed her eyes, pulling away from the glass and leaning back in her chair.

Jack Warren, Morgan’s stepfather and the incumbent mayor of Dublin, Georgia, was due home in a few hours. Morgan had been waiting for the better part of the day, struggling to calm her jittery nerves, pacing around the room before settling into her current position beside the window. After another long, bitter conversation with her mother, she was anxiously awaiting the sound of gravel crunching in the driveway and the echoing click of the front door’s latch, footsteps pounding gravel crunching in the driveway and the echoing click of the front door’s latch, footsteps pounding gravel crunching in the driveway and the echoing click of the front door’s latch, footsteps pounding grav... 

Kristianna Bartow

---

To be careful-“I don’t want to talk about it,” Morgan repeated, leaning her jaw tightly. Her eyes traced the pattern of wood grain on the table, avoiding her mother’s gaze. “Morgan,” her mother responded with a heavy, troubled sigh, closing her eyes tightly for a moment. “I know how terrible this must be for you. It’s not easy, but that’s why we’ve always told you to be careful-““Mom, please.”“Not to talk about it, but to talk when you’re doing something you know you shouldn’t.” She continued, ignoring her daughter’s protests. “There are consequences to every action; I thought you would be old enough to understand that by now. And sometimes those consequences don’t have an easy way out.”“Morgan,” her mother’s voice had grown sharper and she knew her eyes had narrowed into a pointed glare. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stupid.”“I didn’t say that.”“You might well think she’s my fault,” she scoffed, running the stem of her spoon around the bowl’s edge. “You think I was just being stub...
Morgan shrugged and swung her legs over the edge of the bed, sitting up and pushing the pile of magazines she had been reading into the floor. Jack came and sat next to her, and she heard the mattress groan under his weight, the springs squeaking as he readjusted. He folded his hands in his lap and looked towards the window, pressing his lips together in a thin, tight line before he began speaking.

"Your mom’s worried about you, you know," he started, and Morgan couldn’t help but sigh. He laughed quietly and glanced away from her, his gaze resting against the corner of his eye. "I know we’re a couple, but... I’m just thinking about hearing that."

"I don’t know why she’s worried. I haven’t done anything wrong."

"I know. It just... it’s so weird."

"Don’t worry about it," Jack muttered as he leaned closer. She pulled her leg away and glanced up at him, her sharp eyes klarning at him. "She’ll be sorry to hear you say that," Jack said quietly as Morgan slammed the door behind her.

"Whatever," she muttered, hoping down from the bed and grabbing the pile of magazines off of the floor. "Talk soon.

"I’m here."

"I don’t know why she’s worried. I haven’t done anything wrong."

"I know, but she's probably worried about you."

"Whatever," she muttered, hoping down from the bed and grabbing the pile of magazines off of the floor. "Talk soon."
"What are you doing?" She tried to keep her voice from shaking but she felt her throat seize together and her tongue stick to the roof of her mouth like cotton and the words came out as a miserable squeak, swallowed up by the carpet and the bedspread and the walls that suddenly felt too small, too close. Jack didn’t answer, but there was the brush of his lips against her collarbone and his hand trailing beneath her.

Morgan had woken up to the unfamiliar sensation of her inside churn, crawling and slithering over one another before settling like a ball of hot lead deep in the pit in her stomach. She threw her covers to the side and stumbled blindly to the bathroom, one hand gripping the sink while the other wiped away the thin sheen of sweat that had trickled out across her forehead. She hated wasting her last few quarters on the mirror, taking in her ragged hair and damp, pale skin, before something surged in her gut and she leaned over the sink, the sound of her gagging echoing out into the hallway. Footsteps echoed outside and she said, "Help me, mom." Her voice was urgent and concerned.

"Honey, are you alright?" Eliza strode into the bathroom, tugging the sash of her robe tighter around her waist and coming to stand beside Morgan, pulling her hair away from the mess in the sink. The back of her neck was damp, with strands of dark hair sticking against the pallid skin. Morgan waved her away, coughing slightly and wiping her mouth with the back of her hand.

"Go ahead, honey. I’m glad you’re up. Let’s get you cleaned up, straightening and reaching for the hand towel. The nausea to pass as quickly as it had come on, and she breathed a sigh of relief as her stomach settled. "Just food poisoning or something. Do we have any mouthwash?"

"There’s some downstairs," her mother cooed gently, brushing a stray hair away from her daughter’s face. "I’ll go get it. Are you sure you don’t need to go to the doctor?" Morgan shook her head in response, reaching for the faucet as Eliza turned and left the bathroom. Morgan returned her gaze to the mirror, examining her reflection again and gently prodding at the dark bags that had developed under her eyes.

"Food poisoning," she repeated, tearing her eyes away from the image and reaching for her toothbrush. And that was the story she stuck with for the next two weeks, until the violent sickness left her exhausted that she asked Eliza to drive her to the pharmacy. Later that evening, sitting on the edge of the marble countertop and trying to control her trembling hands, her suspicions were confirmed by two short pink lines running parallel across the surface of the First Response test clutched between two fingers. Eliza had looked over the pregnancy test and her eyes had widened with horror, then narrowed, casting a clearly misplaced that Morgan felt a sharp laugh caught in her throat. Her mother’s thoughts turned to images of boyfriends and parties and broken condoms, and when she confronted Morgan with the question, about the need to make this go away and pretend it had never been, Morgan had clung to her, pretending that Morgan had never made a "stupid mistake" and had never "gotten carried away," Morgan had fingered her shoulder, the same as fingers digging into her flesh and hands tangling in her hair and there was the taste of thick, bitter bile rising in her throat. She jerked away. Eliza clucked disapprovingly from the armchair across the room, a frown pulling tightly at the corner of her lips.

"Morgan has something to tell you, darling."

"What is it?" Morgan asked as she shrugged out of his coat, smiling at his wife as his eyes darted nervously to Morgan’s face. She stared back at him with a blank, weary expression, unreadable. A light sweat broke out beneath his collar and he raised his hands towards his face, fingers fumbling against the knot.

"I’m pregnant, Morgan," Eliza prompted, sitting straight as a board, her eyes locked on Morgan’s empty gaze. "You need to let him know."

She looked at Jack, then turned slowly towards her mother and shook her head. "I don’t need to tell him anything."

A tense moment of silent passed as Morgan lowered her gaze to the plush white carpet, clasching the muscle of her jaw tightly closed. She wanted to turn back into the counter, to go to the kitchen, to the dining room and tugging from somewhere deep inside her stomach, like something readjusting itself. Something alive. Eliza cleared her throat loudly.

"This is what happens when you make a mistake, Morgan," she said firmly, hands folded in her lap.

"There are consequences. As your stepfather, it’s his right to—"

"Is something wrong?" Jack cut in, again searching his stepdaughter’s face. "Are you alright, sugar?"

"Oh, I feel a bit out of a sudden, bitter laugh, jerking her head up to meet Jack’s look of concern. She stood at him incredulously, her lips parted slightly and her eyes wide with dismay.

"This is something’s wrong." She repeated the statement, her words flat and strangled as her voice quivered. She shook her head, rubbing her fingers against her left hand. "I’m pregnant."

"I’m glad you think this is funny," Eliza snapped, rising from her chair, glaring down at her daughter.

"Personally, I don’t think it’s funny."

"There’s not one, mom," Morgan retorted, looking at her mother’s face and saw her scowling furiously, eyes narrowed in the same glover of accusation she had worn since learning of her daughter’s condition. The same silent, stinging frown that blamed her for everything, disapproving and critical and wrapped up in an impenetrable fog of concern over Jack Warren’s career. Jack Warren’s reputation. Jack Warren and his charming, crooked smile and his firm handshake and his eloquent speeches and his nails clawing at the pale skin of her hand. Morgan had slid her arms into the sleeves of her jacket. She couldn’t leave. Leaving meant too many things, things that should matter, things that meant she had walked across the living room to the ornate coat rack that stood beside the entrance to the foyer. Grabbing her jacket, she glanced back at Eliza. "You can tell him if you want to," she muttered, jerking her head in Jack’s direction.

"I’m leaving."

"What do you mean, you’re leaving?" Eliza called, following her out into foyer and pausing in the living room doorway. "You can’t leave."

Morgan took a deep breath and felt something cold and steelly rise up inside of her, making her shiver as she slid her arms into the sleeves of her jacket. She couldn’t leave. Leaving meant too many things, things that were dark and distant and far away from the safety of her quiet house and her pristine neighborhood. Her clothes and her bed and the smell of her mother’s perfume. Things that should matter, things that meant she had had to stay. The thought of leaving made her nerves prickle and the hairs of her arm stand on edge, like an electrical current skimming across the surface of her skin.

"I’m leaving," she said again, turning towards the door, wondering why her voice sounded so firm and solid. Wondering if it was a lie. Her mother’s sharp intake of breath made her glance over her shoulder.

"You don’t have to be silly. Come back to the living room." A slight quiver in Morgan’s voice was the Eliza’s attempt at a firm, even tone, and Morgan thought she saw her eyes shining, wet and wide. She looked small, helpless against the dark frame of the doorway, extending a hand towards her daughter.

Morgan looked at her mother for a long moment before taking a step towards the front door. She reached down and tucked on the zipper of her jacket. It was still raining outside. 29
Daniella Briceno Villamil

PREY
Batik technique, Wax on Fabric
Daniella Briceño Villamil

FRUTOS DE LA RAIZ
Batik technique, Wax on Fabric
Daniella Briceño Villamil

SUPPORT
Drawing & Mixed Media
Justina E. Brinkley

ATLANTA SUMMERS
But then he wasn't right, you know that? He left me with no choice. Blame him, not me. I think what happened was right, and I guess maybe that isn't fair. I knew it was only a statement, a recollection of events, but my head was reeling and I could not think straight. The words collided with one another as I tried to focus, rearranging themselves to form what I wanted to see, what they were supposed to say. Why was this so hard? I was writing the truth, wasn't it? It was a simple task of taking the series of events which led to my current situation and placing them neatly on paper. The officer said no emotion, just facts.

I gripped the clear, octagonal plastic of the pen the officer had given me. I grimaced, looking down at the cheap pen that rattled every time I forced my hand to remember the intricate dance to form each letter, each word, each phrase masquerading as the truth. This pen was filled with sludge; it smeared across the page, streaks marring the side of my hand as if the legerdemain I had written were attempting to return to the source. I began to write again, ignoring the throbbing pain in my hand that coincided with the pounding of my heart to force the blood through my veins, slow like liquid metal. The words sat there on the carbon paper, staring up at me. The letters collided with each other as I tried to focus, rearranging themselves to form what I wanted to see, what they were supposed to say. The words sat there on the carbon paper, staring up at me. Why was this so hard? I was writing the truth, wasn't I? It was a simple task of taking the series of events which led to my current situation and placing them neatly on paper. The officer said no emotion, just facts.

I gritted my teeth, trying to remain calm. I had to. I was saving myself. I had to. No one else would.

The words danced around in my head, threatening to break me. The words were supposed to say. Why was this so hard? I was writing the truth, wasn't I? It was a simple task of taking the series of events which led to my current situation and placing them neatly on paper. The officer said no emotion, just facts.

I gritted my teeth, trying to remain calm. I had to. I was saving myself. I had to. No one else would.

The words danced around in my head, threatening to break me. The words were supposed to say. Why was this so hard? I was writing the truth, wasn't I? It was a simple task of taking the series of events which led to my current situation and placing them neatly on paper. The officer said no emotion, just facts.
Mark wrapped his beefy arm around her shoulders as they strolled into the banquet hall. Someone was making a speech. Heads turned as the door opened and slammed closed, looking them up and down before slowly returning focus to the man at the podium. Marie nodded to a seat in the back, but Mark pushed forward, walking down the aisle, his Brown Boot Works leaving mud prints on the carpet. He wore blue jeans with a brown corduroy suit jacket, even though he had begged him to wear his father’s navy suit.

Mark hated that thing. It was old, worn in the elbows and it smelled like the cheap cigars his father used to smoke. Marie remembered standing behind Mark at his father’s funeral. He wore that same old suit, and she couldn’t help it of a time he had looked finely. He smiled a sight. He slammed his fist through the thin wall of his apartment and collapsed at Marie’s feet, sobbing into her stomach, her arms wrapped around him. That was almost a year ago, but Marie still felt his hot tears on her skin and felt like she could see beneath her skin, her muscles, her veins. When she sat up at night, listening to the pencil across the paper. She was always bent low over her desk, trying her hardest to take down every word, every concept her portly professor conveyed. When she sat up at night, listening to his words, she knew all of them, but she didn’t really know them. She didn’t really know anyone.

For two years, she went to her classes every Tuesday and Thursday night, amidst the working moms and younger kids who couldn’t afford to go to the big state schools. She wanted to make friends, but every moment she spent learning about one of her classmates she wasted a little more of the money her daddy had left her, and she couldn’t do that. So instead of taking part in the back-of-the-classroom gossip, she took copious notes as fast as she could move her pencil across the paper. She was always bent low over her desk, trying her hardest to take down every word, every concept her poorly professor conveyed. When she set up at night, listening to Mark snore into his cavernous bedroom, she would read over her notes again and again, glad to see her skin, her muscles, her veins. When she sat up at night, listening to his words, she knew all of them, but she didn’t really know them. She didn’t really know anyone. She was rambling, every reason they should stay fighting to exit her mouth first. She closed her eyes and opened them, hoping that it wasn’t happening again.

“Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear. “Mark, please, I haven’t even gotten my award yet,” she said, trying to keep her voice to contain her mounting fear.
She stared straight ahead but couldn’t find a point of focus. She fought to buckle her seatbelt as she slid from side to side, forced against the door as Mark took another sharp curve. He reached over and slipped his hand under her dress as she tried to lean away from him, his fingers crawling up her thighs. His hand was rough, and each touch was like an iron brand scalding her skin. She couldn’t do it. She wouldn’t do it. Not again. Not ever again.

Marie took a deep breath and reached out to grip the wheel. She was tiny, but she pulled with all of her might, guiding his blue truck towards the guard rail. He was too drunk to notice. Raging blue steel met the guard rail with a deafening crash. The force of impact and the weight of her desperation slammed her against the door across her chest. She couldn’t feel her body as she was flung against the door, handle digging into her ribs, head cracking against the window. Mark struck the windshield and then traveled through it; his body moving so fluidly before he hit the pavement and rolled to a stop.

Marie didn’t know how long she lay there, seatbelt almost choking her as her head lolled forward against her chest, but it seemed like an eternity. Maybe hours. She could hear him moaning, in pain, like she had moaned in pain. Her hands traced shakily down the belt before she unbuckled it, collapsing against the door. Marie took a deep breath and found a strength she did not know she possessed.

Every memory flooded her, the good and the bad. She remembered the pain, and the hurt and every time she had sobbed into his chest, begging him to stop, begging him to love her. She wrenched open the door and started towards him. She fell to her knees, but continued to crawl towards Mark’s body, bits of glass digging into her knees and the palms of her hands. Cars came around the bend and screeched to a halt, faceless strangers clambering out of their cars. She crawled towards him despite the pounding of her brain against her skull. She felt the warm, sticky touch of blood as it rolled down her cheeks. She didn’t care anymore. She had cared for too long.

Marie climbed on top of Mark and looked down at him, eyes wide and staring. His face was awash with red, almost unrecognizable. She clenched her fist and struck his face, feeling the sharp stubble on his cheek dig into her hand. She was unaware of the people that ran to her side; she struck him again and again, her small hand swelling as she forced every pain and every hurt out of herself and into his stone jaw. He was already cold. She didn’t notice.

Something pulled me off him. Or someone. Perhaps it was my conscience, but probably not, he took that from me too. I did not kill Marcus Neil. I didn’t. He killed a part of me every day, and he finally got what was coming to him.

I placed the pen neatly beside the paper and pushed it towards the officer who waited across from me expectantly. Every muscle and every bone in my body screamed as I stood, the officer coming to stand behind me. He took one of my arms in his unforgiving hand and guided me out of the room, the bright fluorescent light stinging my eyes. We walked to the end of the hall just as a voice issued from the holster on his hip,

“That’s a negative, sir. Drunk driver was dead on impact. File it, then you can let ‘er go.”
GERMAN SPIES
Drawing
Calli Woodham
At the poetry opening in Tallinn we drink with strangers. The toothless men that live in the commune pass Balsam like a water jug.

I play piano with the two French men who kiss my bare shoulders calling me Regina, Regina. Une fois plus, s'il te plaît, they are begging. You sit in the corner surrounded by only the torn cushions in your chair watching me go back and forth taking bottles of pilsner from the green crate. Twice you tell me to stop and I throw my head with raucous laughter. I’m dangerous, even to myself.

The author reads from an ugly, worn armchair in a language we can’t understand. I laugh, hard when he points at the tiny drawings that stand as titles, people drawn with animated faces and legs like toothpicks. I hope his poetry isn’t fruitless filled with labored love and limbs. There’s a sauna behind the house and when the crate is empty we take off our clothes and sit inside. You scowl when my bra drops to the dirty floor, but even the boy who believes in God is sprawled over the warm wood watching the soft, winter girls.

Across from us the boy who studies philosophy at the university in Lithuania is sitting naked on the bench playing an old guitar and singing about Gypsies and potato pancakes. Still in your Starter jersey shorts you walk inside to talk to the Ohio boy about crew at Wittenburg and I think you are boring. I want you to be dangerous, even to me.

On the train I’m tired. I leaf through my small journal. Its pages smell like hash. You kiss me briefly. Your lips must be hollow and when I open my eyes you are in the corner of that room surrounded by strangers watching my laughter in a different language.
MATES
Metal, Jewelry
Hannah Ferrara

FROM THE EARTH
Photography
Logan Fields
It was a Sunday afternoon at Emanuel Lutheran Church in High Point, North Carolina. An enormous golden cross hung above the pastor as he gave the sermon. It was some mind-numbing business about forgiveness and loving your fellow man. I rubbed my hand back and forth across the red velvet cushions that lined the stained wooden pews. We sat in the very last row and I was constantly excusing myself. I had convinced my mother that I had an overactive bladder but in reality it was just a plea to escape the congregation. My mother sat next to me in a blue suit. She always wore this enormous flowered broach that I often teased her about. Her chocolate hair was pulled back tightly. She glanced at me and I gave her a look. It clearly stated my desire to get the hell out of the place. She translated a much different message and smiled warmly back at me. I shook my head, disappointed in the realization we would have to endure the entire oration. I turned my attention back to the front. His name was Pastor Petry, a simple minded man who would talk to you like it mattered. I watched him suspiciously waiting for him to motion for the worshippers to rise. He slowly raised both hands to the ceiling.

I stood up and was struck by dizziness. I swayed momentarily before crashing back into the pew smashing my head on the hard red oak corner. Apparently nobody noticed as the choir continued to sing and the flock followed. My mother turned to look at me and said, "Stand up!" I was holding the back of my head and was slumped over in the pew. She quickly understood that something was wrong and led me out of the congregation. I noticed that I was bleeding. Something caught my eye as I was being ushered out. A massive stained glass window stood above me portraying a Caucasian Jesus. He walked, bloodied, carrying the cross to his ultimate demise.

The next day I skipped my 6th grade classes to make a doctor’s appointment my mother had arranged. For weeks prior I endured crippling stomach cramps and ate little. I despised the local pediatrician’s office. It smelled like a contagious infection and little contaminated children roamed the waiting area. I sat and flipped through a bright purple Highlights magazine. I remember thinking about how childish it was as I read how to trace your fingerprints. The implications of my situation changed quite abruptly. My father paced the room as I began to undress. As I sat back down his hands returned to my shoulders. His grip tightened as he whispered in my ear.

"Philip, this is going to hurt." I was then abruptly introduced to my first catheter. No anesthesia or prior warning, only a young boy screaming as his father held him down. I was oblivious to the fact that my doctors felt I wasn’t in good enough health to get up and dispose of my bodily fluids.

I was admitted to High Point Regional that day. I was given no indication of how long I was going to have to stay. Thanksgiving was only a few weeks away. I traded my jeans and t-shirt for a baby blue hospital gown. I longed for my colorful and cluttered bedroom as I was introduced to my new living quarters. It was an achromatic, disinfected space with a bed, an armchair, and a TV. A faceless doctor walked in and began consulting his charts. I assumed they were the test results.

"The heart is broken into four sections, two atria chambers and two ventricles. A normal child’s atria functions at around 35%. Philip’s is functioning at just under 5%. We have to keep him here for further observation before we can give an accurate diagnosis.” I turned to my father followed. I could hear him badgering the man with questions. My mother pulled the armchair close to my bed and sat down. She held my hand with tears in her eyes as I watched television, unaffected by the news. Everything is fine, I thought. Other than the stomach cramps and the soreness of the catheter, I didn’t feel predominantly ill.
I was transferred to the Intensive Care Unit at Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The ICU was an intensely small facility. It shaped like an octagon with a patient occupying each of the eight corners. My eyes were plagued by dim lighting and the only privacy was a pale blue divider that had Baptist Medical plastered across it. I was one of the few in the facility who could actually talk. The closest one to my age was a boy who had gotten into a severe car accident who survived on life support. The walls were covered in a strange jungle scene. Zebras smiled as tigers chased them, apparently thrilled about being consumed.

It was around four weeks before I was given any kind of explanation of what was happening to me. I was not making it home for Thanksgiving; at least I could look forward to Christmas. A doctor named Fitzgerald came into my life. He was extremely tall and had vibrant white hair despite his young age.

"Philip the best explanation we have so far is that you are suffering from an atrial arrhythmia. This means that the chambers of your heart have come out of sync. They are no longer beating in unison," asserted Fitzgerald.

"When did it start?" I inquired.

"We don't know yet, we usually see this condition afflicting patients around the age sixty-five and up. We're going to figure this out," he continued.

I trusted him from the start. He didn't thickly smile like the other doctors when he left. I was an eleven year old boy wasting away from a sickness my grandparents might get could and nobody could tell me why.

Greg, my overly effeminate male nurse, would wake me up periodically, "you need to cough." He would do this when my heart rate got too slow. The coughing would act as a stimulant and the rate would increase slightly. It was becoming steadily difficult to get a good night's sleep. On such a night I was briefly awaken by Greg, coughed and then fell back asleep. My heart rate entered a sporadic rhythm before stopping completely, plunging me into cardiac arrest.

I slid into a warm bath of unconsciousness. No bright lights guided my path as I was brought into the operating room.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

So a week after the first ablation I was on the table again, cursing and laughing at the doctors as they unsuccessfully tried to mend my defective heart. These surgeries were considered the norm. I was optimistic and in very little pain. I could do anything. I could laugh at him and was rarely denied it. I began taking a great liking in my power to diminish my own pain. A pesky stomach cramp could turn into a tranquil stupor at the push of a button. It was one of the only things the nurses could do to help me. In reality it did nothing more than to numb my senses. I was an adolescent morphine addict. The second ablation did little more than the first.

My attitude began to decline along with my condition. I was officially put on the NC Heart Transplant List. The idea had always terrified me, not the surgery itself but the implications. I would have an alien heart residing in my body. I had always held the romantic notion that a heart was purely a home for the soul. Would mine be taken from me when my dilapidated heart was removed? Would my soul wander free as its dwelling was cast out as defective? I feared that my identity would be lost. A change began to appear in my mother. I believe she had accepted that the cause may be lost. Her skin began to grow pale and I swore that her hair began to gray. I was taking 10 pills in the morning and could feel them eating my stomach lining as I would turn my nose up to even the most delectable of dishes.

"Philip, Philip! Can you hear me?"

"My chest was extremely sore. I was told that my nurse Greg had revived me with CPR before my physicians had to get a crash cart. Greg weighed over 200 pounds and I quickly considered the tenderness of my sternum.

"What do you mean shocks?" I queried.

"It's called a defibrillator. It's contained in the pacemaker itself and gives therapeutic heart rates. The pacemaker would take care in regulating the slow beats but not the high."

"Philip! Philip! Can you hear me?"

"My chest was extremely sore. I was told that my nurse Greg had revived me with CPR before my physicians had to get a crash cart. Greg weighed over 200 pounds and I quickly considered the tenderness of my sternum.

My parents took turns leaving work to spend time with me during the day. My mother, an elementary school music teacher, had a number of sick days saved up throughout her years. My father unconcerned with the money he was losing in court would constantly bring me the foods that I was craving. Two weeks later I was on the operating table. Still without a diagnosis my doctors made no attempt to deny they were shooting in the dark. The procedure was called an ablation. Three insertions were made along my inner thigh as miniscule wires were sent up through my body searching for my heart. The purpose of the procedure is to actually burn off the flawed areas of the heart. For some reason the doctors don't find it is necessary to put the patient completely under. After being given me an incredible dose of nitrous oxide I laughed at the pain as it felt like I was breaking my spirit. As I was being wheeled into my recovery room my parents received the news.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.

"What do you mean it didn't work?" my mother demanded.

"It seems that his heart isn't responding the way we'd hoped. We don't think we had enough time. We are going to try again," said Fitzgerald.
My stepfather who was speaking to a nurse, quickly got the hint and slinked out. My mother squeezed my hand and smiled, shaking her head at my father as she slowly proceeded out. I spoke with my father. He tried to ease the palpable tension in the air with small talks, but I could see the shaking of his hands. There wasn’t much to say. The surgery lasted nine hours. My pectoral muscle was ripped apart as a small metal pacemaker was sandwiched between it. A small insertion was made under my left armpit. After the surgery, I was given enough morphine to knock out a baby elephant. It caused me little to no effect on me as my daily abuse had increased my tolerance to outlandish heights.

As I return to Baptist Medical for my yearly visits, Fitzgerald is still there. Laughing at the thought of those visitors, my memory was instantly brought into a conscious reality. Even if it was only for the briefest of moments I was ready to meet my creator and instead was left out in the cold, dark abyss.

“Everyday I try and convince myself that I am here for a reason. I hope it is to better mankind but I don’t think I’m that important. I’m told I was saved for a greater purpose that I cannot uncover. Needs to say, my pacemaker began to work. I am still alive. I made it home for Christmas but had to eventually return; nothing too serious, just a glitch. The lowest setting of the defibrillator didn’t feel like a punch in the chest. It brought me to the floor. One day I woke up and walked to the bathroom and was hit by an intense electric shock. I am still alive. I made it home for Christmas but had to eventually return; nothing too serious, just a glitch.

At first the pacemaker didn’t work. There is always the concern that a body will not accept a foreign object. This wasn’t the case. My body had accepted its new replacement but the doctors couldn’t get the settings right. The second time I flat-lined was completely different from the first. It happened the day I was moved out of the ICU. I was sitting with my grandmother who had decided to visit for the day. She later told me that I gasped and sat up straight in bed and clutched my throat. I can’t that crooning angels were beckoning me on my way because it isn’t true. There was nothing there. I was thrown back into a conscious reality. Even if it was only for the briefest of moments I was ready to meet my creator and instead was left out in the cold, dark abyss.

After my second resuscitation I became apathetic to the whole idea. No one to laugh in the face of danger but one who realizes the futility of trying to control fate. After experiencing the unknown realm of death I began to realize how fragile this earthly existence really is. I relinquished the idea of controlling my body and was deeply humbled.

It was a given a much smaller and more advanced device. The company Medtronic will take my facial hair and actually smiling when he leaves. In another two years my battery will run out and I will be forced to make a decision that my parents no longer control. Do I get the latest model? I still haven’t decided.

As a graduating senior in my final semester at ASU, I have become wildly nostalgic. It’s hard to piece together all of the moments, connections made, and lessons learned to form a coherent picture of my time in Boone. I will save you a sappy paragraph about looking to the future and cherishing memories, but I will say that the numerous days and nights I have dedicated to The PEEL have been some of the most inspiring of my life.

I want to thank all of the amazing artists and authors who have chosen to share their creativity with The PEEL, the talented staff who made it possible to bring this magazine to you, and the faculty and friends who have supported us along the way.

And, of course, I would like to thank you, the reader, for giving us the reason to strive for greatness.

Best, Sarah Mosseller
NOW ACCEPTING

Editorial Board and Staff applications

The PEEL Literary Arts Magazine is now accepting Editorial Board and Staff applications for the 2010-2011 school year. Students interested should send an email with a cover letter and resume to thepeel@appstate.edu. Please include what positions you are interested in.

Available Positions:
- Assistant Editor
- Print Production Editor
- Online Production Editor
- Editorial Assistant
- Events Coordinator
- Art Committee Chair
- Prose Committee Chair
- Poetry Committee Chair