Miscellany

Spring 2010

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Hello Friends,

Beliefs fuel our passion and passion dictates our motives to live. So, in this edition, I wanted to start a conversation about believes and see what motivates our generation to live.

Throughout the magazine there are different perspectives of student’s beliefs and where they stand on certain issues. They were given the freedom to say whatever they wanted, some used that wisely to speak about issues and other used their creative license to the fullest.

Personally, I believe that everyone should be happy and given the chance to live life to the fullest. I believe that you can do whatever you want to do in the world, no matter what. If you want to do it, there’s room for you!

On that note, I hope you enjoy this edition of the Miscellany. I definitely had fun with this one. Thanks everyone for your help, you make this magazine possible!

Peace, love and lol.

Hey kiddos!

Thank you for picking up this semester’s edition of the Miscellany. With all the talk about budget cuts this semester, its good to know there is still support in the magazine and the creativity that it stands for. If you haven’t yet, please contact our representatives and DEMAND that Georgia Southern University be excluded from these cuts so that all our programs (including the arts) will not be demolished within the next few years (if you don’t at least try you’re a lazy jackass).

For more information on what you can do, go to: www.georgiasouthern.edu/budget/.

Respectfully fighting the Man,

Leigh-Anna Spivy

Cover Art: Bridget Hanney
Rhapsody- Acrylic Paint 12”X12” Matte Board
Topsy- Turvy 12”X12”

Back Page Art:
Clayton Cunningham- Fonzie Recycles, 11”x 17” Digital Media
Heather Waldron- Conservation Poster, 4.75”x 9.25” Print
Laura Pallini - Georgia Power Series, 13” X 19.5” Print
Susie Roupe- Conservation Poster 17” x 22” Digital and Print Media
In this Edition:

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- Caged -

Caged - Alla Parson
Oil on Paper, 25"x 32" Canvas

Alla is a graduate student and she believes that the main purpose of art is to show human emotions. When I start a painting I sometimes have no clear idea but just a feeling, an emotion that I cannot express in words. I turn on the music and it gives me the energy to start working. I believe that music that I am listening to, dramatic or sad transforms through my fingers and finds place in my paintings.

- All That Surrounds Us -

All That Surrounds Us - Laura Williams
Pencil/Graphite, 14x17 Drawing

Laura is a sophomore majoring in Graphic Design. Laura believes that our future is up to us. By taking past and present experiences, such as our education at Georgias Southern, we can create the individual that we desire to be. If we take for granted the minute details and focus areas in life, we will never acce!
- Innocence -

Innocence - Christina Byrd
Digital Photograph

Christina Byrd is a Junior majoring in Art. Christina believes that the innocence of Aleshia is captured solely through her eyes.

- Fiore Luminoso -

Fiore Luminoso - Marielle Williamson
Digital Photograph

Marielle is a Sophomore majoring in Art with a concentration in Photography. Marielle believes that it is totally unnecessary for people to be rude when they think it will get them what they want. When someone gets “out-of-line” because they cannot get an immediate resolution to their situation, it simply makes the problem worse. It also frustrates the person trying to help which may lead to the situation getting dismissed altogether. “Don’t be rude. It’s not nice.” :-)

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- "Untitled" Stoneware-

"Untitled"- Adam Pace
Stoneware Platter 10" Diameter

Adam is a senior majoring in Art with a concentration in Photography. Adam believes "in a thing called love, just listen to the rhythm of my heart. There's a chance we could make it now, we'll be rocking till the sun goes down. I believe in a thing called love." - The Darkness

- Mermaid with Pearl -

Mermaid with a Pearl - Hannah Clough
3D Work- Copper, Nickle, Copper Wire, Metal Stamping Gold, Copper Patina, and Small Faux Pearl.

Hannah is a senior majoring in Graphic Design. Hannah believes that good art can be appreciated by all people, even the untrained eye. Art is all around us, beauty can be found in everything, we just have to slow down a little and take the time to notice it.
- Orges Are Like Onions -

Orges Are Like Onions - Brent Williams
Metal Work Sculpture

Brent Williams is a graduate student. Brent believes that art should be something intriguing.

- He Watches Over Me -

He Watches Over Me- Michelle Parker
Small Sterling Silver Sculpture

Michelle is a graduate student with studies in Art. Michelle believes caution! Viewing my small visual narrative can create a sense of uneasiness. Just as you are being taken in by the beauty of a well-crafted work of art, you realize the story at hand is an unsettling one. You fight yourself as your brain delves into the arena slowly absorbing each minute detail, forcing you to create your own narrative. You can not help but wonder how this little setting went from pretty to simply disturbing. everything, we just have to slow down a little and take the time to notice it.
- Hatch -

Hatch - Michael Johnson
Guache Paint - 13” x 19”

Michael is a Junior majoring in Graphic Design. Michael believes his work is guided by the desire to inspire others and help them break out of the boring, everyday norm. We as human beings cannot run from life. It will always catch up to us, however, if I can provide a small gem in the form of a break fro this strenuous, monotonous life then I would feel like I have a purpose in this world.

- Untitled Self-

Untitled Self- Jessica Eanes
Digital Inkjet Print, 8”x10”

Jessica is a Senior majoring in Photography. Jessica believes that all people should find themselves. Going through life without knowing who you are is like walking around with a complete stranger and missing out on one of the greatest adventures of a lifetime.
Skelton

Skelton - Courtney Bradshaw
Printmaking - 10" x 7.5"

Courtney is a Senior majoring in Art with a concentration in Drawing. Courtney believes that art is an integral part of everyday life. Whether you’re looking at, making it, writing about it, it doesn’t matter. We are surrounded and influenced by art in too many ways to count. Everyone needs some form of art and creativity in their life, it makes it fun and enjoyable. That is why art is my passion. It is something everyone can enjoy, not just the artist themselves.

En la Espera

En La Espera - Patricia Quilichini
Digital Archival Print - 13" x 19"

Patricia is a graduate student. Patricia believes that we should question morality and myths.
Death By A Rose
By: Kenny Olowoyo

Circle of Roses
Around your throat
As it draws tighter
You start to choke
Droplets of blood

Where the thorns pierce
Welling and mixing
With your falling tears
Pain pushes you down

You’re on your knees
Ring of roses so tight
You can’t even breathe
As strong as steel

You can’t rip it off
No breath to speak
But you mouth the word “stop”
You think you hear laughter

As it tightens more
No longer dripping
Blood’s starting to pour
Mind has gone numb

You’re too spent to fight
As deeper in your neck
Thorns from roses bite
Lying still on the floor

you hear a whispered sigh
“For love we live
And by love we die”

Danielle Scudder is a Senior majoring in General Studies: Writing, Photography and Art History. Danielle believes that the truth is elusive. That we cannot be so arrogant as to think we know all the truths of the universe. The most important things is to know your truth, to know who you are and never forget it.

Sanctuary
By: Danielle Scudder

I heard the whoosh of a hundred beating wings suddenly overcome the silence like an unexpected sheet of rain getting closer and closer, like a car wildly, abruptly smashing into another. That's how you left this world.

You left your body behind just as quickly as you got into it. The shock sent you swiftly over that line, just past that unconscious realm of comas, right into that brilliant white light.

Mortality went unspoken; a foreign language to your youth. But when that steel cage bent around you, and when that glass shattered on top of you, I wonder if you thought of us.

I wonder if you thought of the time we tore down the road, away from that car that followed us, jokingly thinking, pretending we were going to get shot; our immortality running right along beside us.

We ran to that little white church on Main Street, laughing, screaming, “Sanctuary! Sanctuary!” violently throwing ourselves onto the perfectly cut green grass, rolling, covering our heads, huddling together, and hysterically giggling. I wonder if you screamed Sanctuary then, right before that brilliant light swallowed you.

Kenny Olowoyo is a sophomore majoring in Art (Drawing and Painting). Kenny believes a true foe only as menacing as his blade, if I’m able to disarm the opponent then victory is ensured.
Home Away from Home
By: Andrew Carr

High up on the tree-covered mountains, where the hustle and bustle of civilization fades away into nothing, the silence is deafening. It’s peaceful and majestic as the Bald Eagle that’s patiently waiting for the wondering mouse, or the oblivious muskrat.

Construction begins as the Woodpecker makes his new home, a wholly place.
Humans influence them so each towering pine would resemble a flute or an oboe; their tree line apartments produce a deep, dark bassoon sound as the wind passes through; a waterfall of sound, rustling the leaves, swaying the Pines.

Down the path, the flowing greens are potent, mint, raspberries, blackberries; I crave them all.
The wind continues to sway me, feeling fresh and feeling alive.

Down by the river, the salmon swish through it without a second thought, then SPLASH.
The Black Bear pounced on the salmon and chopped the head unceremoniously. Silence never lasts.
He looks up from the bloody mess he’s made.
I stand absolutely still, like a deer in headlights. He nods off and tramps up the stream.
The tall pines and the noisy neighbors, my home away from home.

Shell
By: Megan Morris

I search for shells while combing the beach. Suddenly, a wave crashes around my feet.
The sea foam softly tickles my toes, The salty, sticky air fills my nose.

I imagine someone is holding my hand that both our feet are covered in sand, Our laughter drowns out the ocean’s roar as we chase each other all over the shore.

I am alone again staring at the bluest of skies, trying to remember the day we said our goodbyes, I imagine for a moment that time just froze that last time I saw you, when we chose.

The sight of a fin breaks the shimmering surface, visions of a family of dolphins replace your face. The fin disappears into the murky depths of Poseidon, just as you had, so long ago, where were you hiding?

Rolling waves deliver me half of a yellow shell. From above, a seagull’s cry chimes like a Chapel bell. From the dunes, my mother waves for me, it is time to go so I set the shell free.

Andrew is a Freshman majoring in Early Childhoood Education. Andrew believes that music traps you in its rhythms and notes, like a reader captivated with the senses a book magnifies, and that you should laugh every chance you get. You only get one chance to live.
chocolate-covered knives

By: Luke Easterwood

they're threaded through her eyes
like complex shapes
with jagged edges
that are never-ending.

following them leads me to
nowhere but her thoughts
threshing constantly
with themselves and mine.

we're both the guides
to each other.

and we both believe
that infinity is a number.
but we can't agree
on the amount.

it's beautiful like tainted
beauty
like
craving chocolate-covered
knives
have two slick sides that come together
to make a point:

like discussion and thought that come together
to make a point:

and it's so sharp it can cut through
my concreted mentalities;
but wrapped in the threads
that keep us both intertwined,
the hard, coldness we've established
has never felt warmer.

and to see an outsider step in the
maze we've created
as an insect in a trap
or a mouse going for the cheese,
we're to become them:
as entangled and as without direction.

but with connection.

Thomas Akins is a Senior majoring in Spanish. Thomas believes in stripes and spirals, hooting owls at 12 o’ clock, top hats, monocles, full moons, southern drawls, Tennessee whiskey, good smoke, gypsy girls, down-tuned guitars, F# minor, and bare branches against a grey sky. Everything else can just lay low.

Darling

By: Thomas Akins

there's a knife in the wall
buried up to the hilt
and the smile that it drips
it splatters and spirals
and the cigarette ghosts
they wilt and they wisp
from tar and pitch hells
of delight and glow
hand smeared smut falls
across glass and bears
the gaunt starvations
the burning coal eyes
floor strewn charry
with mannequin limbs
with my darling’s limbs
with fake plastic limbs
rubber knife quiver quiver
up to its fake plastic hilt
in the shuddering wall
in the ricketing wall
rain on tin, rain on tin
black beak snap
lipless crack grin
thrum coil metal springs
light gray, rust red
hands red clutch
fake plastic handle
draw my darling’s blade
carve my darling’s name
fake plastic name

Luke Easterwood is a Sophomore majoring in Writing and Linguistics. Luke believes that the gummy bear he ran over has a family; they miss him.
To Mourn the Death of a Mighty Illusion
By: Xavier Best

That morning I woke the sculpture was dead rusting beneath an angry sun’s head. The townspeople wept before the cleaved rocks remembering the image absorbing the shock.

“That sculpture was loved,” they cried out in pain “an upstanding man, a symbol of fame”. Fame of the world! Where’s the virtue in this! For what did he fight and where did he sit?

“His beauty was grand and so picturesque, the firmament smiled on his marble-white breast” Who care’s of this form, this deceitful visage? Was his mind great, for what reason you cry?

“Foolish old thinker, you speak ‘gainst the sage, The whole of our passion, the king of our age?” I gazed at the corpse dissolving to dust, Congealing with dirt atop the earth’s crust

“For this you all cry, this pendant of craft? This image has dwindled! Its era has past!” The grieving fell deaf, bewildered with fear. Their guardian perished beneath heaven’s sphere.

“Awaken yourselves, you gullible souls. Your guardian’s dead, his body is cold. His spirit has flown far from this grave sight, expanding in mind advancing in height”

They lacked a narration to their tragic plays, to see that earth’s fashion was passing away. Their gilded epochs and towers of gold were starting to merge with crack pated roads.

The sculpture departed, while the people cried “death!” oblivious that it never had breath. The ornament paled in my memory’s hand, returning as one with the barren land.

Armies of rain washed over the ruins converging the two in beautiful union. “Why aren’t you crying?” They asked in confusion, as I smiled at the funeral of their mighty illusion.

Xavier Best is a Senior majoring in Mechanical Engineering. Xavier believes I believe that our lives are determined by the sum total of the decisions we make. This is a philosophy very much aligned with the existentialist philosophy of life. I believe one can only reach a state of intellectual freedom when they carry out what French philosopher, Jean Sartre, called “conduct in the face of nothingness”. There must be an existential wrestling with one’s most cherished beliefs if they wish to come to any degree of wisdom.

Keep It Simple
By: Robby Hurd

Praise God for the cylindrical! For records shine triple- scratching eardrums and Our world, spinning through swollen clouds While moon gives way to apparitions. Sing- song taffy; after dinner mints; Yo- yo’s, cheerios, and a well- rounded education Bring simple satisfaction of An apple on the desk; A teacher, two curls twirled behind the ears, Clear- cleaned, neatly rounded spectacles and Belt buckle shaped like the letter “O”. Bring out the kickball, hoola- hoops and baskets, The rings, steering wheels, and warm cherry pie. My mother’s swollen belly; Everything moving in circles thank God, And praise Him forevermore.

Robby Hurd is a Senior majoring in Writing and Linguistics. Robby believes for anyone struggling to find themselves, Jesus Christ is there to pull them out of the muck.
Hazard Warning
By: Christopher Kraakeel

Caution: product may be harmful if swallowed, contact physician immediately. (Swallowed? We haven’t kissed for months. When we were young I probably ingested gallons of her saliva.) For skin contact, flush area with clear water for fifteen minutes. (Our lips rarely touch; hands do here and there, inside grocery stores. I re-tilled the bathroom last spring. I usually shower before bed and again in the morning.) For eye contact consult physician immediately. (Looking at her is looking at the sun; it burns and is blinding. She hardly looks.)

Storage: Keep container sealed when not in use to prevent contamination. (There’s mold in the refrigerator. Sordid milk crusts the front of the crisper. We had two separate sinks put in when we fixed up the house this winter.) Protect from freezing. (There are spare blankets in the closet in the hall. She’s a cover hog but denies it.) If freezing occurs, (I sleep on the couch more than two nights a week.) let product warm up to room temperature, (I wake for work. she sleeps, I shower, thaw out.) then shake before using. (She yells from the bedroom, we need milk. We don’t hold hands or go to the grocery store together.)

Disposal: Disposal of this material. (I walked out the front door yesterday. We never use the front door. I walked to my truck. I’m almost out of gas; I’ve crossed two state lines.) all its mixtures (She’s got mixed feelings, on the phone, she tells me, as I headed down the interstate.) and any spill residues (They aren’t my sheets, I have my stuff in a storage unit in the city.) must be in accordance with local, state and federal regulations. (She wasn’t local dad says, they’ve seen it before, you need someone from Georgia my brother says. They’re just trying to help.

Peoples Janitorial Supply (People cleaning, Break-ups.)

My Summary of the Bible
By: Essence Jones

Verily, woe shall be given unto thee. The scourge of mine spirit’s rage shall enrapture thee. The flames shall rise up and you shall be swallowed by the heat. Thoroughly, you burn. Thoroughly, you will wait, you will pray, you will hope, for my mercy. Surely, you are the damned, the counter-point my soul has identified in the abyss. To where doth thou scurry? Have you not found a spot suitable to hide yourself from me?

Or have you remembered what I have forewarned? There is no place to hide. I am the seer of all things. The knower of things unbecknownst to you. The creator of your life and the destroyer of mankind. Where to shall you run now? Shall you flee from your flesh in an attempt to become invisible to me? Ha! Verily, woe shall recapture you. Hath thou forgotten of the last day? Did I not send my angels down unto you? Did they not warn of the day when all is recounted in a book and I shall separate the vigilant from the ignorant!! Verily, woe is to be you. Send me not stories of your repentance and neither of your sorrow! I know of them! Pray not to me in times of great joy but thank me in turmoil! I have given you life and you turn from me! Verily, woe is to be the Last Day. Woe is the last day.

Christopher Kraakeel is a Sophomore majoring in Creative Writing. Christopher believes people should write about Post It notes and think about them in a philosophical way. If a Post It note falls in the woods does it make a sound? What if it says “I Love You!” on it? What if it has a Whitman quote? What weight does it hold then, more than one with a grocery list? Milk, bread and eggs imprinting its yellowish face. More weight than a Redwood?
I Believe...

Porsche Bridges (Senior, Creative Writing Major)
I believe that science is the study of magic; and that the clearest evidence of magic is experienced each and every time we experience awe. I believe we are held together by a common spirit, static electricity, and music.

Heather Jones (Senior, Fashion Design Major)
I believe in a magical land where dreamers roam free, lovers let loose, and it’s okay to be a horse of a different color. This wonderful place must be somewhere over the rainbow.

Gerrard Davis (Sophomore, Writing & Linguistics)
I believe that death is a treasure sought by few, but a punishment cherished by many.

Patrick Lewis (Junior, Creative Writing Major)
I believe that the world is a chaotic place where life springs from destruction. I also believe that I am God, and that everything in this world is a manifestation of my own imagination and will cease to exist when I pass on.

Mary Cooper (Senior, Graphic Design Major)
I believe that love is the answer to a lot of problems. As long as you have the power to love, you will be loved in return.

Christina Curry (Senior, Studio Art Major)
I believe that some people go to college because it is what everyone expects of them while others go to learn more about what they love in life whether it is poetry, literature, art or even history and science. It is up to you as a person, student and human being to find that passion and pursue it in order to live a completely fulfilled college career.
2010 Powell Award Winners:
Fiction - Katie Brookins and Patrick Shuler
Poetry- Kate Beasley
Creative Nonfiction- Jonathan Moore

**Watch**
By: Katie Brookins

Outside the city, beyond the park and the national cemetery's white rows, are jagged hills. Beyond the hills is a village by a river. Beyond the village is a trench covered over and driven over by deep green trucks.

On the hill nearest the trench, groups of mourners stand in knots along the ridge.

Two girls break the surface of the earth, scratch their arms on the rocks as they hurriedly climb, cough. Above them, near the trench, a pile of coats, dresses, shoes and stockings still burn.

The mourners watch the trench and pray the rolling earth will release another neighbor.

In dirty slips, the girls struggle up the hills furthers from the city toward the river they cannot hear over the wind.

The mourners in their billowing coats turn their faces away, their chins pointing toward the river. They must be able to answer the flashlights in their faces, "I didn't see anyone."

**Rained Rorschach**
By: Kate Beasley

We fetch dish pans and mismatched pots when it rains, to catch leaks, to save the carpet. We position the vessels beneath tea colored stains stretching over the Ceitex. And we agree the stain growing above the television looks like a silhouette of a Dutch girl with a goose tucked under her arm. The drips slap the naked bottoms of our makeshift raincatchers, and we look out the windows and say how rapturous good rain is.

The Powell Awards are named after the first creative writing teacher at Georgia Southern and founder of the Miscellany Magazine of the Arts. The Roy F. Powell Awards for Creative Writing are offered to encourage and recognize excellence in creative writing. There are three categories of the award: Poetry, Fiction, and Creative Non-Fiction. The winner in each category receives a cash award of $50.00, a framed award certificate, and recognition at the University's Honors Day ceremonies. In addition, the winning entries are published in the Miscellany. Creative Writing faculty in the Writing and Linguistics Department select the three winners from submissions to the Powell Award contest, which is open to all Georgia Southern University students, both graduate and undergraduate.
Killing Quill
By: Kate Beasley

I killed two
today.
I did it
with my pen.
The first had a cheeky voice,
crinkling eye. I swear she squeaked
before she died. The second
gentler fellow
who worshipped Spanish moss. These
were no strangers, no,
they were my own lyric-inked
offspring, and I slashed
two deep black cuts across writhing
lines, wounds that silenced glistening
whispers. My motives are all
muddled, my wrath stirred maybe
by her wheezing or by his
bumbling, faults I gave them, not
their own. I hate it, but though
I prod the paper corpses,
breathe upon the marked-up pages
I cannot revive my words.

Lizard
By: Kate Beasley

Next time you’ll notice it.

Night and the house a
fire in the black,
allures winged
things to windows
He skulks in the sill
Pointed snout tilts
Eyes like tiny black marbles
Fixed upon the prey
A clever way to use your light. His bait
A blur – chomp: Rough, lur chim g swallows

Day and he watches
you dash
from house to car
Cool body
lazy still in the sun.
Gazes later when you
plod from car to house.
Scales your homewalls
like an acrobat thief
Spies you sunk into
your couch,

Remember he loathes
your kind
because of summers
when boys squeeze the slim stomach
in fingers, lift the flailing body
To the edge
Of a wide face.
Squeeze and shake
Run to their kitchen
Yell, “Look, Ma”
Point to the flopping green
creature suspended
jaws clamped to a
fat earlobe.
I didn’t drink coffee myself, but I got up before the sun and lugged my ole bastard of a oxygen tank into the kitchen to brew a fresh batch. The percolator was ironclad, forty years old, and heavy as the head of a sledgehammer. I filled it with grounds and chopped pecans and water from the faucet and set it on the burner. I shuffled back into the living room and set down in the recliner, where I sleep most nights, and listened to the dripping and the sputtering as the world outside grew light.

Buster wasn’t barking. That made three days then. I wanted to see if he might be lying on the porch, but my knees said no.

The living room looked dusty in the dawn. The picture of my wife blushing in her summer hat sat on the side table, right where I had left it. I thought about watching television but got lost gazing at myself in the bulging black screen. The coffee smelt thick and strong and like pecans.

A rap came from the door, and I heard her toe into the kitchen with the bleached sunlight and her shadow stretching into the living room. I heard her put a container in the fridge for she said, “Morning, Jonathan.” “Mornin’, Sarah Beth.” I paused to breathe. “Wha’d you bring me today?”

“Breakfast casserole.”

“Thank you, thank you. There’s coffee on the stove.”

I bent over the side of the recliner to see her in the frame between the kitchen and the living room. When she was six, she come running with her arms raised and her Sunday dress swishing bout her knees. “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy,” she cried, and I lifted her in my hairy arms, and she pressed her smooth cheek against my morning grizzle and rubbed it with her hand to hear the scratch.

She crossed her arms. Her suit was navy today.

“No,” she said. “I have a quarterly meeting today. I can’t dillydally.”

“It’s fresh and steamy,” I said.

“I really can’t.”

“Sure you can.”

“I have a meeting.”

“If you’re goan’ to drop the food and run, then what’s the use in stoppin’ by. I could of just ordered a pizza.” She glanced at her watch then at the window and said, “All right.”

I heard the creaking of cabinet hinges, the tinkering of porcelain, the burbling of coffee, and the chiming of silverware. She came and sat on the couch. “So how’s life?” she asked.

“Much the same,” I said. “I laze about the house and read a book or watch history on the television. I ordered some more puzzle books in the mail, crosswords and those Japanese sudoku. I go through one every couple days. Have to keep orderin’ more.”

I paused to breathe a few times. She waited.

“I think Buster’s gone off,” I said. “Dogs do that, you know. They feel their strand bout to be cut and they wander off. They go somewhere they used to romp about when they was young and wait for it to come.” “I’m sorry,” she said. “I know you loved him.”

“It ain’t no big deal. He’s just a dog. A good one though. Really stuck by me.”

She sipped her coffee.

“Aw, Jonathan,” she coughed. “You’ve got to trash that percolator. It’s rusted.”
“I’m sorry, Sarah Beth. I hadn’t realized.”

She ran into the kitchen, and I heard her rinse out her mouth a few times at the faucet.

“How are things ‘tween you and that Evan fella?” I asked.

“They’ve been better;” she said. “I, well, we’re thinking about getting a divorce.”

I couldn’t see into the kitchen. The recliner faced away from it.

“I’m sure it’s not all that bad,” I said. “You both just need to remember your vows, and.”

“That’s not it, Jonathan.”

“Well, what’s the matter?”

I heard her footsteps echo toward the window. “I don’t want to talk about it,” she said.

“What, can’t tell your troubles to your own father? That ain’t no way to live. I’m here to give you advice and help you with the hard decisions. If I can’t do that then what am I still lingerin’ round for?”

“It’s you, Jonathan.”

“So you goan’ to offer me up to that place again?”

She came back into the living room and sat on the couch. She looked at the picture of her mother blushing in her summer hat.

“There’s nothing wrong with it,” she said.

“I seen that place, and it’s a sad, sad place. Chain-link fence topped with barbwire. All my friends from high school hanging onto the fence, lookin’ at the ghetto cross the street or else at the bogged up ditch beside it. Some days they try and crawl up the fence, some days they pull their pants down and piss through it. What’s that place called again?”

“Pleasant View.”

“Yeah-huh. Believe I’d rather die.”

“Don’t say that.”

“It’s the damn truth.”

“Would you just think about it?”

She glanced at her watch and the window again. “Like hell.”

“Look, I drive over here twice a day to bring you meals. I drive you to the store. I pick up your prescriptions. I clean your house. I refill your oxygen tank. I don’t see Evan more than thirty minutes a day and the closest we get is at the sink when we’re brushing our teeth. So tell me, Jonathan, what should I do?”

She waited for me to say. “I’m not going to let this do to me what it did to Mom,” she said. Then she stood and walked into the kitchen again, where I couldn’t see her.

“Come back in here, Sarah Beth,” I said.

“There’s nothing wrong with sending you there,” she said. “It would take the burden off of you.”

“Come back in here where I can see you.”

I heard her steps then the door and then her car. I sat for a minute fore I put on my jacket and walked outside, luggin’ my oxygen tank. The oaks and poplars were orange and gold. The leaves hadn’t yet littered the ground. The mud was carved with her tire tracks.

A white van pulled off the main road. I headed for the woods. The oxygen tank caught on a root, and I had to heave it over. Took my breath some. The van parked in the tire tracks already in the mud. A man in a suit and a man in khakis and a polo shirt got out and rung the doorbell. The van read, “Pleasant View.”
“I spat on a sapling, and begun to walk deeper into the woods, my oxygen tank catching on everything it could. I came to a meadow and saw Buster laying with his chin on his paws. The edges of his fur was stuck to the ground. I set down my tank and lifted him to my chest. He was only a little stiff. When I walked, the hose yanked up my nose, and I drug it back over my head and allowed it to fall off to the ground.

Buster and I walked to the oak tree near the center of the meadow. From a branch hung a rope worn so short that I couldn’t have reached it if I’d a tried. It hanged there near all my life. I had swung on it and Sarah Beth too till she fell and chipped her tooth, a canine one, and how she did scream, “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy. Fix it. Fix it.” And I told her not to worry cause she would lose that tooth soon enough.

I sat down against the trunk, Buster in my lap, and I petted his matted fur, thinking how he knew better than I ever did bout waiting for it to come.

“Did I ever tell you about the time I almost shot this guy up at the lake?” My uncle Joe asks this sitting across from me in a flimsy white-plastic chair on the front porch of his house. He leans over one side, looking down with his one good eye, petting the rotund Springer Spaniel laying and panting underneath his chair. “Good Peanut,” he says scratching the dog’s back with the tips of his fingers.

“Want a beer, first, before I get into it all?” He asks. He rephrases: “Can you have a beer?”

“Yeah, I’m old enough this year; twenty-one in January,” I say with a smile.

“Oh, that’s right. It seems like you were just this high not so long ago,” he says holding his hand at the top of his knee.”

I walk inside and get two Bud-Lights from the bottom drawer of the refrigerator. I walk back out, hand him one and sit back down – the white plastic chair bends a little as I sit and I catch myself on the railing, pulling little hunks of chipping paint from it as I do.

“So, a fuckin’ nut, this guy was,” he says, looking up and lighting a cigarette, spindles of smoke wrapping around his pale, freckle-splotted wrists, and wafting through his snowy crew-cut. I light one too and we sit there in the fading summer evening drinking beer like tea and laughing. He starts low, the smoke in his throat changing his inflections. I lean forward in my seat, eager to hear. Then, exhalating, he booms out into the tale, like a street vendor in a crowded street.

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I can see him sitting there, under the canopy he built, jetting out from the trailer, looking out over the lake, the twilights casting tendrils of purple and orange over the water and the hills that are covered in clay. The lake I had visited so many times over the years would be low from drought and he would watch the birds fly, in no particular formation, down for nightcrawlers in the mud or for little bugs scampering around in little puddles here and there.
The new dock he bought the year before would be grounded, not like the old rickety one that he and I fished off of when I used to visit every summer, the one with swollen, brittle planks that fell into the water, scaring the fish away.

But unlike those fish he was never scared away from that place. Every month, or even every week sometimes, he was at the lake, painting the walls of the trailer a sandy beige, or pulling concealed leaves and pine-needles from the gutters than ran along the eaves. The place smelt like the storage room of an old high school, dank and musty. It bit the inside of my nose when I would first walk in, make my eyes water from the stingle. But he liked it anyway because it was his retreat and, I suppose, somewhere he could reflect and be, again, the young man that fought in bars and streets and only answered to himself. There, at the lake, down in the hollow where the land created a tiny valley, he could do that.

But sitting there that summer, a summer in which I had not visited him, he was not in retreat. Next door, the new neighbor crouched in the old driveway where Joe had stood so many times talking to so many old friends. The man’s hair was greased down across his scalp in long, curling tendrils and a dark brown beard traversed the raggy contours of his face. He tinkered with his motorcycle. They didn’t speak to each other. They didn’t look at each other. Joe held his hand against his hip and the holster of a gun and the man stood up and walked inside.

“It was that night,” he says to me as we go through our fourth beer and crack ourselves another. He says, “I was in bed,” and I imagine the covers slung down in a heap at the foot and his pillows spilled out across the mattress. His arms were bolted down at his sides, and he watched the shadows of trees sway in the wind outside his window. And they were next door, the man and his buddies, their hogs purring and growling like prowling lions in the savannah-dark.

“Come out Joe,” they shouted. They held their guns up and volleyed into the sky. The rapport rang in Joe’s ears, but didn’t startle him. He just stared out the window.

“‘I’ll fuckin’ kill you Joe, fix you up good,’” the man shouted, swigging from his beer. He leaned down and snorted a line of cocaine, some of the powder clinging to his mustache like icicles on an eave. “Why don’t you come out Joe? I’ll show you.”

Then, after a few moments of silence, there was a slamming on the door, the butt of a gun knocking against the wood. It pounded and pounded, a dull hammer filled with fire.

“‘I’ll fuckin’ show you Riley. I’ll show you Joseph Riley. Just wait.’”

Joe tells me, “I didn’t startle. I just held the glock in my hand, the magazine full.”

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As I remember, from the road above the trailer, a walkway trickled down into the little valley alongside the driveway, past the trailer, and down to the water. Joe watched it, drinking his coffee in the late morning, and waiting.

It was quiet next door – the bikers left sometime during the night or in the early morning. “It only mattered that they had gone,” he tells me. And as he watched the walkway stones, a boot, black and slick as motor oil, stepped down, followed by another preceding the hems of a pair of black jeans.

Joe pulled his glock from the table in front of him and sauntered out to meet his neighbor.

“Sit down,” Joe said holding the gun at his side, a cigarette dangling from his lips. His white hair glittered in the rising sun and his one good eye stared the man down.

“Joe, I wasn’t, there ain’t no problem,” the guy said, his hands raising up. Joe pointed the gun at him, then the ground.
“Just sit down.” The man sat, his knees pushed up to his chest from the incline of the walkway. “I don’t know what the fuck you and you’re buddies are doing over there, but I’m tired of you shooting and yelling and threatening me. It’s got to stop,” Joe said.

“We’re friends Joe. What I said – I was joking.”

“We’re not friends, and this has been going on too long. What a year now? Two?” Joe paused dragging from his cigarette. “Take your gun out.” The guy hesitated. “Take the damn gun out and put it on the ground.” The guy pulled it out, the metal glinting in the rays of sun pushing through the thick trees. He tossed it on the grass and it bounced a little in the thick green cushion.

Joe picked it up, tossed it into the lake, and turned back to the man. “It’s got to stop. There’s no reason for all this,” Joe said.

“I’m not afraid of you. What, you going to shoot me? I’ve been shot three times in the chest and been to prison. You don’t scare me old man.”

“I’ll shoot you. One shot. And I won’t miss. You won’t be going back to prison, bud.”

“And I didn’t miss him when he just up and left one day,” Joe says to me. There’s more to the story, but I only remember the key parts. I remember because it makes me see my uncle as the perpetual badass – a smart mouth with a handgun, a sweet heart, and a wise soul.

“Funny. I’ve kind of got the same problem. You know, tough guys wanting to fight for no real reason,” I say. “Think they’re tough shit.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, some of my girlfriend’s old friends. One of her ex-boyfriends and his buddy. Want to beat my ass because they want to sleep with her. Obviously, I won’t let them. Some shit huh? Kind of doin’ the same thing, calling me up and saying they’re going show me and set me straight.

All I’ve done is defend her, maybe call them queer or some other choice words, but that’s guy stuff,” I say sitting forward and lighting a cigarette.

He laughs. “Yeah, some people just have a chip on their shoulders. And sometimes you gotta’ show em’ they can’t mess with you. That’s how it is, how it was for me my whole life. I grew up fighting. I had to be strong.”

“Yeah, but I’m just not the fighting type, not the type to hold someone up with a damn gun,” I say, laughing.

Peanut waddles over to the railings and barks at a hummingbird hovering above his head at the feeder. “He’s just jealous, the ex-boyfriend. Just ride it out or knock him in his mouth, give him a bloody lip and a black eye. Either or. Both work just as well. But you know you can’t always fight.” He calls Peanut back to him, scratches the skin at the base of his tail. “You’re a smart kid Jonathan, a tough kid. You’ll figure it out.”

I’m not sure where he gets this idea, the idea that I’m tough. I’ve never fought or dealt with losing someone. I don’t know what tough feels like.

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We stand on the same porch, but at night now and several days later. He is propped on the railing around the little deck, his arms forming columns to hold up his weight. His back is turned towards me as I come from inside the house; the cold air rushing out past me dies in the exhausting humid night. He trembles slightly, his shoulders shaking softly, and he breathes deep, sniffing, rubbing his sleeve over his mouth.

As the hinges on the door squawk, he turns his head towards me, it hanging down with some tremendous burden attached. I give him a moment – I don’t speak, I don’t move. I pull out my cell-phone, pressing the little white buttons, pretending to text. I am careful catching him in this vulnerable state, careful like a hunter that has awakened a sleeping bear.
He turns around fully, holds out a pack of cigarettes. “Take one,” he says. They’re some off brand, Indian Red I think. They taste like piss, but I smoke it because I can tell he wants to talk. And the funny thing is that I don’t expect him to really talk to me about whatever it is that’s bothering him and I’m taken aback when he does.

“Sit down,” he says motioning to the seat behind me, the seat where I laughed earlier so many times before. He stares for a moment, out to the street light, a foggy yellow hue with hundreds of tiny insects dog-fighting inside of it. “It’s funny how you see things when you think you’re dying,” he says. I choke. I’m not laughing now, but earnestly intent on listening to him.

“You remember I had cancer in my eye? They thought it was back, you know, in my eye again. It’s not, but…” He bends down into the chair across from me and rolls his pin-striped sleeves to his elbows. “But I’ve got this thing on my leg, this thing that’s gotten bigger, like a rash, and I just know it’s moving around inside.” He locks with my eyes through the smoke and although his stare is unmoving, stern, his lips quiver slightly at the corners. His facade is crumbling in chunks and shattering on the ground. “I just keep wondering if I did things right and I think that I did. You’re just never sure I guess. And it doesn’t matter really. I just can’t help but think it’s eating me on the inside.”

At that moment I think about everything. I think about Six Flags. We went there every year and he rode the rollercoaster with me: the Batman rollercoaster. He was fearless on it with his hands raised up, a surrendering man screaming at the top of his lungs, a wide valley of a smile stretched between his cheeks. We looked down at the rushing landscape, with our feet dangling unprotected. We were in some rocket ship, flying away from it all. And I think about the lake after he had skin cancer. He fished with me on the dock in midday, a straw hat strapped to his head — he was a rice farmer with penny loafers and baby-blue jeans and a long sleeve shirt unbuttoned at the breast. I think about he and I playing Gin Rummy at the kitchen table, the way he cradled the cards in his not-wrinkled hands, and swore that I must be the best nine-year-old card player there ever was as I slapped the last of my cards down and won again.

I think about his promise that he would always be around and how strong he was to push through his sicknesses and share life with me. I think about how strong he was to lie about being all right – to me and himself.

And at that moment, too, I finally realize he won’t be around forever after all. All that will be left of him are the pictures we took, his stories, his drive. The trinity of he, my mother and my father taught me to be strong through words, but I saw the words manifest through his second cancer battle. He drug that parasite along the ground and through the mud with his fists clinched tight in its hair. He hung it up like a punching bag, black and blue and beaten for everyone to see.

He is no longer that prize fighter. We both know.

He says, “I’ve come to grips with it all – I’m seventy-four. How much longer can I hold out anyway, right?” He smiles and laughs. I can’t help but smile too even with him saying this and I hate it because I want to be sad for him, for me. I haven’t accepted that he is not something special. I am sad he will not ride rollercoasters with me again and shuffle those Dollar Store playing cards in that way only he can.

I stand to walk inside, to run away, lay there stiff under the sheets, and push the thought of him dying through my ears and into the trash. He grabs my hand as I go passed. He says, “I won’t fight it this time.” He says it with utter conviction – his face is rigid as wood. I nod my head and slam the door behind me with the sharp barbs of his Yankee twang sinking into my temporal lobe, lodging down like a sunken ship.
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