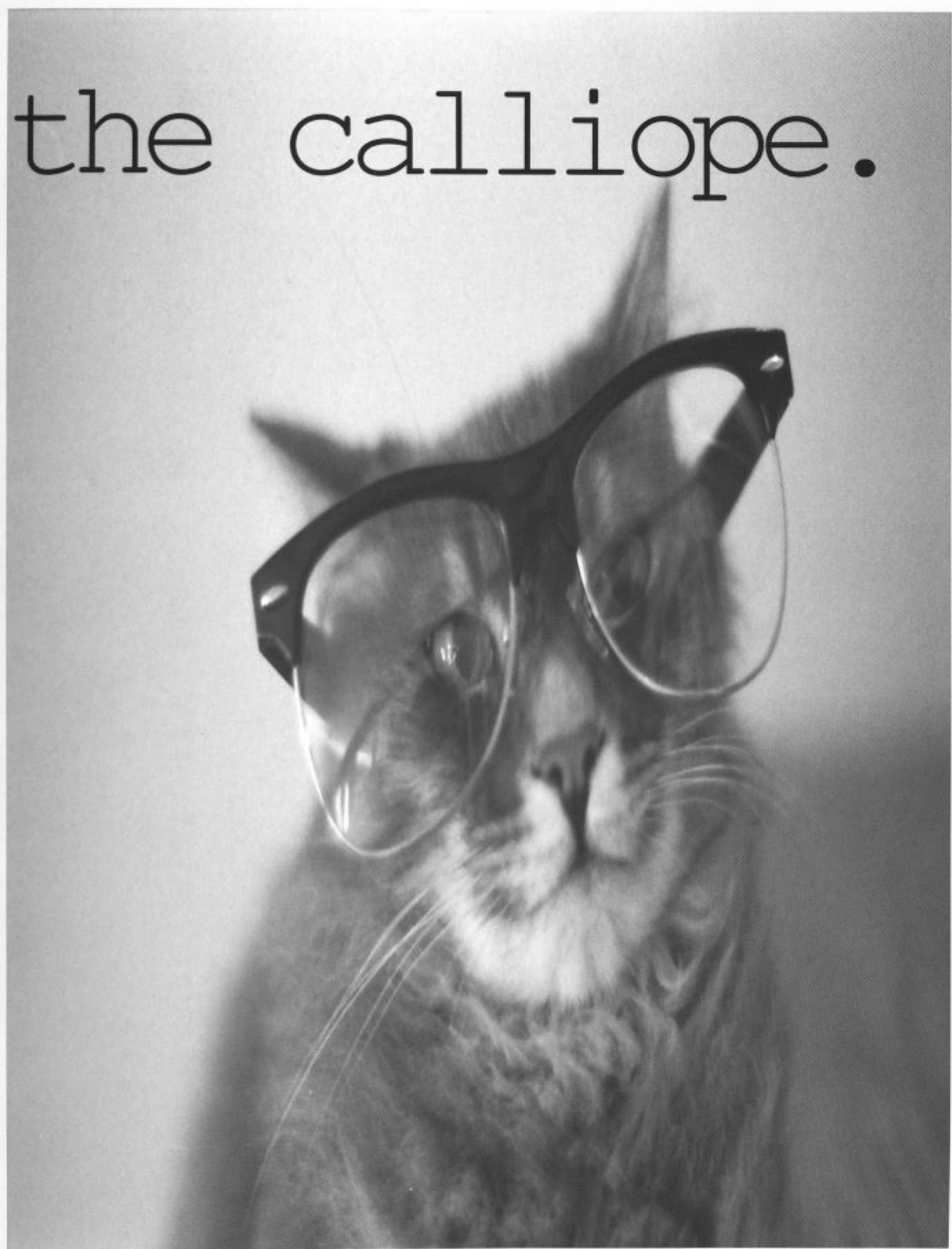


the calliope.





ARMSTRONG ATLANTIC STATE UNIVERSITY

C A L L I O P E

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ASHLEY POPE

*lillian spencer award winner

" UNITITLED"

This is a history.

Small and heavy, the only one.

The things around me hum with possession;
with dull significance.

A sleepless night, a flared temper,
a little boy's mother lost and found
in the clicks of time, the drone of the endless.
And we pass it like a breath, a blink in
the sleepless night of one history.

" AS YOU LAY DYING"

I thought of it while you
slept your sleep of wishes;
those days of currents and matter
that salted my girlhood summers
so that they tasted like happiness,
like yellow sun in sea green dishes.

I scooped the memory
from my aging mind, sand
into my pink plastic pail—
a photograph of my innocence in pigtails
gripping your strong hand with my small, browning
fingers, a fluttering wind gripping the solid sail.

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Your skin cannot feel
The sand's tickling lick today.
It will not feel it tomorrow.
There are no more hours we can create or borrow
other than these that fell into your glass
the minute you inhaled your first day.

Your face, growing old
looks young with its delicate layer of hope
around the eyes. Dreaming in your antiseptic bed,
do you walk through the rooms of
the sandcastles we built with the red
flag soaring to the sky?

It's been so long
since you've seen that ocean. The hot
tears feel like the water in July when our
lives stretched beyond our age,
beyond the ever
of thought and the dreams of never.

As you lay dying
I thought of it. The days of those pink
baby roses drying up into salt and air.
I cling to your hand again, now papery and light;
my regrets linger on my lips, and sink
beneath the low tide.

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" MODERN WORLD"

When I grew up, I was going to be beautiful,
riddled with pearls and cream and feathers;
a riveting display.

The wind changed; the rain washed away
the colors of youth, of ignorance.

The black and white, teeming with the fray
of a California market was all that was left.

Shots of green and orange, I ignored
for the sake of the innocence lost.

It's a strange thing, the living dead;
the pearls that were his eyes read
the new contract and we all assented.

It was expected in the new world.

It was expected.

We saw the colorless light shift
and we prayed.

We prayed to you, the god become woman,
for the cause of a different view.

And I knew.

The flower of life, a new species.

What's that color?

I couldn't tell you, even if I knew.

SPRING 2012

"COLOSSUS"

When I first saw you
it was in the dark
between the shafts of fluid and shadow.
Alien and strange,
you were a thin layer of life,
fragile and glowing—
a tiny ball of days and years to come.

Your colossus, hemming me in,
braiding my years to yours, a
pale gold through dying leaves.
I could not have known—
my middle and your beginning
flung into the waiting air,
ready or not.

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"ONE HUNDRED YEARS"

No one could remember them after they were gone.

There was no second chance.

The repeating names stopped with the wind
along with the eager glance
of a hundred years of waiting.

Waiting to die, waiting to change
into something more tolerable
in the rain and the heat.

The curse came at the end;
came in laughter and blood, a friend
for the last of the line.

A beautiful beginning—
life and light an idea to bring
the world to the nonexistent

Thirty years of war—an interlude of
fiction and futility;

last love,
damaged blood.

The end came with the wind.

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"MY ARMS ARE TIRED THIS MORNING"

I awake early with a quiver, cold
skinned and panting in the dark morning
on the other side of the year-long night.
The dream fell in between when the desires, old
with fervency, ignited without warning
in the graceful curve of your bright
and tender words with the shyness of the first
pink of April. You professed and I danced
the motions of a dying woman still inflamed
with the faith in a love that bursts
from all colors and light; the romance
that lifts bruised arms to the sky in the rain.

My arms are tired this morning.

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"RISING SUN"

The blood flows in the streets.
I walk through it.
Is that blood?
It is life and death;
to me, just color;
the color of motion and wine.
Movement has no meaning
and we don't care.
Another bottle, Señor!

She looks lovely, as usual.
I lay dormant, still, sleeping
amidst the endless motion.
There is no change
and that's fine with me.

The darkness lends some cover.
I can't see her as clearly then.
When she asks me,
I'll say yes. I always do.

This life is easy—
it's shallow and blunt,
the best excitement is a pair of horns
or a pal's needless existence.

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I don't want to know what it all means;
tell me how to get from one light
to the next,
and pass another bottle around—
the color of wine, the color of blood.

"ECCLESIASTES"

The sparks made some color in that black
and white cave, a bright gold with red dripping
from the edges. The precipice of some future breath
caught everyone's attention.

That was the beginning; the pink and yellow
tulips growing up in a green field
like winter would never come.

We forget in our embryonic field;
the first breath blinding us from the last.

The years descend from the sky; rain
on the thirsty ground dissolving into
the dust, disappearing into roots
and other worlds.

We cannot retrieve them; catch them
in a cup and set them upon the windowsill.

CALLIOPE

THOMAS GENTLE

" SCRATCHIN"

Breathe.

Like a tree before the axe,
Tall and firm I stand, ready against the wind.
I spread my branches, knowing I will be cut down.

Cardinal calmly, progress is made, the slightest stammer turns to
sweat
Controlling confidence, rational regulation, exasperated effort,
My throat draws its sickle, quietly and effortlessly seizing
Blindly, I press on.

W-w-whack

Flustered frustration, rage begins to boil.
C-c-lick C-c-lack, the guillotine drops on my tongue,
My crackled voice s-ssspews another indistinguishable sound.

Crackling snappy flutters,
Tongue lashes, expressions askew.
Spittle unchecked, twitchy wrinkles collide.
No sultry sounds do I invoke, only shame and the hope for an end.

Speech, the ecstasy of my being, my lustful mistress,
Speech, to whom everyone so easily shelves away;
Speech, a readily granted bridge used by so many
Speech, a barred cell unjustly caging me in.
Speech, my ghoul,

Freedom f-f-f-f-fighter, rrrrrestless reciter, I will be heard.
Relentless will, lest I be forgotten, I speak.

Though my voice be a broken record,
Forever will it spin.

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VIOLET BUTLER

" EVOLUTION OF INFANTS"

Our thoughts
were born in the tropics
but now, having learned so much,
our curiosities grow North
away from the Equator
with six months of night as marked
by the Gregorian
and Kindergarten color theory
expands to questions
of magnetism
What draws us here?
where growing pains
in tired legs
are so easily confused
for Banshee calls
Where we converge—
a thick stew of science
and tribalism,
lonely travelers
dissecting the symmetry of
each cold flake,
before those famous lights
sure that none have come before
or ever left the palms.

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" GRAVE DIGGER"

You buried my bones
in a shallow grave
just below the surface
so that a rainstorm could wash them up
but for now
they're hidden safely beneath my soft earth
that your hands hold
that fills your hands.

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" OCEANS "

Every few days we
create silent oceans between us
and pretend we can't swim

It's when the rhythm slows down to a
dull coma patient's pulse when
affects steady slightly furrowed south
and words become sticky in our mouths
seeming inappropriate once spat out
into the other's ear

Behind the drum
there are bridges
stubborn like mirages, stubborn like bigotry
but there nonetheless

and we'll cross.

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RACHAEL FLORA

"SNOW AND SIRENS"

Sirens always make me think of December.
Maybe it's the long wail that pierces the
silent evening,
Still shrieking after they've passed my block.
I think of a person inside, the cold night
outside,
Maybe even some snow beginning to grace the
ground,
When a fire truck speeds by, red lights
flashing and sirens echoing for miles,
Shattering the quiet scene of the evening.
The snowflakes are pushed aside by the trucks,
And the silence is smothered by the splitting
sound.
Then my gram turns from the icy window,
Cigarette dangling from her bony fingers,
Furry robe tied tightly around her lanky
frame,
And she says to me, or to anyone who is near,
"Damn fire trucks."

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Then she puts out the cigarette in her blue
ashtray
And shuts the freezing window with a clang.
Across the road I can see the bright Kroger
lights,
Infiltrated by the tiny white flakes dropping
down
And illuminating the thin layer on the dry
grass.
The trucks are gone with their noise and
flash,
And all that's left is the snow outside the
room window,
As my gram and I watch it slowly cascade
down.
The stillness that follows is of Christmas
folklore,
The grandmotherly moment fleeting, yet
permanent.
I guess that's why I think of snow and
sirens.

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CHARLOTTE HALL

"FALL (I WILL NOT CHANGE WITH THE WIND)"

It's that time of year again
When I find my thoughts to be unclear
But I know your love is stronger than this change in
the air
Than these oranges, browns, and reds
And the urge to rush to the comfort of my bed
I must keep everything in perspective though
Yes, my world is changing
Along with these leaves
The summer wind has turned
Into an autumn breeze
And the temperature has dropped
Down to about fifty degrees
Even though the seasons alter their mood
I will not change the way I feel about you

Yes, fall has arrived
But I will still think about you all of the time
I will not change with the wind

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HOYT RAMEY

*lillian spencer award winner

" I "



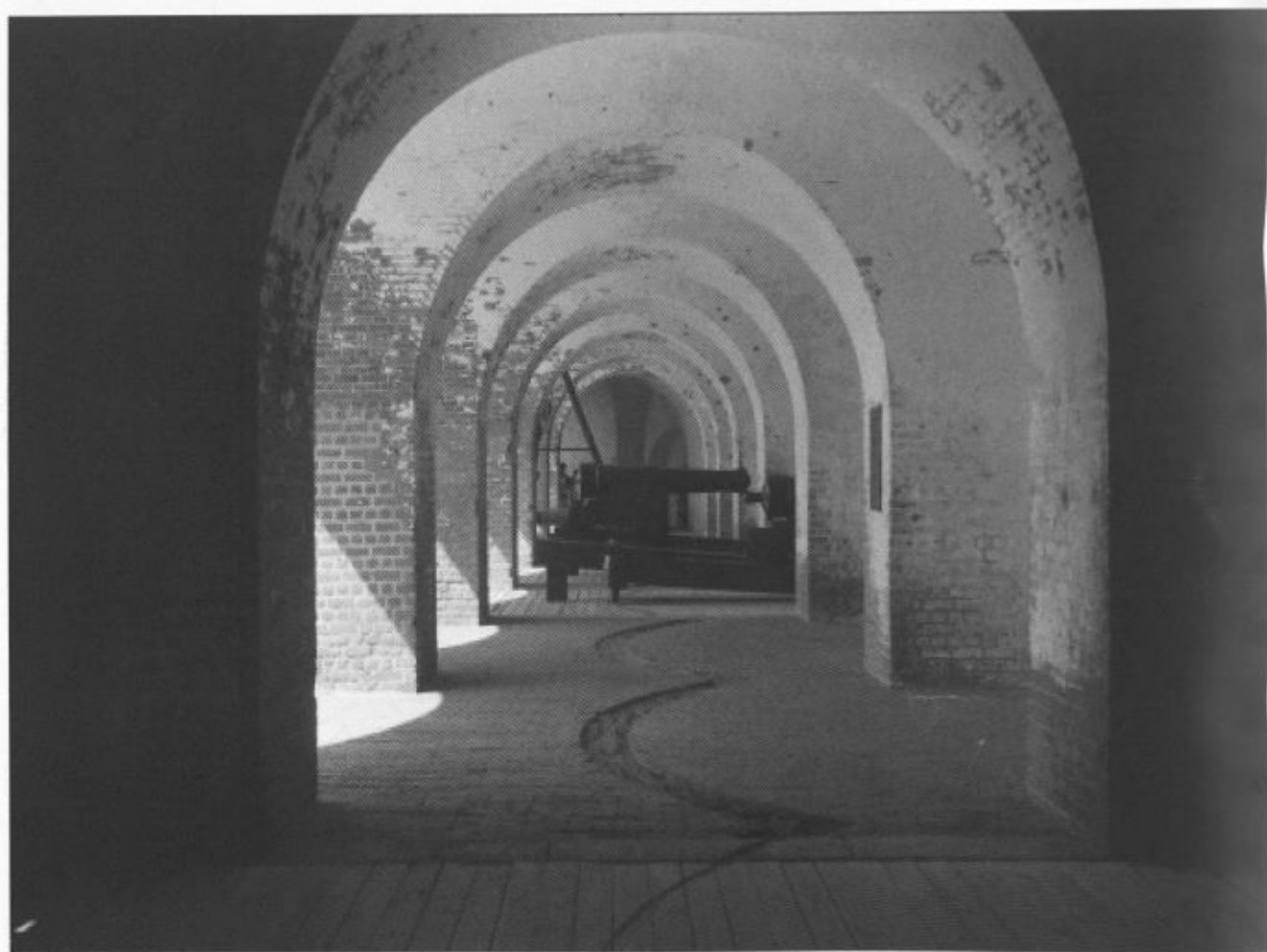
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" 2 "



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" 3 "



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ELLA GREER

"THE GIRL THEY WRITE ROCK SONGS ABOUT"

Remember to keep an ice pack on the hickey and have
second thoughts about the boy that gave it to you, good
lovers never leave marks; dab your lips with foundation
before applying the red lipstick otherwise you'll look
like a clown before the night is over; is it true that
you lost your panties?; the walk of shame is never
okay, leave the party before you're left; this is how to
hold your liquor; always know where your panties are,
or you will never like the way they come back to you
but I never lose my underwear and I'm never ever the one
left; girls like us don't cry, we bite our lip, flip our
hair, and saunter away; eat the ice cream if you want,
just be sure it's not because of a boy; it's okay to
leave questions unanswered, no one cares about a girl
who gives all of her secrets away; sunbathe topless,
tan lines are for the goody two-shoes; this is how to

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reply to the girls who call you a slut I wasn't naked, I was wearing his shirt; use liquid eyeliner to create the cat eye so you don't end up looking like a raccoon; this is how to smoke a cigarette to make your voice sound raspy; this is how to write a song about a man that has done you wrong; this is how to sneak out of the house while your parents are downstairs; this is how to sneak into the house before your parents notice that you're gone; this is how to hide all evidence that you did not spend the entire night in your room; this is how to toe the line of being a tease and a slut; this is how to cure a hangover; remember that boys like the chase, once you let them catch you they won't like you anymore; it's the good girls who keep diaries, girls like us don't have the time; this is how to hide your music collection from your parents; remember to save

CALLIOPE

all of the desire for revenge for a song, only sluts start drama; this is how to escape the small town that suffocates you; this is how to move to the city; this is how to become the snarky waitress that the regulars love; this is the freedom you feel once you realize your life will be nothing but art and music and friends from this moment onward; this is how to get out quick when things get too serious; the staples of our closet are Levi's, converse, and band tees; this is how to turn your apartment into a refuge for underground artists and musicians; there is nothing sexy about being a sloppy drunk or a sloppy lover; when at a concert, dance with your hips only; sluts chase the band, girls like us live with the band; if you don't have to wrestle with your pants when you put them on, they're not tight enough; sluts talk about other people, girls like us talk about ideas and places we've been; the way I see it, we want to live this way forever, and the good girls are the ones who die young; this is how

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to use the hairspray to give volume but not make your hair stiff; girls like us don't call boys, nor do we have to worry about boys ever "forgetting" our number; be sure to keep the songs written about you for your grandchildren to hear and know that there is truth behind the stories; but what if no one writes a rock'n' roll song about me?; do you really mean to say that after all of this you are not going to be the kind of girl they write rock'n'roll songs about?

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"JASON"

In the dog days of summer behind his parent's
house
we lifted our faces to the sun and spoke of
Aldous Huxley.

I mistook the beer for wisdom and looked on in
wonder
as he chain smoked and quoted Jack Kerouac.
"I think Bob Dylan and David Bowie had a
thing."

The water ran cold, and as we sat in silence in
the bath-
a deranged novelty of sepia rust stains and a
tired faucet-

I peeled off what was left of my summer skin.
He snored behind me as I watched the street
lamps flicker down below.
I prepared for what was to be a cold December.
Sometimes we're not as beautiful as we think.

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JUSTIN TONEY

"A FATHER LOST AND FOUND"

It is the 4th of July, and I am with my father setting off fireworks. The cracks of black cats, explosive bursts from roman candles, whistles from bottle rockets, and the violent beauty of colorful flashing lights in the sky created memories that were branded in my mind. We are all in the K-Mart parking lot, each with our own bag of fireworks. This is an event that brings my family together, especially me and my father. Dad lights a roman candle for me—while I hold it with both hands—and I aim the mini-cannon at the night sky as it launches ten balls of fire in the air. Every summer I anticipated the trip to Andover with my father to buy fireworks as if that holiday were my Christmas.

I enjoyed those moments when my siblings and I would visit our father. My parents had divorced before I was born and all of us children lived with our mother. We spent some time together, so it is evident that some manner of a relationship was formed between my father and me. Since my

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father did not live in our house, there was not much of a rapport between him and me.

There was something missing from our relationship. Perhaps, no relation existed—except for our DNA and last names—that displayed any familiar relationship between the two of us. I grew up without my father living under the same roof as me, so I was robbed of that constant interaction with him. That necessary interaction is what helps create the emotional connection that encourages a father and son to get to know each other. There were some concrete facts that I knew about my father: he worked as a supervisor at the BOEING aircraft company—in the aircraft manufacturing department; he was born in Wichita, KS; and he used to smoke cigars that stained his old Lincoln Town car with a sweet musk.

I remember looking at a fifteen year old family photo—which was imprinted on a beveled wood frame—and it included everyone else except me: my father Donald Sr.; my mother Patricia; my brothers Cedric and Donald Jr.; and my sister Micha. My father wore a thick jerry curl and a lumberjack beard that made him look like an African American Santa

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Clause without the big belly and red suit. My brothers and sister shared his dark chocolate skin, while I favored my mother's looks and her peanut butter complexion. My birth was an unexpected arrival, and there was a subconscious distance between my father and me.

We did not talk much on the phone; and in person, the only moments that I spoke to him were in response to him speaking to me first. Whenever he called, our conversations sustained only a matter of minutes with the usual small talk, "Hey son how are you doing?" and "I am doing fine dad." He usually initiated the calls, and one time he asked me, "How come you never call me first?" I replied, "I never have much or anything at all to say to you." He wondered why I felt that way. I figured since he left us, then he should be the one responsible for contacting his children, and not the other way around. My mother was responsible for my upbringing: with the love, discipline, and bestowing wisdom upon me. Many children were raised without ever knowing their fathers, but even though my father's presence was there, I felt as if I did not know him at all. My father showed more affection and attention towards my

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elder siblings than he did towards me. Whenever my brother Cedric would earn good grades, my dad gave him an additional allowance, but when I received above average grades, my accomplishments were not rewarded. My achievements were smaller, but I still yearned for his support and attention. I was jealous of the favoritism he displayed towards Cedric and the others.

I did not have his mentorship as a young boy, so there were other males who filled the positions he had left vacant. I looked up to various male role models: a guy who taught me how to tie my shoes, male mentors provided by the Big Brothers & Sisters program, Mr. Moment from my mother's church, etc. Father would take us all to theme parks like Frontier City in Oklahoma and Joy Land in Kansas. We spent time with him every other Christmas, and I loved waking up Christmas morning, to my favorite toys and additional gifts. But I never had that deep father-to-son conversation: being taught how to become a man. All the gifts in the world cannot replace the close bond I wanted to have with my father.

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My mother could not make the enrollment day my junior year of high school, so my father had to take her place. The school library had tables circling the room, with a conga line of students who could not wait to leave, and they were aided by their parents who wanted to make sure their money was not being wasted. When it came time to pay the necessary equipment fees—which amounted over one hundred dollars—for my enrollment, my father asked me, “Son, do you think you can pay for them?” I could not believe he had the audacity to ask me to pay my own school fees, especially since I did not have the money or a job to cover the bill. Initially, I was shocked by his question, and later I was hurt, because I was not worth him spending a measly \$116 for my education.

What would happen the following year was not expected, although we should have seen the train approaching the derailed tracks up ahead. One late afternoon, my father came to my mother's house, because we both needed to have a serious discussion. It was him and me, standing head to head in my mother's green and white living room. This was my chance to let my father know how I truly felt about

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him. All of the repressed rage and resentment I held towards my father just shot out like steam in the Looney Tunes cartoons. I do not remember what came over me. I had no control over what I would say next. "I HATE YOU!" I exclaimed. "Oh you hate me? Well then I do not need to give you any more money," he replied surprisingly. "I never needed your money. I have come this far without much of your help, and I can continue on without it," I said. I felt a huge relief getting that off my chest—like a boulder finally being lifted off my back, liberating me from my damaged emotions, due to his lack of fatherhood towards me. He walked out of the house, drove off, and we did not speak for a few months.

One Sunday after church, Mrs. Deborah Mumford, my best friend Roland's mom, decided to have a talk with me after I told her about the altercation between my father and me. I considered Mrs. Mumford my second mother, because she always provided me with sound wisdom, and she accepted me with a mother's love. She sympathized with me and understood why I was so upset with my father. I felt like he did not

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know anything unique about me: my favorite color, my love for drawing, or that I wrote poetry. But then she told me something that I did not expect nor would I ever forget. "Justin, you need to forgive your father for his mistakes, and you should apologize for what you said," she told me. She continued to explain, that in order for me to progress to the next stage of my life, I needed to release the hate I had for my father.

I realized that Mrs. Mumford was right, and it was up to me to make things work between me and my father. I had to muster up some maturity and discard of my pride in order to change our faulty relationship. So, I forgave him and apologized for what I said in our last conversation. That talk with Mrs. Mumford was the catalyst for the change and progression of our relationship.

During my deployments to Iraq, my father was one of three people: my mother, stepmother Diane, and himself, who asked if there was anything that I needed sent to me. He sent me care packages with hygiene products, notebooks and pencils for my artwork, snacks, home-baked cookies,

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etc. The packages and letters I received boosted my morale during my tour overseas. Later on I noticed that my father and I had more in common than I had previously thought. He also served four years in the U.S. Army active duty—during the tail end of the Vietnam War. We were not so different after all. Even though I could not tell him everything about my missions—due to operation security measures—he asked other questions: where my base was located, any exciting things that I have seen, how I was doing, etc. We finally connected after so many years.

It was the fall of 2011 when I realized how much I needed him. Our relationship has turned a full 180-degrees from where it nearly ended ten years ago. I think back in those times when I visited him for the 4th of July, and how we bonded through exchanges of explosions and cracks of the fireworks. I had lost sense of who my father really was, because we were not connected. After my first deployment in Iraq, I was reminded of those times we spent together on that holiday as a kid. We shared a bond as veteran soldiers, so he understood what I was dealing with overseas,

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more than anyone else in my family. His support during my war deployments brought us closer together than we had ever been. For years he was just my father, and now he is my dad.

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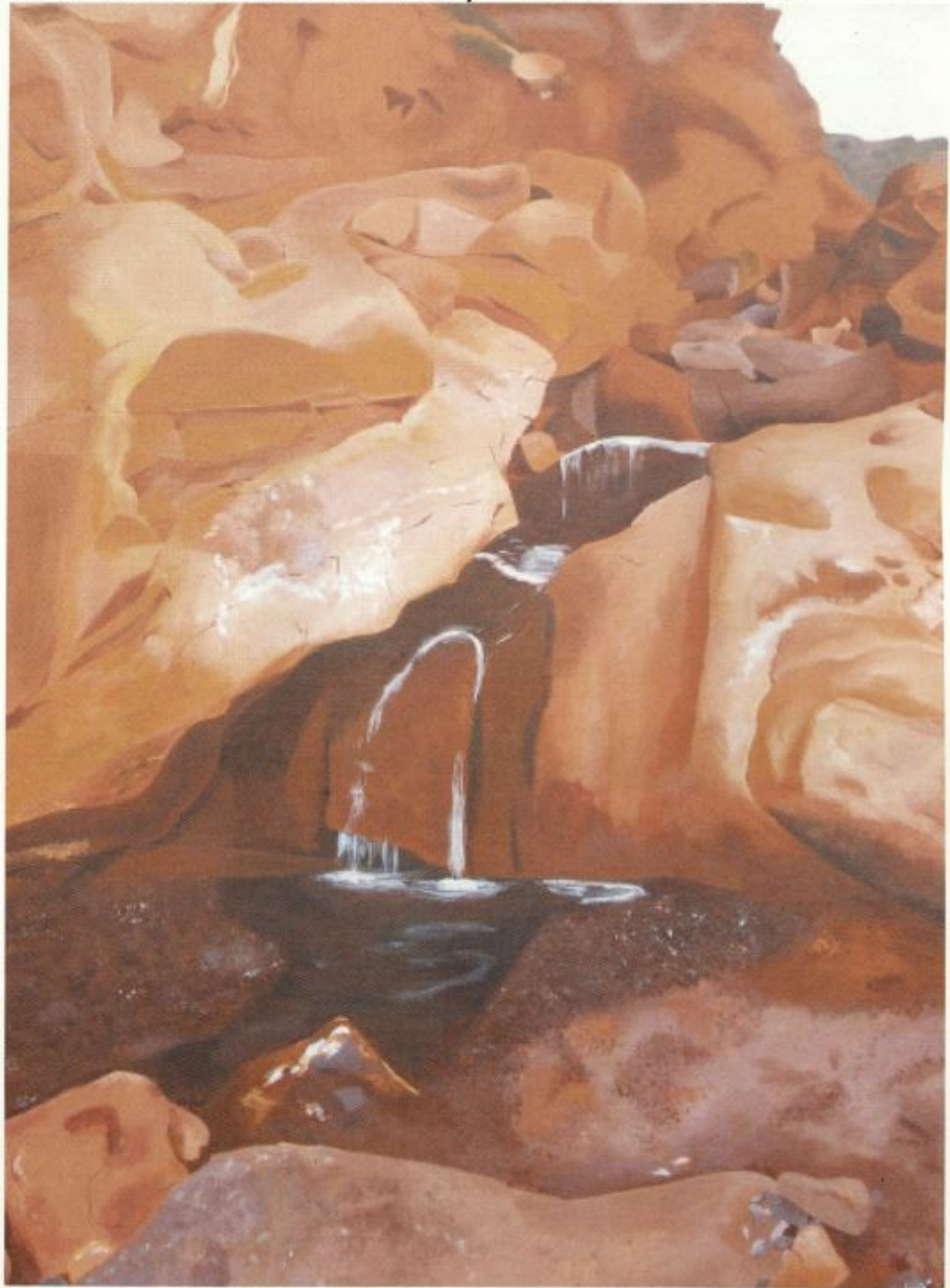
AMIE CONLEY

"SUMMER AT THE LANDINGS"



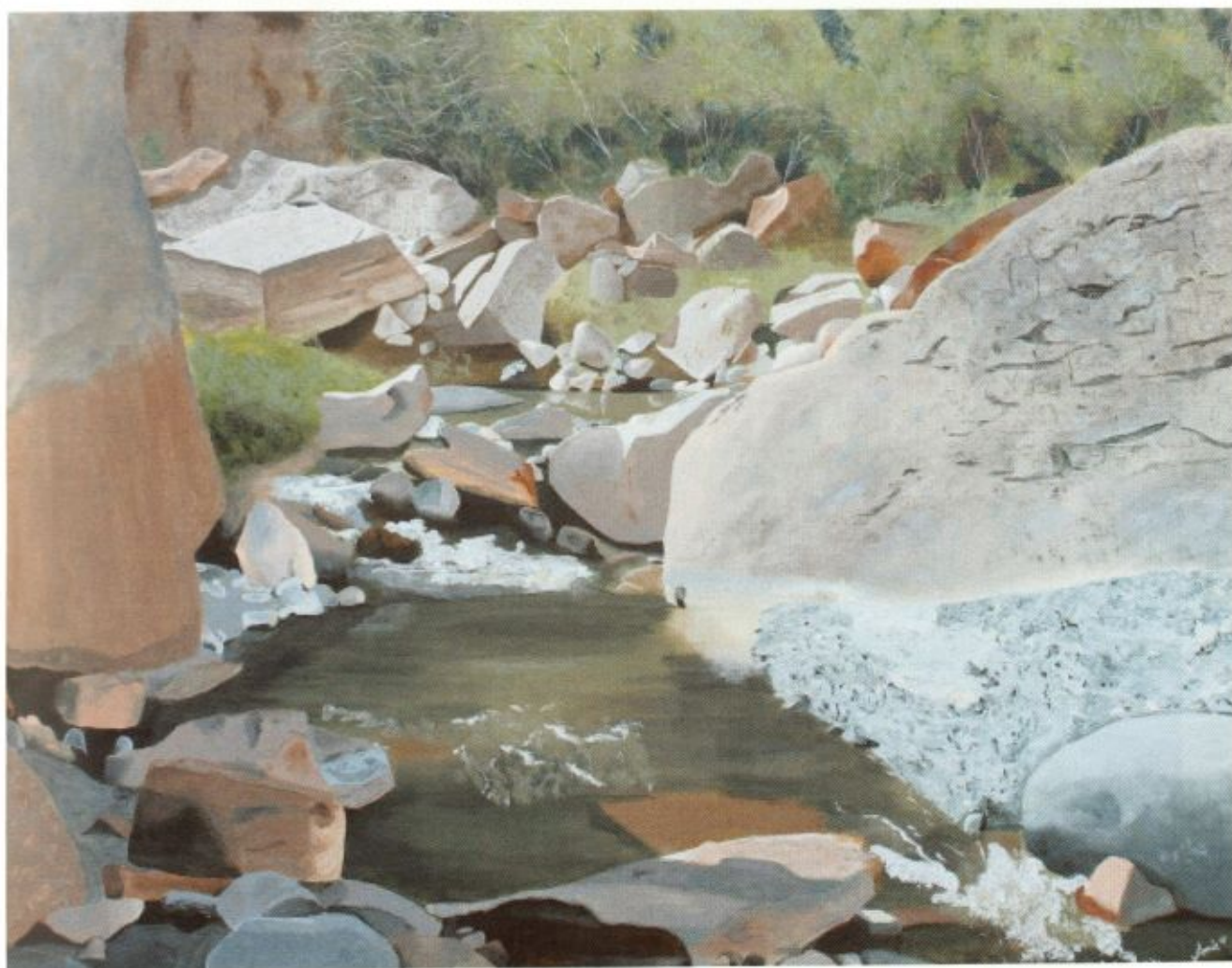
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"HIKING AT ASCIBI, ARGENTINA"



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"HIKING AT BREALITOS, ARGENTINA"



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"BUTTERFLY- THE LIGHT FROM WITHIN"



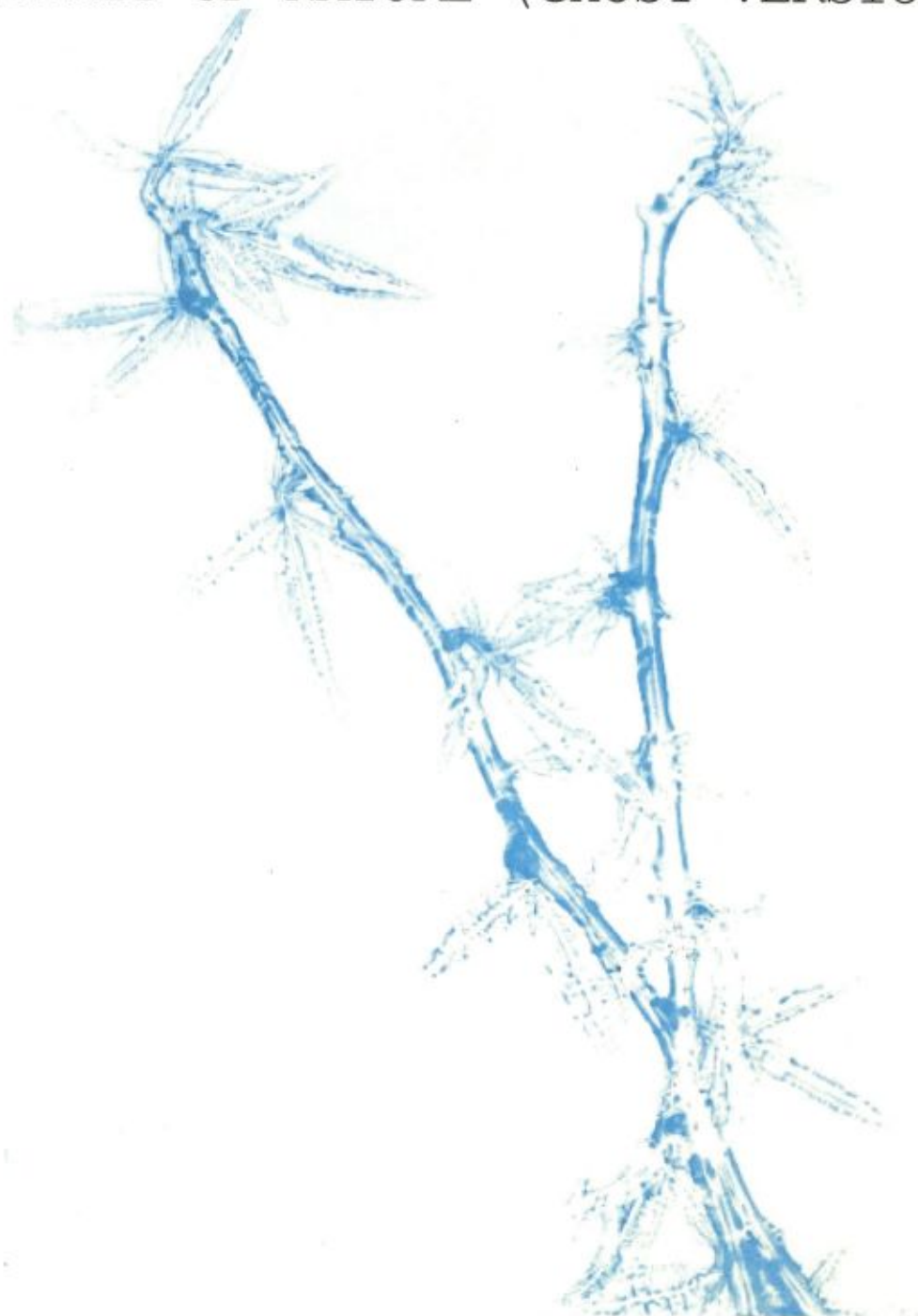
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"SPIRIT OF NATURE"



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"SPIRIT OF NATURE (GHOST VERSION)"



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MICHEAL ROGERS

*lillian spencer award winner

"WHEELERS STORY"

Dear reader, this is the story of Wheeler Barrows, an international fugitive hunted for crimes he did not commit (and some he did). I have made it my life's ambition to follow the trail of Wheeler Barrows in an attempt to return him to his family. I have traced his steps to the ship of the dreaded pirate Captain "Long Legs" Cahoots, I read the graffiti he scrawled upon the highest peak of an island floating in the clouds, and I am almost certain that I stewed in the same boiling pot he did as I tracked him to the cannibalistic Zera-goo-goo tribe in the forgotten jungles of West Africa.

The Barrows family is wholly extraordinary, an odd collection of characters, each so full of their own virtues and vices that a full chronicle of the family's history could never be recorded here. Suffice to say that Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Barrows and their thirteen children live in a large country home just outside Firebolt. It was the oldest son, Theodore, who offered me a chance to come live in their home after I had a series of falling outs with my own family. I felt shamed at the idea of imposing, but the Barrows family welcomed me with open arms and threw a party to for my arrival that lasted for two straight days. It was at that party that an eight-year-

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old Wheeler christened me "Chang Barrows" to commemorate my acceptance into the family.

So, the story begins one night when I was driving my wife Lucy and our seven-year-old daughter Natalie out to the Barrows home one evening, Wheeler having volunteered the location for a small friendly gathering. As we pulled into the drive, I noted that none of the cars in the driveway belonged to the premises. It was often no strange sight to see five to eight cars parked on the lawn, being that there are so many drivers in the Barrows' home and the backyard was, at times, quite littered with vehicles. I concluded that the whole of the family had gone out on the town, leaving Wheeler the house to himself.

I retrieved my daughter from the backseat where she was bursting with excitement; it had been arranged that Karie, the youngest of the Barrows girls, would look after Natalie while Wheeler and I touched elbows with his friends. Natalie ran ahead of us to the front door as my wife and I exchanged a quiet smile.

"Come on! Hurry up!" called Natalie, as she knocked at the door.

Lucy and I were ten feet away when the door opened.

"Hey, Wheeler," Natalie said as she rushed by him.

"Oh, hello, Nat-" he began, but Natalie had already tuned him out and as I walked onto the door step, I heard my daughter cry out "Karie!"

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There, in the threshold, stood Wheeler; he possessed the build of a scarecrow: tall and very thin. His hair, once pitch black, contained a tinge of red, which Wheeler himself had added, and he was almost always smiling. Also of note about Wheeler was his young appearance. Though he was in his early twenties, he barely looked eighteen, and as a result, I have heard people using the epithet "the boy" almost universally when speaking of him.

Behind Wheeler, Natalie stood hugging Karie, who was laughing and tickling her. Karie was fourteen, had dirty blonde hair and shared the scarecrow build with Wheeler .

"Chang!" said Wheeler, with his face beaming, as he beckoned Lucy and I inside. Such was his pleasure in seeing us that I was quite reminded of Natalie when she had finally gotten within arms reach of Karie.

"Good evening, Wheeler," I said as I followed him through the foyer. "Where is everyone tonight?"

"Hm..." was the sound that Wheeler made when he was thinking. "Well, since Bartholomew got married, he hasn't wanted to visit us very much at all," said Wheeler with a rare scowl on his face.

"And he never invites us to tea!" chimed Karie.

Bartholomew was the third Barrows child, and he had, indeed, recently be-wed. Unlike his older siblings, however, his marriage was not followed by frequent visits, but, rather, only the occasional phone call to make sure all was well.

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Wheeler had once described the union as 'Not at all like gaining a sister, and very much like losing a brother.'

"Oh, stop you two!" said Lucy, though she was smiling. "It's not that he doesn't want to see you. It's just, well, he needs time to get adjusted to being a newly wed, and being able to have his wife all too himself before he realizes how much he misses the two of you. Why, when You and I were first married..." as she spoke, she twirled some of her long, golden locks around her finger, her eyes beaming with nostalgia.

It was quite amazing how Wheeler and Karie shared the exact same look of skepticism; arms crossed, with their right eye narrowed and their left eyebrow raised slightly: a twofold image that quite clearly said, "I have no idea what you are talking about." Indeed, they looked so similar that I almost forgot that they were in no way related by blood.

Due to the unique environment in which they were raised, many of the Barrows children's social maturation has been stunted slightly, and they had trouble understanding some of the concepts that other people might take for granted. However, Wheeler, for one, was not the kind of person to get caught up in trivial matters so he shrugged it off. "The twins took the girls shopping, the boys went bowling, and I think Mom and Dad went to the movies. Regardless, everyone is gone except me and Kare Bear."

We arrived in the living room where the other guests were gathered; Wheeler's friends, who were almost as broken to

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reality as he was. There was Richard Stilow, though everyone called him "Molits" because of his preference for being upside down. He is the only individual I've ever met who could walk faster while doing a hand stand than the average person can run. So it was, therefore, no strange sight to see him, his hair hanging loosely from his head, his muscular arms supporting his body, and his limber legs flailing about as they reached towards heaven. Molits had known Wheeler for as long as anyone, their friendship dating back to grade school and the two of them had done everything together growing up. Molits tried to show Wheeler the benefits of living life upside down, but many of the lessons did not take ("I don't care what anyone says, it is significantly harder to study algebra when you're upside down.")

Anna Reidier was also present, and ever since a very traumatic event in her childhood where she had almost stepped on a crocodile seconds after being advised to "put her best foot forward," had only been able to walk backwards. Anna had moved to Firebolt and joined Wheeler's class when he was in the seventh grade, and though she had been pretty, she had been dubbed an outcast because she walked backwards and was always looking over her shoulder. Wheeler, always unable to resist someone who marched to the beat of different drummer (even if they were marching backwards), had befriended her within seconds and suggested they become best friends. As such, having observed much of her throughout my years in and out of the Barrows home,

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I am almost positive she had developed something of a crush on Wheeler, who was oblivious.

They were chatting the night away with Savannah Savannah, who was ambidextrous, and had long brown hair and perfect green eyes. I knew that she had come from a rough household where, in the past, she had been beaten whenever she asked her father repeat anything. She met Wheeler on their first day in high school, and Wheeler, having never met an ambidextrous person, let alone someone who had the same first and last name, became transfixed almost immediately. Savannah, incredibly shy and a bit unused to kindness from men, had nothing but laughter to give him and they became fast friends.

Finally, there was Brittany Mears, the closest thing Wheeler had to a love interest, who was sitting slightly apart from the rest of them, and was a bit non-responsive whenever spoken to, seemingly lost in her own world. Although Brittany was beautiful and brilliant, most people thought she was incredibly bad luck. In her twenty one years of life, she had lost both of her parents, causing her to be raised by her uncle, who lost a substantial fortune within a week of her coming into his home. Every pet she had ever owned had been run over by a car, including a pet goldfish whose bowl was sat down in the garage for one minute while she attempted to find some fish food without realizing her uncle would pull in the moment she looked away. And every boyfriend she had ever had encountered horrible accidents within two months of their first date. She had therefore accepted her role as something of a bad omen and

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a harbinger of doom. Indeed, after her fourth boyfriend had been chased three blocks by a bear, she had dyed her hair black and taken to wearing dark shirts to make it a little more obvious.

Much as I have questioned Wheeler about his interest in Miss Brittany, he remains allusive, as if he were confused himself. While he assures me it is her infinite collection of soft t-shirts that has caught his eye, I am utterly convinced that there is some other reason, perhaps buried deep within the recesses of Wheeler's mind that he has long since forgotten that draws his interest, and if I ever manage to discern that reason I will consider myself the Chief Expert in the Realm of Barrowology, with a specialty in Wheelerisms.

As Lucy and I took our seats, Wheeler brought around coffee for everyone and, dear reader, let me tell you about the coffee that Wheeler Barrows prepared. I have heard Wheeler's blend of coffee described as: "A relaxing euphoria of indulgence, while rafting down a river of Happiness. With a hint of cinnamon." Whatever secret ingredients he had added to concoct that absolutely perfect flavor, he had struck gold.

"Here you are Anna," said Wheeler as he passed her a glass.

"Oh, thank you Wheeler," said Anna, blushing slightly.

"And for you, Molits."

"Are you sure you don't want to sit down properly, Molits?"

asked Karie, always very perplexed by Molits'

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strange habits.

Molits was sitting with his shoulders at the seat of the couch and his legs thrown over the back. "It's a proven fact that drinks taste better when you're upside down," he said as he took a swallow.

"Wheeler, I know I've told you this a thousand times, but this coffee is amazing!" said Lucy incredulously. "I have to know, where did you learn the recipe?"

The boy turned around, smiling slightly mischievously as everyone in the room turned to him, ready for a story.

Wheeler paused, and looked as though he were trying to break down the question. I noticed there was a playful twinkle in his eyes. "Are you sure you wanna know? I did some questionable things." I allowed a slight dramatic pause before telling Wheeler that yes, we did want to know the entire story, no matter what sort of wicked deeds he committed.

"Well," Wheeler began, "it happened the summer after I finished high school; as you all know, my parents let me travel to Europe to take in the sights as a coming of age present. I was a few weeks into the trip when my ears caught wind of a world famous coffee hut in Switzerland."

"You got your coffee in Switzerland?" asked Savannah Savannah incredulously.

"Yes, Switzerland. Now, I was just starting to develop my love for coffee, and it didn't become a passion until my first finals week at ECU, but all the same, I decided to push

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Switzerland to the top of the itinerary. I tracked the shop down, tried the coffee, and I fell in love. I mean, this was heaven in a mocha blend of caffeinated goodness. It was incredible! Then, I started asking around for the recipe, but they were holding out on me. I mean, sure, they'd bend over backwards for tourists wanting watches, but they were unwilling to part with the golden egg-laying goose."

"Imagine that?" said Lucy, a laugh in her voice. "The Swiss were unwilling to part with their secret recipes? How backwards!"

"Being backwards isn't a bad thing," said Anna looking hurt.

Lucy's mouth dropped, "Oh, no, I didn't mean, it's just that it seems upside down—" "What's wrong with being upside down?" Molits asked. Lucy, unable to tell when Wheeler's friends were having a laugh, seemed stunned having to backpedal so quickly to avoid offense, so I came to her rescue.

"What Lucy means is that this community of Swiss must have been raised in barns to not want to share their secrets with outsiders." I was about to add, 'She was being sarcastic' when I was distracted by the awed look on Wheeler's face, which quickly broke into a beaming grin. "I need a friend who was raised in a barn!" Wheeler's friends all laughed and even Brittany allowed a giggle.

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"A friend who was raised in a barn would be good for you," said Brittany logically. "He could do anything he wanted and no one would be able to complain."

I decided to prompt Wheeler.

"Wheeler? Coffee Recipe? The Swiss were holding out on you...?"

There was a slight pause as Wheeler recollected his thoughts. "Right, as I was saying, coffee isn't a possession to be hoarded! It needs to be shared with the world!"

"But you've never told anyone else how to make it," Karie pointed out.

"Well, part of that is because if word gets around about this coffee being brewed in Firebolt, the Swiss will track me down and kill me."

"Right," Molits's face appeared skeptical even though it was upside down. "But, fair enough, so how did you get the recipe?"

"Hmm... I found it."

"How did you find it? Did they just leave it lying around?"

"Well no, see, there was this one Swiss who talked in his sleep and, well, I needed to know where the bathroom was, but he was chatty, and as the conversation went on and on..." and Wheeler trailed off dramatically.

"Ok, so, basically, you stole the recipe?" Anna asked.

"Yes, from the Swiss."

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There was a pregnant pause. I for one was very impressed with Wheeler's ability to create such a story on the spot.

"And you are afraid the Swiss are going to hunt you down for stealing their coffee recipe?" I asked.

"Of course! They are very angry because people have already taken so many of their things: there's cheese and army knives and watches and bank accounts..."

"Why, you must be absolutely terrified," said Lucy, with a smile on her face and sarcasm in her voice.

"Hmmm, not so much terror, just a constant state of..." Wheeler paused for a moment, searching for an opportune word before settling on "caution."

"Why no fear?" asked Karie, who seemed to have bought into the story at least a bit, if only perhaps out of concern for her brother. "Because I have developed a fool-proof Swiss detection plan!" said Wheeler dramatically. "They'll never get near me. For as long as I have my ears, I'll be able to hear them coming on account of their wooden shoes. And as long as I have my eyes, I'll see them at a distance because of their blonde hair. And as long as I have my nose, I will smell them well before they can get near me; because these Swiss smell of coffee beans!"

There was much applause and laughter at the end of Wheeler's tale. After which everyone gradually settled down and we took turns chatting the night away until it was time to leave ("May

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I get the door for you, Molits?" "It's a proven fact that it's easier to open doors when you're upside down.").

It would not be until much later that I would realize the events that the night heralded. Oh, had I known at the time that every word Wheeler had spoken was true, perhaps everything could have been averted.

Some weeks later, I invited Wheeler over to watch a movie. We were just about to start when the boy asked if he could fix himself a glass of sweet tea, a request I immediately permitted. However, Wheeler had no sooner stood up when his cell phone began to ring. He took the call while he was in the kitchen.

I made myself busy setting up the television as I waited for him to return.

"Hey, Chang," said Wheeler, minutes later, "it's my dad. He needs me to come home real fast."

"Oh, that's fine, will you come back over afterwards?" "Heck yes," said the boy. "Back in a flash."

Had I literally been expecting Wheeler to be "back in a flash," I would have been solely disappointed. For Wheeler did not return in a flash or at all that day, and that is, in fact, the last I ever saw of him. I do not know his current whereabouts and if I did, I would not name them here, in case this letter fell into the hands of the Swiss.

It would seem that the Swiss, who had been hunting Wheeler meticulously ever since he pulled one over on them those years

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ago, finally got wind of a city in Firebolt that supposedly had the best coffee in the world, all from a private vendor. Once the Swiss started asking around town, they were told exactly where Wheeler lived. It is such great fortune that Mr. Barrows, one of the most clever men I have ever known, took an immediate distrust of the blonde haired man in the wooden shoes who smelled of coffee beans when he asked to speak to Wheeler, and within seconds of inviting him into their home, beat him unconscious with, ironically (a term that does not mean "made entirely of iron" as I once believed, but "a paradoxical, unexpected, or coincidental situation or turn of events"), a coffee pot. Mr. Barrows then called Wheeler to return to their home: Wheeler, upon seeing the unconscious Swiss, packed his bag and was gone within an hour.

Since that day, my refrigerator has not been without a jug of sweet tea. For how much would my shame be if, when Wheeler Barrows returned, expecting that long-promised glass of tea, I had none? Dear reader, the worst nightmare I have ever had featured me dressed as a mime, attempting to climb an invisible ladder out of a scorpion pit. However, the worst reoccurring nightmare I have ever had is where Wheeler Barrows, still smiling and still looking an awful lot like a scarecrow, knocks upon my door asking for a cup of tea. I am overcome with happiness and invite him inside. However, when I open the refrigerator, regardless of whether the jug is empty, or if the tea has soured, or if the

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jug contains a severed head, or a thousand other terrible outcomes, when I turn around, Wheeler has disappeared and I wake up shaking, drenched in sweat.

Oh, if only I could speak with Wheeler: he has gained the undivided attention of nearly the entire world and is in unspeakable danger as there are so many who would call him re'er-do-well, and vagabond, and believe that he is a threat to world peace. If only I could find him, or some other voice of reason, and assure them that it has all been one big misunderstanding. If only I could tell them that Wheeler is being used the draw attention away from a criminal organization that is bent on world domination. Dear reader, as surely as I love reason, as surely as I love life, I believe that, as strange as it may seem, the fate of the world may be revolving around a coffee recipe, and the boy who holds it.

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BRIANA ROSS

"DAISIES IN THE GARDEN"

If I tell you a story, promise me that this goes no further than my lips to your ears.

Sometimes Mr. John would come and knock on my window, lightly as if he would spook a ghost. He would come in my room and gently rub on my special area. Maybe, I thought, my body was pulsating and frantic from the sweltering heat and I just didn't know it. One thing I know for sure is that it felt good. It was sweet and sticky like pure honey; sucked right out of the comb from the backyard. Yeah, I loved it....It wasn't right though, Lord knows, it wasn't right.

Mae lived in a homely cottage down a dusty road. Sweetly, nestle in the corner of the Bayou. Soft yellows, deep oranges, and bold reds that was speckled with deep hues of blue. It was like the stream flowing through her garden... always easy. Easy enough since, Sasha, her girl child always seem to find herself in the oddest situations and don't let her find a topic

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she was madly driven to know everything about. She would ask umpteenth questions.

She loved tending to her flowers, especially her daisies, that she grew and sold at the local market, but as for now she was content on watching her daughter sitting on the front steps, looking up at the sky. Wondering? Dreaming? All she knew were questions were about to roll off the girl's tongue. She waited.

"Will I go to heaven, Mama?" Sasha's big brown eyes gazed upon her mother's face quizzically.

Mae smiled.

"Child there isn't any heaven. There is only the earth and the sky and you will be lucky to get there." Mae softly rocked in her chair and sipping sweet tea in the smoldering heat.

"Mama there must be a heaven. Reverend Jacob from the little church down by the pond told me so. You knoooooo..." Sasha trailed off. She knew she wasn't supposed to go around him. For some reason her mother disliked him.

Mae rocked in chair intent on teaching her curious fourteen year old that God was minding his own business and so should she too. There was so much to do on this earth that made heaven seem like it was a vacation

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for the dead and not a safe haven. She gave a little sigh. Some questions were to be asked sooner or later. Some answers are to be given sooner or later.

"Why do you ask, baby?" Mae took another swig of her sweet tea and placed a cold cloth from a water basin nearby on her head.

"Ugh, I just wanted to know. That's all"

Sasha scooted towards her mother, eyes wide and pleading to tell her the story she knew her mother was hiding. She had been listening to the elder women talk while walking with her best friend, Haven. Her mother stop going to church for some time but for some reason the women stop short of that story, as if they knew she was ease dropping.

"Well you know I don't believe in that stuff." Mae knew where this was going and thought it was about time she told her daughter, the nosey girl she was, the story she hoped the elder women would leave for her to tell.

Sasha moved to close the inch that was left between her and Mae. Mae steadily rocking began to embark on a painful story that she soon would rather die from then have it flow from her mouth.

Taking another drank of sweat tea, she cleared

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her throat and barley looking at Sasha; she began in a slow southern drawl...

"When we die our souls hover over our bodies for three seconds. Three seconds isn't that long, it's shorter than short. Three seconds is a thought, an idea. Three seconds to realize that you're dead. It's funny because sometimes I think that the sky is a mirror reflecting the ocean and that when we die our souls take solace into the deep abyss of the sea but for three seconds we get to see the world in its entirety. We get to see reality and if by chance we leave it in peace, then our souls smile.

One day when I was your age, I was walking down Reverend Jacobs's pathway minding my own business, but on that particular day, I thought, I take a detour down to the cemetery to visit your grandmother and replace the withering flowers. I saw Mrs. Jacob leaving her driveway. At that time I was living with Ms. Daisy. You remember your grandmother?"

She waited for a nod.

Sasha slowly dipped her head.

"Well, I turn down another pathway, which trails by the stream, after I saw Mrs. Jacob; she doesn't like me so I just excuse myself from her sight. This is the time where I started to grow daisies to impress

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your father's mother. It didn't hurt that the white ladies from the other side of town are fond of them, either. You know I had to make extra cash; my belly was getting big with you. Then I heard a rustle in the thicket. I kept on walking because I thought it might have been a small squirrel rummaging around. I heard the sound again. It was louder this time. I started to walk a little faster. I notice footsteps quicken their pace. I didn't know whether it was mine or someone else's because I took off. Next thing I know someone yelled stop.

The Reverend appeared I was so relieved. He came up to me with a look in his eye, the look that a man gets when he's on a mission. I slowly backed up, ready to run but I was too slow. He grabbed my arms and told me that if I didn't get rid of that bastard baby he would see to it that it would disappear. Said I was messing up the community with gossip and lies. I was some orphan girl tainted by my father's lust for me. Mr. John was a local deacon at the church, buried out back in the church cemetery. I didn't know that what happened was a bad thing. I thought it was

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normal. What was going on, he touching me and all. Still do.

Heaven is for the pure, baby. I know you're going to make it. Yet, heaven for me is when I see that the sky is beautiful; heavily filled with God's Blue. Not just an optic blue that is common when someone happens to glance up at the sky but a deep blue that seems to echo the souls lament. I sit here always thinking. Thinking if I wasn't so cast down would I still believe in that faraway place? It's not the place where little girls are specially loved by their fathers go. They told me it's a sin to love your father in that way. He was all I knew.... "

Mae stopped rocking. Her head bent, tears welling in her eyes. She wanted to continue but thought better of it.

Sasha decided she knew the rest. Some things she decided weren't meant to be known, ever. Her mother got up and somberly shuffled to her bed room and quietly shut the door.

She gets up without a word, goes to her room, sits down at the nook, lights a candle and begins to write in her diary:

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Sasha is more beautiful ever. She is the product of Love. Perhaps great sex, but it wasn't just sex. No, it wasn't, I must say. It wasn't the kind of lovin' where the poor woman just lies down while some man rhythmically pumps in and out. It was the bravado movement of drums beating to a steady rhythm. 'Ba Doom 'Ba Du.....'Ba Doom 'Ba Du. It was steady and constant, primitive; it was needed this kind of lovin'. Moving to the syncopation and the smooth liquid sound of the trumpets; it was jazz. It was blues. Dammit, it was my soul! It reminds me of making love in the summer. It's about 100 degrees outside, your body's hot and sticky, and the windows open; the fans blowing. You're touching, kissing, licking and you're holding me tight in your arms. That kind of lovin' was beautiful. Strokes that could set your soul on fire; no that kind of lovin' isn't for everybody. I pray that that kind of lovin' isn't for everybody. It's too good.

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LYNDSAY DUNNING

"WALL OF CHOICES"

Numb and in a daze, I find myself tearing up as I stand among a crowd of American consumers in what appears to be an endless sea of groceries. My body frail, I lean against the shopping buggy for extra support. Where do I begin? I am bombarded by the smell of the nearby deli, and I notice an entire wall of bread to my left, a mountain of fruits and vegetables directly in front. Everyone rushes by with a seeming objective. I can't move. Years ago, my high school French teacher told my class that she had cried, staring at an aisle of cereals, when she returned from a two-year trip to the Ivory Coast. I couldn't understand before why she had reacted this way, but now I do. Now I know what culture shock feels like. Now I know what it is to stare at a wall of choices, bewildered.

Surprisingly, one week was all it took to bring me to this point of helplessness.

Last summer, I discovered there was a missions trip to Haiti through the Georgia Baptist Convention for a mere one hundred dollars. I've always had a desire to travel. Haiti would

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be my first test as to how well I could get along in a foreign country, a country whose culture bears little resemblance to mine. Only a few seconds passed by before I made up my mind that I was going. Passport. Shots. Paperwork. I packed a small duffel bag with clothes and supplies, and jumped on a plane with fifteen teammates. Soon we landed in Port-au-Prince.

Haiti is no tourist trap.

Stepping off of the plane was like stepping into a sauna; the scorching hot sun and heavy atmosphere made the simple act of standing uncomfortable. I was taken aback when our team leader pointed out how mild the weather was. However, I continued to smile with the excitement of embarking on an adventure. Shortly after, we were introduced to our mode of transportation for the week, the "tap-tap."

My first impression of Haiti, not exactly what I expected. A tap-tap functions like a taxi in the United States. Only, the passengers are crammed into the back of a small dumpy pickup truck lined with wooden benches, covered with a make-shift roof, and painted in an array of eye-catching colors and a

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litany of religious phrases. There are no seatbelts. Ten of us kept each other in place with our own bodies as our vehicle made its way to the seaside town, Léogâne. Haiti resembled a country devastated by war: Masses of trash lined the streets, dilapidated buildings spotted the towns, and a conglomeration of tiny tents took the place of homes. The amount of exhaust that filled the air was almost nauseating, the smell of rotting trash, putrid. I do not recall any real structure to the roads, the streets still broken up from the recent earthquake. Horns honked incessantly, vehicles were bumper-to-bumper, and traffic lights were rare. You know what happens when you hit another vehicle in Haiti? Nothing. I would know because our tap-tap lightly thumped a motorcycle and continued down the street without stopping. Utter chaos. Adding to the confusion, a girl in our tap-tap developed motion sickness and spewed puke all across herself and those of us around her. Thank God there was not a chain reaction! But as we were cleaning off our gear, a massive roach flew onto the girl sitting next to me. I was thrust into a

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sudden panic, my heart pounding profusely, until several minutes after the thing was killed.

The compound, with walls of pale yellow outlined in pink, was no American house, but the building was a mansion compared to the shacks and tents in the surrounding area. Where we would picture white picket fences, there were only iron bars and cinder-block walls to be found. Somehow, being assigned security guards for our teams did not make me feel safer. During a debrief, I found that there was no air conditioning, no hot water, no drinkable water, no electricity during the day, and no toilets that flushed toilet paper. The guards had to bring in containers of clean water every day. We used seats from a minivan for furniture, and fortunately I was blessed with my own room, not packed into a room of girls and bunk beds.

5:30 a.m., I awoke to the relentless crowing of the neighborhood rooster. I swear he was taunting me. Unfortunately, there is no snooze button for a rooster. This awful sound would wake me up every morning for the rest of the week along with the

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occasional racket of dogs ripping at each other's throats. Good morning!

My next hurdle was a mountain, literally. Can you imagine trekking a mountain in a dress? Needless to say, I wore pants the rest of the week. We packed into our tap-tap to visit a local church, picturing a quaint little building with a field to play soccer with the kids. However, our vehicle slowed to make a right turn uphill, way uphill. Our new mission: Don't crush the person next to you or fall out of the back of the truck or break a bone when landing against the metal backing of the seat. The path was steep and bumpy. Once, I hit my spine on the back of my seat, and I turned pale as I felt agonizing chills run up my back. Half way to the church the truck dropped us off to hike the rest of the way. The sweltering heat made every step seem like I was dragging along dead weight. We reached the church exhausted, panting for breath and swimming in our own sweat, hardly able to enjoy the breathtaking view of the ocean. We would have to make this painstaking journey four more times

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during the week. What had I gotten myself into? Our church was a large tarp from USAID held together with sticks and wire, blowing in the breeze. Little dark faces peeped back at us as we entered the church. I felt like a complete stranger at first, but thankfully the pleasant welcome made the trip worth the trouble.

Everyday, I returned to the compound covered in dirt, depleted of fluids, and ready to pass out on the floor in a coma. The heat continually increased, zapping all energy; by the third day, I was sleeping on the tile floors in search of some escape from the perpetual inferno. Sliding in a puddle of my own sweat, I managed to get a semi-decent night's sleep with only a pillow and flashlight nearby. Showers were refreshing, but they only provided relief from the heat for a few minutes before I was drenched in sweat again. I lived in a constant slime of sweat, sunscreen, and mosquito spray.

As if the heat in Haiti wasn't bad enough, I developed a dreadful fever by the middle of the week. One night I was

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feeling a little strange. I thought I was just dehydrated, but when I traveled the stairs my symptoms began to worsen. My head pounded furiously. My lower back ached, making every movement unbearable. I was nauseated, weak. I felt off-balance and dizzy, nearly collapsing on the floor in an attempt to put on my pajamas. My speech made little sense. One of my friends told me that I was burning up when she felt my head. I slipped under the cover to sweat out the fever, the one time, the only time, I wanted to sweat. I was miserable. All I could do at that point was pray. Within half an hour, my fever broke, and I was walking around our balcony. If the fever had lasted any longer, I could have ended up in a foreign hospital, a thought which frightened me more than the sickness itself. I don't even like American hospitals. I couldn't imagine seeking aid from a country I wasn't familiar with. My supervisor was very concerned the next morning, but I was fine. I stayed home that day just for good measure. To experience such a drastic transition was one of the most miraculous moments of my life, and surprisingly, my transition to health

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was reaching beyond the physical realm. Soon I began to notice a subtle shift in my view of Haiti.

The week was a blur of tap-tap bouncing, mountain hiking, Bible lessons, crafts, singing, and "duck, duck, goose." Throughout the trip, we all encountered our own personal low points. In Haiti, there were no pretenses. Everyone was stripped to their bare necessities. As a result, a pure bond had formed among us, and we knew we had reached this point when we began to compare our urine colors, number of mosquito bites, and leg or facial hair. I'm not sure that I've ever developed such a closeness with a group of people so quickly. We shared every bruise, every scrape, every tear, every laugh. Every hardship became a memory, a shared experience, and before long, I didn't care that I smelled like a goat. The staff became a part of our family as well, the guards, interpreters, and cooks, and all the precious children, clinging to our sides at the church, made the hike up the mountain seem like a stroll up a hill.

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And somewhere in the middle of building a relationship with this amazing, diverse group of people, I bonded with a young Haitian girl that worked at our home. Her name is Sabrina, and I will never forget her.

Sabrina and I developed a sisterly connection. I tried to speak to her in French. She tried to speak to me in English. We played soccer long after dark. We cheated together while playing UNO. We washed dishes after dinner. She taught me to dance and played with my hair. I taught her to swim and gave her a sea star. She presented me with parting gifts. I left her some jewelry I had brought along. She wrote to me, "I love you." I wrote to her, "Je t'aime."

Then, it was over. I was alone in my own bed, and I had air conditioning. The end of the week came so quickly, and yet time stood still while we were there. One week seemed to last for at least a month.

Now, I find myself staring at a wall of bread, life rushing past me, counting me obsolete. Most people come back from a trip

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like mine, promising never to take life in America for granted. Of course, I am one of those people, no one was happier to flush toilet paper than me. But, the experience means so much more to me than just an appreciation for a life of ease. Despite all the struggles I faced, I felt more at home that one week in Haiti than I have ever felt here in Savannah, my hometown. Life in Haiti was simple, but it was rich. Connections were pure. And now I've found that America is just a wall of choices. Unlike many people in Haiti, most Americans can decide which house they want to buy and how elaborate to decorate it, which car to buy and how to properly maintain it, and which phone to buy and how to find apps to aid in the simplest tasks. We are consumed with millions of choices for a happier, more connected life, but I've learned just how lonely life can be in the "land of the free." Here, all I see are pretenses. We strive to make as many friends as possible on social networks like Facebook, but almost always, an invisible barrier prevents us from truly seeing the person beside us, our shared American experience more solitary than

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anything. If not careful, this monster of a lie will swallow us whole, telling us that life is cruel and unforgiving unless we reach beyond the necessities. I can't help but wish that someday we shed the American materialism that has poisoned our society.

One week was all it took to bring me to this point of helplessness, this point of recovery. My first step for a happier, more connected life: A little dose of culture shock. It may not be the easiest route, but I guarantee you, the experience is worth every trouble in the end. All I can hope for now is to carry some of the spirit of Haiti into the relationships I have today. I don't want to be so guarded all the time. I want every relationship, every friendship to be pure. I want to listen to every detailed conversation intently, to experience life from someone else's eyes. And more than anything, I simply want to share a smile with the person walking towards me on the sidewalk.

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AMANDA ROLLER

"THE PURSUIT OF ADULTHOOD"

Summers were always the best. We made devout trips to the beach every weekend; our Sunday afternoons were spent worshipping the shore. Sand found its way into every thread of clothing that came along and lingered somewhere in every snack that was packed. Lathered with sunscreen, our family wouldn't retreat until one of two things happened. Either the sun disappeared behind us or my mother's skin became reddened beyond reason, and we figured, for safety's sake, we ought to turn in until the next weekend's mission. During the week, we would busy ourselves with this or that game: hide-and-go-seek, house, or sometimes we would raid our parents' pantries to stock the playhouse and pretend to shop for groceries. It was with this lightheartedness that the summers of the late eighties passed, brief and innocent. If only I'd known how fleeting that depth of simplicity would be.

During my freshman year of high school, at the age of fourteen, I got my first job. I was so proud to have an income. It's hard to recall how much money I brought home back then, fifty bucks or so a week, at best. All I knew was that it was one step closer to independence - sweet freedom! Two or three nights a week, after school, I'd go to Videorama and busy myself with menial tasks: checking in movies, dusting and straightening

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the store, making silly phone calls about delinquent rentals. "It has been seven days Mr./Mrs. So-and-so, we need Father of the Bride returned asap!" After a couple years of employment, I earned a key to the store and at this point truly felt the first tinge of adulthood - a real sense of responsibility. Aged sixteen short years and there I was, so I felt, at the precipice of being all grown up. I was so eager, chomping at the bit for a slice of my rapidly approaching twenties that were sure to grant me everything I'd dreamed of. For a while they did. I had my freedom, my apartment downtown, and I was making decent money waiting tables. What I was failing to recognize was that I had no solid plan. My twenties seemed to be attacking me, not vice versa, and I didn't feel like an adult at all.

A brief stint in college in the late nineties rendered me clueless as to what it was I truly wanted, so I dropped out, but didn't worry as I felt like the 'normal' young twenty-something who would eventually figure it all out. As I breezed through that portion of my life, I didn't fret about what was to come. It was a childhood of sorts: weekends spent on the beach, late night run-abouts with my friends, it was good-times-galore. When I looked up, six years had passed. I thought again, for sure, that I was on the edge - here's adulthood. At that point I wasn't correlating it with my level of responsibility, I was matching it with a number. The equation in my head went as follows: twenty-seven equals grown.

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I was at a loss for figuring out how I had accomplished so little. What had happened to all of that time?

And more frightening, what was I supposed to be doing with my life? I had always thought that by the time I hit thirty life would have sorted itself out. All of the right opportunities presenting themselves for the picking while I sauntered through the buffet of choices, tasting a few things before I made a final decision. I couldn't figure out what had happened to my preemptive strike on adulthood. I considered myself 'ready' at a very young age - fully prepared for life's curve balls. It turns out I was ready, just not fully prepared for what was going to happen. In the spring of 2008 I realized just how unprepared I was.

Spring fever had the best of me. I was head over heels in love, sure that at least that part of the plan had panned out. It's neither here nor there that it hadn't - I was going to be a mommy. This news catapulted me into get-it-together-mode. Now more than ever before, I felt that I had arrived. "It can't get much more adult than this," I thought. My list of things to do in life was edited and re-edited. My thoughts were probably similar to those of most parents: I am going to ensure that this baby never endures a moment without endless amounts of love at his fingertips. His opportunities for happiness are endless, this I knew, and it was a source of pure joy for me. So it was, parenthood had commenced - full-blown responsibility. The process of decision-making and plans for the future had forever changed. But I felt that if I had caught the elusive adulthood,

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it was quite surprising in its sweetness. There were residuals of childhood innocence. In motherhood I had found something previously undiscovered within myself. I had never understood that I was capable of functioning at such a level of pure love. In the first months I spent with my son, I began to remember moments from my childhood that had since been dormant: being cradled by my grandmother while she sang me lullabies, my pop's curiously delicious sausage and eggs, the biting smell of coffee in the early morning hours, and the time I accidentally used my gran's 'good' spoons to play in the dirt. I was beginning to experience these tender moments from the opposite perspective, through the memories being created with my son.

It's funny sometimes, watching my three-year-old play. In my eyes he is still so tiny, with so much time ahead of him before he worries about growing up.

Although some of his games show how grown he already considers himself to be. He wants to cook and help pay for the groceries, and after particularly long days asks, "Mommy, you okay?" Our mornings are a blur. They have become a mixture of me trying to do everything quickly, and my son tripping over my every move to make sure he can 'help'. He insists on making the coffee, picking out his clothes, feeding and watering our dog, and there is the daily pleading to let him drive the car. It is endearing, really, but I sometimes wonder why he doesn't just want to play while I attend to the morning rush. I've come to see in my own pursuit of adulthood that there's no concise

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definition of that which I've been chasing. We start out as youths with adulthood as an enticing enigma that we are on the path toward from the moment we are born. Once we are there, or think we are, we wonder if this is all it's cracked up to be - is this what we've been waiting for? The never-ending list of things to do seems daunting at times: go to work, cook, clean, pay the bills, get a proper education, raise a child, avert temper tantrums. Check, check, check.

I have found a secret, though. Somewhere on that grown up list I added 'play'. It is essential to keep a close connection to our inner child. The irony of it is

that it's liable to help maintain sanity in the realm of adulthood. When my son and I make our trips to the beach, I remember immediately how easy it is to let go of life's pursuit. It is in that time that we as adults are able to feel such a depth of innocence again: running toward the ocean with my child, basking in the warmth of the sunshine, and refusing to go home until we have had our fill of playtime. We trudge back to the car - sticky, covered in sand, and exhausted. When I glance at the backseat, halfway home, and see Breylon sleeping, I am reminded of how simple it all is. Three sweet words: "Mommy, let's play," and I see that this is everything

it's cracked up to be. If this is adulthood, it's the most fun I've ever had.

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