

HAUTE DISH

The Arts and Literary Magazine of Metro State University



Fall 2022

Editor's Letter

“If you dare nothing, then when the day is over, nothing is all you will have gained.”
Neil Gaiman, The Graveyard Book

Welcome to the Fall 2022 issue of Haute Dish – The Arts and Literature Magazine of Metro State University. I would like to encourage everyone to be brave and submit work for our Spring 2023 and future issues. Being a part of Haute Dish continues to be a wonderful experience and having the opportunity to read and view all the amazing work Metro State current students and alumni have created is simply the best.

Haute Dish has been one of my favorite things about Metro since I began attending. Being able to be the managing editor might be the only thing that surpasses that. As much as I enjoy Haute Dish, it could not happen without all the authors and creators that submit their work to be published here.

I would again like to thank all those who have contributed to Haute Dish, all those who shared their work, the editors, the staff, and all those who continue to make Haute Dish possible.

Enjoy,
Josh Rieger
Managing Editor

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TRAVLERS OF TIME

by Arien Mormul

We are All time travelers who can travel back to the past in our memories. Even if we can't change the things that have happened, we can relive them.

There are memories that bring us happiness and joy that flutter in our bellies. Others carve out our hearts and we bleed all over again. Some memories are a mix of both.

We are All travel masters who can paint in red and grief, but also with the yellow sun to reminisce in the days that are worth remembering.

When We Were Mountains

Bryant Rooney



The Giant of Split Rock

by Bryant Rooney

Our mother, before she passed away, used to tell us Celtic fables and myths. Mine and Tommy's favorite story was the legend of how the Giant's Causeway was built. The story of two giants, one in Ireland (Fionn) and the other one in Scotland (Benandonner). There was an unfinished bridge between them. These stone columns were made of volcanic rocks from the earth. Our mother never used science to explain column formation for her stories. In her stories these stones were made from sand, molded by giant hands, and skipped across the water, bonding together to form the bridge.

The story of Fionn and Benandonner had many versions, like most Celtic Myths, yet our mother decided she would create her own version of the two giants. She told us that the Giants were brothers, that had been separated from birth. Fionn Mac Cumhaill, the Irish giant, was trying to unite the two together, so he tried to build a bridge. Our mother died before telling us if that giant Fionn was able to build his bridge. It is safe to say that he was unable to unite with his brother.

I got a call from my brother Tommy back in December. It had been a few months since we last talked, not since our father's funeral, in the early Autumn, just moments before the colors of the leaves changed. He wanted to talk to me near the rocks below Split Rock. It was a place we used to play as kids with our parents. His voice over the phone did not reflect any joy at that reunion. I did not want to wait too long to see him. I drove through the night, through five hours

of snow that covered highways and winding roads just to get to Tommy.

Tommy was sitting on a small rock that appeared from the water, his body facing the Split Rock lighthouse that towered above the lake, and a shot gun barrel rested underneath his chin. Tommy was a leg stretch away from the shoreline. The rock he sat on looked like the basalt rocks of the Giant's Causeway.

I walked between birch trees whose leaves had fallen since the coming winter. Small clusters of leaves matted the ground and mixed with the snow. My feet crunched against the frozen brown leaves, leaving fissures along my wake. I felt like the giants from those stories, standing atop a piece of earth, and on the other side, another giant sat. He was not paving a basalt bridge to connect us together. I sat on the edge of Superior, only a small gap of water that divided me from the rock that my brother sat on.

The rock that my brother sat on was covered in snow and clusters of ice that hung like a chandelier around his rock. He sat there with the butt of the shot gun resting between his legs as he sat cross-legged on the ground.

"Hey, Jack." He said while holding the gun tightly in his hands.

"Hey, Tommy. What are you doing with that gun?"

"You know me, Jack. I'm always thinking."

"You can talk to me, Tommy. I don't want you to do something foolish."

The Giant of Split Rock cont.

We were twins, kinda like the cities, and kinda like the giants. We were shitty twins. People would ask us if we spoke at the same time or finished each other's sentences. We didn't.

When our mother died, our father began taking us to church. Dad wanted us to be good and holy catholic boys. But Tommy was a free spirit, and that was something our father did not accept.

Tommy ended up carrying more physical memories of our father's presence than I did. Tommy's broken nose was the most noticeable memory that set us apart. Our addictions made us similar also. I love alcohol, love it so much Tommy was often the one to pull me from the bar. My father was the same way. Without Tommy, I wouldn't have been able to overcome my problems. But I could never help Tommy. Tommy's addictions were not just pills. There were things you could not simply pull from his hands.

Tommy looked at me, his sapphire eyes were empty. A small dust of snow began to fall. We listened to the sounds of lapping ice crystals sounding like cracking knuckles against the shore. We watched it recede, the water and ice replacing the old with the new.

"I was thinking about Dad again. When Mom died, he changed, Jack. He died with her; a new man took his spot. A demon from hell," Tommy said as he chewed at his nails. There was not much left to chew. He always had that nervous habit, it came when Dad changed, even the memory of our father brought back old habits. He rocked softly back and forth and swirled

the snow into manic piles around him. The topic of Dad was always Tommy's weakness. He loved Dad more than I loved Dad; Dad loved me more than him.

"Dad's dead. We don't have to be afraid of him. You don't have to be afraid of him. We can get you help, I'm here for you, Tommy."

Tommy's tears fell to the snow, leaving their impressions upon the stone beneath it. "You're lucky that you were able to just sever those ties. I wish I could do that. He always wanted me to be like you. You dated good catholic girls. I hid like a coward under the bleachers with Henry Collins," Tommy said. I could hear his heart break like twigs underneath a boot.

"You ain't a coward."

"Are you telling me you didn't look at me the same way Dad did? I still hurt from his revelations."

We watched from a distance as heavy waves began to smash into the cliffs below the lighthouse. We listened to the heavy impressions, the sound reminiscent of fists against ribs, and cracking thunder snapping like Tommy's nose.

"I'm sorry I didn't stop him. I was afraid," I said pleading like a scolded child.

"Jack, you couldn't do anything. He was a real giant. We didn't stand a chance," Tommy said reassuringly.

Tears began to form in my eyes. I let Tommy see in my face that I loved him. Our love was formed through pain and cemented by each other. Nothing could break that, not even our dad's hands. Tommy

The Giant Of Split Rock cont.

had a place in my heart that no one else could ever fill.

“You’re my brother. I would never treat you like Dad did. I just wanted you to speak to me. I just wanted you to know I loved you no matter the circumstance. I failed you, and I...I...” I said whimpering the words, impossible to say everything I wanted to say.

“I love you too, Jack,” Tommy said looking toward the Split Rock Lighthouse that was resting like an eagle’s nest atop the cliffs. To Tommy and me, that lighthouse was always a beacon. We loved it here, it brought us back to the times with our mother, and a time before our father changed. One could argue he was always that way.

“So, tell me,” Tommy said, chocking back the tears to better control the flow. “Date any good catholic girls?”

“Naw, just bad atheists.”

Tommy and I sat there in awkward silence for a brief moment before Tommy started to roll back in laughter.

“Forget about Dad. Mom is rolling around in her grave. She is up there in heaven begging all of them saints to forgive her foolish son.”

We both started laughing. The joyful tears falling uncontrolled. I reached into the frigid waters and pulled from the small clusters of smooth rocks. I blew into my hands to warm myself from the instantaneous cold that numbed my fingers. When they were efficiently warmed, I threw the stones against the endless waves of Superior.

As I threw my stones, the frigid wind blew against my face, and the tears formed into crystals. I screamed louder than the waves as I hurled my stones. When I threw my stones, they broke through each wave that came. In the beginning it was only a few skips but as I continued to scream, the numbers began to grow to ten skips and then thirteen. I screamed with everything I had. My breath was visible like winter fire. I was a giant screaming into the sky. The tears fell from my face like frozen rain drops. Tommy was no longer crying. He was calm and happy to see me. He did not skip stones. He held on to that shotgun, not willing to part with it, like I did with my stones.

“There, you see that! I broke through,” I said, holding up a fist into the air proudly.

“Ya, I saw it, Jack.”

“Fear my pebbles, all ye waves that break,” I said shouting to the heavens and fell backward on the shoreline. The snow around me flew away. Tommy sat alone on his rock. He was still, not even his breath was visible in the presence of the frozen winters of Lake Superior.

“Come on, Tommy, let’s go home. You will feel better when we get out of the cold.” I said holding out my hand for him to take. I stared at that division in the rock that separated us.

“No Jack, we both know I can’t leave,” Tommy said peacefully. “I am the Giant of Split Rock. I am kind of like a fable from one of Mom’s stories. But Jack, you managed to be more than a story. You are a

The Giant Of Split Rock cont.

glowing beacon; bright enough for the two of us. I can't let you take my place on this rock, I was forged upon these shores. You gotta move forward, Jack. Be more than a memory."

"I can't go on without you, Tommy. Twins go into the world together; they should be able to leave it together." I pleaded. But Tommy held up his hand as a parting gesture. The rock that was coated with soft snow began to melt as a warm Spring wind blew across the water.

"Thank you, Tommy. I love you," my voice clutched in my lungs. Tommy began to fade, just as the images of snow did across the landscape. The rock he sat on melted with him. The flowers and trees bloomed as the warm wind carried the snow back into the clouds. The clouds moved away, leaving only the sun.

MASTER HANGS AROUND

by Spencer Vik

So, you're really sittin' there
with the spirit of your forebears?
Your body as electric as Whitman's?
Exasperated of the gift,
you scramble to make a name for
(yourself)

Now you're really sitting there at your desk,
working these things out. Heavy-hearted,
devoted,
a craftsman.

Are you really sitting there
with the spirit of your forebears?
What has the desk seen?
Who knows about this, this effort?

The poet fell right into place –
blame unplaced –
because so much goes without saying.

Are you really just sitting there,
coy on a park bench,
faintly formulating under a visage of hat and scarf?
Leaning back, closing your eyes,
and imagining walls of wind?
Are you really just sittin' there, dreaming up sounds for
the sky, a cure for the darkness?
Waiting for a pigeon to shit on your shoe?

(That was rhetorical, of course.
One of many devices we have learned to employ in our
work.)

Are you really sitting there with the spirit,
or is it secretly a joke?
Is your portfolio a failure in your view?
The night outside your windows is a new night, a new
world. By way of speculation, you've brought night to
its knees. You write it and it's right,
no matter how it turned out.

So, are you really sittin' there with the spirit, or are you
just a master?

FLOATING EYES

by Andrew Kasmarek

On paper all I feel I draw is looking back at me like the person I know something more than what I do is give zero (fucks) is the amount of what I own in dollars that rule the world.

Floating eyes look at me and help me see the truth that most of us are stuck watching online life happening in real life watching who real life is happening to online and wondering what real life means anymore and who has it and how I can call them and figure out where in hell they are instead of being left on read.

Floating eyes on heads that explode with wonder what I should look up online to spoil like bananas in the rainwater that turns to rum over time I'm drunk anyway so I might as well have some now because now is supposed to mean so much even though no one cares and forgets why they're there(ore) I might as well post my dick before I try to burn it off and delete the account.

Floating eyes tapped to the marrow of a bone picked about a love that was only yours for a moment but you kept trapped in a box with all the cash you have to mail those polaroids that remind you how much you can love without reason if you are ever going to love again.

Floating eyes on the cover of the Great Gatsby used to mean something more than attention spans that are lost if a tik tok is more than 7 seconds it decreases the likelihood of going viral in a hospital overrun by depression.

Floating eyes belong to my hand like a scar from a ball rack back when I could still get excited over the thought of making you smile after I made you cry.

Andy's Show

by Louise Reed

I'm what you would call a loner. Working was only my part-time gig, not my lifelong career objective. I had no intention of making friends, nor did I necessarily want any. I worked best in solitude. However, Andy had another idea in mind. Andy and I met at work two years ago. Instead of taking my lunch breaks alone, there was Andy, sloppily eating his sandwiches with me and forcing me into human interaction. And before I knew it, I had invited him to this concert with me.

Andy, seven years my senior, is tall—Slenderman tall, with the frame of a fourteen-year-old boy and the appetite of a seven-month pregnant woman. Peeking out his front pocket is always a packet of Camel Lights. He had smoker teeth that were a constant shade of yellow. I've never met someone so upfront, blunt and, well, exhaustingly loud and obnoxious. So, why I consider this man my best friend is beyond me.

Andy sat next to me, a burger in hand as grease dribbled down his stubble. Watching him eat was like watching a toddler learn how to eat solid food for the first time. I tried my best to not pay attention the droplets of food missing his mouth. I just kept my eyes peered at the stage in front of us. The sun beat down, melting my makeup the same way it would with an ice cream cone. The crowd was still funneling in to find their seats. Our seats were on the floor, sections away from the general admission pit. Good seats, but I was still envious of those who were able to get tickets to the

pit.

"So, I was bangin' her right?" He told me, bits of burger dropping down the corners of his mouth and into his lap.

I tried to keep my eyes on the stage. I watched carefully, seeing if I could catch a glance at the band. "Right." He continued talking. "And she's like...maybe forty-five."

That caught my attention. "Wait. What? How old were you?"

Andy took his napkin, wiping the burger off his chin. "This was two years ago, so I was about twenty-six. This was right after my DUI."

Andy had a habit of doing this—telling stories rather bluntly without you really wanting or consenting to hear these stories. He would say something so absurd; it would catch your attention and suddenly you've heard his entire life story.

Andy crumbled his wrappers and napkins before tucking them under his seat. We sat in silence for a while. The only noise was the surrounding sounds from fellow concert goers in the stadium. Ever since I can remember I've never been much of a conversation starter.

"So far, I have the coolest shirt here," he said. "We'll have to find someone with a cooler shirt or else I win."

"Win what?" I asked.

"The satisfaction of having the coolest t-shirt

Andy's Show cont.

here.”

“Oh.” I replied.

Andy had a thing. He told me that you don't wear the shirt of the band you are going to see. Instead of wearing what ninety-five percent of the stadium was wearing, he wore a “real” punk rock band t-shirt; The Get Up Kids. I didn't tell him this, nor would I even, but I think it was just an excuse for not owning a Weezer t-shirt. This t-shirt debate had sparked Andy's ongoing competition with himself and everyone at the stadium. We sat and people watched—well Andy did. I continued stalking the stage for any movement of the middle-aged dads I waited months to see play.

“I shaved my balls today,” Andy yelled and pointed towards the porta potties that sat to our left.

“What?” My face curled in disgust like I just smelled a spoiled glass of milk.

“Not me!” he defended. “But that guy probably did for this concert. His shirt says, ‘I shaved my balls today’. See look! I mean, he really does look like the type of guy to shave his balls for a Weezer concert.”

My head turned to the left, and sure enough standing in line for the portable toilets was another tall white guy wearing a stupid shirt. “Does he win the best t-shirt contest?”

“Oh no,” replied Andy, his lips curling upwards to a smile, flashing me his smoker smile. “I'm still winning.”

The crowd went quiet. I gasped to myself and grabbed Andy's shoulder in excitement. This is the mo-

ment I had been waiting for. In unison, everyone stood up and cheered. It was like we had all practiced together before. Our minds connected by simple yet therapeutic guitar strums. The band funneled on the large stage, their guitars reflecting the sunlight. The guitars began to riff, the vibrations and sounds were welcomed by my ears. I knew exactly what song was being played just by listening to the first cord; *Say It Ain't So*.

Before I knew it, my feet became in control. I had been waiting for this moment, for this very night for years. My mouth spit out the lyrics word-for-word. I'd practice in my shower for this very moment. My body started swaying, bumping into him. My way of indirectly saying dance with me. Andy laughed at me, giving in to my invite. Our shoulders bumped; bodies collided like rock n' roll wrecking balls.

Suddenly, I felt Andy's hand on my wrist.

“C'mon,” he said. “Let's see if we can sneak up any closer.”

“But we don't have red bracelets to go to the pit,” I said.

Andy only smiled. “Yeah, well, I'm not always one for following the rules, kid.”

I followed Andy's lead as he dragged us through the swarm of people. As we approached the entrance to the pit, there stood a stadium guard, a little shorter than Andy. Andy greeted him and pointed towards the pit. I was expecting him to ask to see our bracelets, but due to the chaos of the crowd, the guard just smiled at Andy, letting us pass.

Andy's Show cont.

"I told you I could get us through," Andy bragged.

I followed Andy the way a small child follows their parent. He pushed us through until we were so close to the stage, I could see the sweat on the band's forehead. I couldn't contain myself. Andy and I danced in pure bliss.

After a while, a man wider and taller than me managed to shove himself, blocking my view of the stage. Even me standing on my tip toes, I couldn't get a view over this guy. Andy noticed, and tapped my shoulder.

"Jump on my shoulders," he said over the crowd.

"Your shoulders?" I asked him.

"Yeah, so you can get a better view." Andy stated it so matter-of-factly like he's done something like this before.

Before I knew it, Andy squat down, making it easy for me to hop on. My arms wrapped around his shoulders, gripping him tight, afraid I would fall. Andy stood up, giving me the perfect view of the stage. I towered over the whole crowd like Godzilla of concerts.

"Careful, kid," Andy laughed. "You're holding on a little tight."

I laughed, loosening my grip so I wouldn't choke Andy and continued to sing along to the greatest band of all time. The guitars began their everlasting

strumming.

The Good Life

The concert, which I wished could've lasted forever, came to an end eventually. The sun had been long gone. Everyone either sunburnt, drunk, high or all the above funneled up five flights of the stairs to back to the top of the stadium. Me, standing only a little over five foot, gripped onto Andy's shirt, ensuring I wouldn't get trampled or lost.

Like a pair of salmon escaping a fisher's net, Andy and I made it safely out the gates of the stadium onto the city streets. My legs continued to shake with excitement, begging for more dancing. I couldn't get my ears to stop ringing, but I didn't want them to. If they stopped ringing, that would mean that the night was officially over.

Before we went on our separate ways I looked up at Andy and said, "Thank you for coming with me." "No problem, kid," he said. "Oh, and hey, what are you doing next Friday?"

"Nothing, why?"

He flashed me that cheeky smile before responding, "Because I'm taking you to a real punk rock concert."

And with that, there I stood with an invite to Andy's show.

ARS POETICA

by Jason Emrick

A poem bares a babe
a strange life, yet familiar
in the cheek or the chin, the dimple when it grins.
A poem finds the missing thing that wasn't lost
until found.

A poem ferries us to a new shore, fine sand painting our feet.
Its words float in on the tide, to pacify or guide, to light the shoal,
to cry out, you're alive.

A poem cradles a thought that slips from your hand like an unknotted rope through a cleat.
The right words in their description conceal.
The wrong words but
in the right order, reveal.

What are you seeking when you sit at the desk, erasing pencil on page?
An order that feels right, sounds right, strikes curiously at your soul?
Or
Does that curiosity harbor more questions?

A poem celebrates the shadow or absence of shadow,
it was there, is gone, on this day, in that passage, behind that rail, under that sail.
The poem is your vessel.

Your arrival reveals a new being, you're bigger, or maybe you're
a sliver of something greater, the thing that's now found.
It is the poem that illuminates it, you.
But the clarity will not hold, it must be sought again, and again, found in those words.
Seized for a moment, gone, a peace that cannot endure
a journey that never ends but pauses
allows your soul to catch up
to explore its new home.

Blackout

by Zach Murphy

My roommate took off right before I lost my job at the pizza place. The only thing he left behind was a note that read, “Moved back home.” If only the unpaid rent were attached to it.

I sit at the wobbly kitchen table, gazing at the floating dust particles that you can only see when the sunlight shines in at the perfect angle. Sometimes, you have to convince yourself that they aren’t old skin.

The air conditioner moans, as if it’s irritated that it has to work so hard. I haven’t left the apartment in four days, for fear that the hellish temperature might melt away my spirit even more. Is a heat wave a heat wave if it doesn’t end? I gulp down the remainder of my orange juice. The pulp sticks to the side of the glass. It always bothers me when that happens.

As I stand up to go put my head into the freezer, the air conditioner suddenly goes on a strike of silence and the refrigerator releases a final gasp. I walk across the room and flip the light switch. Nothing.

There’s a knock at the door. I peer through the peephole. It’s the lady with the beehive hair from across the hall. I crack the door open.

“Is your power out?” she asks.

“Yes,” I answer.

“It must be the whole building,” she says.

“Maybe the whole city,” I say.

“The food in your fridge will go bad after four hours,” she says.

I’d take that information to heart if I had any food in the refrigerator.

“Thanks,” I say as I close the door.

When the power goes out, it’s amazing how all of your habits remind you that you’re nothing without it. The TV isn’t going to turn on and your phone isn’t going to charge.

There’s another knock at the door. It’s the guy from downstairs who exclusively wears jorts. “Do you want a new roommate?” he asks.

“What?”

He nods his head to the left. I glance down the hallway and see a scraggly, black cat with a patch of white fur on its chest.

“It was out lying in the sun,” the guy says. “Looked a bit overheated, so I let it inside.”

Before I can say anything, the cat walks through the doorway and rubs against my leg.

“Catch you later,” the guy says.

I fill up a bowl with some cold water and set it on the floor. The cat dashes over and drinks furiously.

At least water is free, I think to myself. Kind of.

I head into my dingy bedroom and grab the coin jar off of my dresser. “This should be enough to get you some food,” I say.

I step out the apartment door and look back at the cat.

“I think I’ll call you Blackout.”

AURORA

Miranda Okonek



My House is Full of Elephants

By Robin Locke

Mounds of wrinkled gray skin milling in the living room

Growing fat on silence and unspoken words

Bigger always bigger

There is little space left to move now

Without tripping

Over

Trunk or tail

And collision leads to outburst

An angry flapping of ears Stomping

On a lucky day

There is little more than a trumpet It's the tusks that are dangerous

Polished ivory

Gleaming razor sharp to the point

Upon which one might become impaled

Should you miss step

My House Is Full of Elephants cont.

I wonder at the sheer mass of them

Once as small as one

Word

Left hanging on the tip of a tongue

Now

Over fed

To alarming size

Perhaps they'll over gorge so much and so long they'll simply

Pop

Or perhaps they won't

In which case they'll crack this house

Into splitters

Or worse yet still they'll just expand and expand

Filling every crawl space and corner with

elephant

My House Is Full of Elephants cont.

Crushing all resident here

Finding their food supply exhausted

They might then a couple hundred years too late To do us any good

Shrink down again

All ways lead to a messy end

The remains of which

It might very well take a

lifetime

To wash away

LOVE AND HEARTBREAK AT A MIDDLE SCHOOL DANCE

By Tommy Shreve

Every year, my school put on a Spring Dance to celebrate the 8th graders moving on to another school where they would do the same meaningless shit for another four years. For months, the girls in my classes plotted with each other about what they would wear and who they would go with. And for months, I debated tearing off my own ears, so I didn't have to hear their incessant whispering piercing through the classroom air.

Weeks prior to the dance, student council handed out flyers at lunch. They took special care to cover my entire table with flyers. "Romance in the 21st Century! Got your date?" read the pile of papers. I made sure not to let any of them slip into my backpack.

At home, I regularly hopped on my Mom's computer, deleting all school newsletters from her email. I thought I was in the clear, until just three days before the Spring Dance was supposed to take place.

"Why didn't you tell me your school was putting on a dance?" asked my Mom, waving one of the tacky flyers in my face. She had found it in the mailbox and ambushed me with it as soon as I got home.

"I don't know," I shrugged.

"Dances are so much fun!" she squealed, "you know, I met your father at a dance—"

"I know, Mom."

She held the flyer to her chest and looked at the amazement of the kitchen chandelier. After a moment, she snapped back to life. "We need to get you a suit!"

"Mom—"

"Oh, this'll be so much fun!" she shrieked. My resistance was ignored.

On the night of the dance, I found myself being paraded around the house by my Dad who had greased my hair back and shoved me into a claustrophobic gray suit.

"How's our little man look?" he asked my Mom, spinning me around as an object.

"So handsome!" squawked my Mom, throwing the back of her hand to her forehead.

"You look dapper, fella," winked my Dad.

"Can we just go?" I said, starting for the door.

"Not so fast," said my Mom, blocking my path, "the ladies will be all over you and I'm not letting you go out there just to embarrass yourself," she started snapping, "let me show you a few moves."

"Oh my god, Mom," I shoved past her, "I'm gonna be in the car."

The car ride involved my parents arguing over whether or not it was time for "the talk," so as soon as we were near the school, I bolted out of the car, ignoring whatever embarrassing sentiments my Mom was yelling at me. The suit was heavy and stiff, so just getting to the door was a hassle.

"Ned Pellingier," a raspy voice greeted me as I entered the school, "looking handsome as ever, are you." Ms. Tinny, the ancient English teacher was

LOVE AND HEARTBREAK AT A MIDDLE SCHOOL DANCE

CONT.

greeting people and taking tickets at a white foldable table. She was wearing a long skinny zebra-print dress that highlighted the pointy bones protruding from her body. She looked like a wrinkly snake that had just swallowed a porcupine. “I think you just may take the award for best dressed,” she chuckled as she punched my ticket and handed it back to me.

“Thanks,” I said, heading toward the gym.

“Don’t break too many hearts in there, James Dean!” she yelled.

Approaching the gym, I whiffed the familiar mixture of teenage sweat and musty cologne. It was accompanied by a generic dance-beat, lacking any vocals. As I entered, I was blinded by the all too familiar stale white lights of the gym, only this time, they were accompanied by several plastic party lights projecting colorful orbs across the cracked concrete walls.

“Going to a funeral, Pellinger?” quipped Jake Thompson as he sped past me and into the crowd of awkward teenagers. Jake Thompson was considered by most to be the class clown, and he was considered by me to be an asshole. At first, I was confused by his joke, but then I took a look around the gym.

The gym could be cut into four distinct sections. Closest to the entrance, there was a row of folding tables that held bags of chips and mini soda cans. Manning the snack tables were all the single teachers who had nothing better to do with their lives: Mr. Dannelly, the diabetic gym-teacher, Ms. Hudson, the loopy guidance counselor, and Mr. Hank, the alcoholic

woodworking teacher. Mr. Dannelly and Mr. Hank sat on either side of Ms. Hudson, both of them leaning weirdly close to her.

On the left side of the gym, there were several packs of girls, hugging the wall. Danica Tundy and her girls packed into the far corner, all absorbed in whatever false reality their phones held. Not even Jake’s drive-by obscenities could bring them back to life. The other packs of girls were huddled tightly together, probably getting excited over the next event they can’t wait to go to and ignore.

On the right side, was a horde of boys. Flooding the gym, their movements were random and erratic, it was less dancing and more slapping and shoving. As I observed the horde, I realized what Jake’s joke had meant. Taking the cake for worst dressed was Todd Knixley in a greasy wife-beater and red basketball shorts. Best dressed was Mr. I’m so good at sports and so popular and everyone is obsessed with me, also known as Dane Crawford, wearing a white button-up and black jeans.

I couldn’t believe I had let my Mom dress me. It’s not the fucking 1800s anymore. I was standing at the entrance of the gym, completely out in the open, a prey awaiting slaughter. I knew I needed to find a place to lie low and wait out the night. I thought about running to the bathroom and tearing myself out of the suit, but it took two people just to jam me into it, so I imagined getting myself out of it was near impossible.

Unable to bend my elbows or knees, I waddled

LOVE AND HEARTBREAK AT A MIDDLE SCHOOL DANCE

CONT.

my way through the ocean of sweaty boys, taking my post at the far-right corner. There, I was shielded from most of the gym by the army of boys who were too busy kicking each other in the balls to notice me.

I could've hid in the bathroom. I could've pretended I was sick. I could've walked to the gas station down the street until it was over, but part of me wanted to be there. I watched the entrance through cracks in the crowd, hoping maybe she'd show up. Maybelle Morales.

Everyone in my grade was so immature and childish, but not Maybelle. She was like me. She wasn't glued to her phone like Danica Tundy, she was glued to books. She wasn't caked in makeup like Lucy Cummings, she was cute and natural. She was shy, but intelligent. Hell, she was even a trekkie like me! We were perfect for each other. I had never really noticed her until biology last year. We were partners for a lab and we just got along so naturally. We laughed and joked about real things; I felt like I could just be myself around her. I knew that the dance wouldn't really be her thing, but I figured I'd watch just in case, not like I had anything better to do.

As I watched the gym entrance with little hope, I couldn't help but be distracted from the fourth section of the gym, the center. A daring mixed group of boys and girls mingled in the middle, led by Dane Crawford and his girlfriend, Lucy Cummings. The group had started out jumping around wildly, thinking it was dancing, but they later transitioned

to forming a circle around Dane and Lucy, who were doing the weirdest shit I had ever seen. Lucy was bent over in her nearly translucent dress, rubbing her butt into Dane's crotch. I shit you not. What made it even weirder, was that the circle was watching and cheering them on. This is exactly why I didn't want to go. Kids my age are weird and immature. I don't belong with them. I just want to be an adult, so I can actually fit in with my peers.

"Hey! Enough of that over there! Keep it PG!" shouted Mr. Dannly from the snack tables, his arm was around Ms. Hudson at this point.

Near the snack tables, something caught my eye. Standing in the entrance to the gym was a puffy, purple tutu. Thick, black hair draped down the back of the dress. Maybelle had shown up.

Her golden eyes were popping beneath her thin, round glasses. She must have walked in and seen Lucy and Dane's bizarre dance. Probably not the best thing to walk into. After standing there in shock for a moment, she scurried over to the left side of the gym.

I had to adjust my position in the corner a bit until I could see her through the cracks in the crowd. She was leaning up against the wall, watching everyone, just like me. I thought about walking over to her and chatting, I'm sure we would've talked about how lame the whole thing really was, but I figured waddling through the crowd was a death sentence.

So, I stayed in my corner, watching her, thinking about her, imagining.

LOVE AND HEARTBREAK AT A MIDDLE SCHOOL DANCE

CONT.

“Hey,” came a soft voice, piercing through my day dream. I felt a light tap on my shoulder. “Hey, Ned.”

I looked down to my left and there she was, holding her hands together patiently, staring up at me with those golden eyes.

“Hey,” I said casually.

“I see you copied my strategy,” she said pointing to my corner.

“Well,” I chuckled, “It seemed like the best place to wait it all out.”

“You mind if we share this one? All the good corners are taken,” she said, nudging me with her hips.

“I don’t know, do I really have a choice?”

“Oh come on, you like being stuck with me.” She turned to face me, grabbed each side of my jacket and straightened it, then ran her hands along the sleeves. “You’re looking really handsome.”

“Thanks, but I feel like I may be a little overdressed, huh?”

“Nonsense. At least you put in the effort, unlike every other guy here,” she patted my suit one more time, “and it certainly shows. You’re much more mature than these guys.”

“Thank you, Maybelle,” I looked down at her tutu, “you look really beautiful.”

She grinned, trying to hide her blush. “Thank you. You’re sweet.”

I wanted to kiss her right then. Well, I wanted

to kiss her the entire time.

“Oh my god,” she blurted out with a laugh, “please tell me you saw Lucy’s butt dance!”

“Unfortunately, but I really wish I hadn’t.”

“It was like a car crash,” she rubbed her forehead, “like, I knew it was gonna scar me for life, but I just couldn’t stop watching. It was so…”

“Bizarre? Strange? Weird? Awkward? Uncomfortable?”

“All the above.”

We laughed. We laughed as hard as anyone had ever laughed. Maybelle was laughing so hard she had to lean on my shoulder for support. Our laughing was interrupted when the generic dance beat that had been playing on a loop all night finally switched to a softer piano melody. The energy in the room quieted down as couples began coming together, boys hesitantly approached girls, girls hid from said boys.

As Maybelle and I watched the awkward romances play out, I felt a warm buzzing in my chest, like, I knew I needed to ask her to dance, but my body was petrified, and not just from the suit. I felt myself slowly rotating to face Maybelle, but before I could get the words out, she gently grabbed my hand.

“Ned,” she smiled, “would you like to dance with me?”

“I was gonna ask you the same thing.”

She squeezed my hand tight and took off, dragging me out into the dance floor. She placed me right in front of her and slapped my hands tight on her hips.

LOVE AND HEARTBREAK AT A MIDDLE SCHOOL DANCE

CONT.

Then, she moved her face closer to mine, laying her arms on my shoulder. We instantly began swaying in unison, like we were completely synced up. She didn't say anything for a while; she just flashed her golden eyes at mine.

"I'm glad you're here with me, Ned. I really didn't want to come to this, but I had hoped you might be here."

"You did?"

"Yes, I-well...I can't believe I'm gonna admit this, but...I have a crush on you. I've had a crush on you...for some time."

I felt the warm buzzing again in my chest. It felt like it was going to lift me up off the gym floor.

"Maybelle, I've had a crush on you too."

She opened her mouth wide, like an excited smile. "Are you serious? Cause I've liked you ever since we were lab partners last year. You were so funny and easygoing and cute and I felt like we just got along so well. I know it was a while ago, but I just always felt so nervous to approach you. I always got butterflies in my stomach when I saw you. I have them now."

I felt a permanent smile across my face. I don't think I had ever felt like that before. Pure bliss. There was so much I wanted to say; my brain was overloaded.

"Maybelle..." was all I could get out before she pulled me in close to her.

"Kiss me," she said. She planted her lips on mine, squeezing her body against mine. This was it,

this was everything I had ever wanted.

She pulled away slowly and softly kissed my cheek, before burying her head in my chest.

"Let's just stay like this forever."

At that was it. At least, that's how I had imagined it.

In reality, I had stayed in my corner all night. When the slow-dance music came on, I tried to build up the courage to approach Maybelle and ask her to dance, but Todd Knixley beat me to it. The two of them danced until Mr. Dannly finally cut the music and announced it was time to go home. At that point, Maybelle kissed Todd on the cheek and the two of them left hand in hand.

I stayed in my corner until the last student left the gym, then I waddled out alone.

"Have a great night, James Dean," said Ms. Tinty as I left the school.

I approached the lone car out on the curb and entered the back door.

"Last one out," said my Dad, grinning from the driver's seat, "must've had a good time."

My Mom turned around from the passenger's seat. "I bet the ladies were all over you, honey. How was it?"

"Good."

Tiifan

Amerti Kitila



Play it Off How?

By Spencer Vik

Play it off as something profound.
I live to see myself in marble, flowers at my feet.
I live to see myself immortalized.
Be prepared for my jokes. Shit, be prepared for me.
You'll never know if I'm here or there
if you're standing right in front of me.
Confiscate this skull, as it's a coin pouch full of most
tantalizing, controversial theory.
I have never been in an ambulance.
I was gone before you strolled back inside for the second
half of the show,
gone into your mind.
I will haunt you with my fingers, until you listen.
I gave you the sexy assistant,
I gave you the singalong finale,
and I even gave you three spin-offs, on the house!

What do you think of me?
My kitchen table lost beneath
an egregious pile of phone books and fan mail to be
stamped.

But you are still Stan, you hear me?
Just tone it down a touch.
We're not staying in touch, this is just an invitation to a
house I bought for this one occasion,
which is the release of my first chapbook.

Yes, I will personally set up the karaoke,
but touch the mic at risk of interruption (by yours
truly).
I'll be drunk early enough to remember my speech.

This is when I talk to you directly.
This is when you hear how I speak.
This is when you laugh tastefully,
This is when you nod solemnly, then clap your hands
as loudly as you can.
This is when I thank the audience.
This is when I look a few folks in the front row square
in the eyes and say
"Leave, you wankers!" to rapturous applause.
I do thank you, for you'd be my medium, if I had one.
I know it's not your thing, but thanks for getting all
dressed up anyway,
for playing it off as something profound.

JUST GOIN' HOME

By Jason Emrick

“It’s true, he put his hand on my ass and I was about to scream bloody murder when the bus passed by a church and he crossed himself.” Sherry looks at me in disbelief.

“Are you sure?” she asks.

“Pretty sure, it wasn’t a rub or pat or nothing like that, it was a full on cheek grab and that’s pretty hard to misinterpret. The funny thing, if any of this is funny, is that when he crossed himself, I started thinking, am I the asshole here? Just got grabbed in the ass, and his little act of contrition has me all confused.”

“What’d ya’ do?”

“I stood there stunned for a moment, kinda like when someone makes some stupid ass racist comment and it takes a second for you to believe you heard it. That is the moment when you might do the wrong thing like pretend you didn’t hear it or worse, give an uncomfortable chuckle and turn away. Well no chuckle came from me, not even one of those cute, phony, try’n-to-be-polite-smiles. My feet dug in, my hands raised and just as I was about to sock him like he deserved, I leaned in real close and calm, breathed in his ear. ‘You think Jesus gonna forgive you for that, taking advantage of someone just trying to get home from work?’ All of a sudden his eyes got that ‘oh, shit, I done fucked up here look,’ so I leaned a little closer and whispered, ‘Jesus probably will forgive you, that’s what he does, but he remembers too.’ Then I stepped back and raised my voice loud, sure that everyone could hear and I said, ‘This dude just grabbed my ass and now he thinks Jesus’ forgiveness will stretch to me. Well he’s wrong, I ain’t been to confession for a year and I can afford to put this on my bill.’ Just then I grabbed the pull cord to stop the bus. Felt it swerve towards the curb, then I shoved like he deserved, shoved him like back in the day when we were playing king of the hill and laid that son of a bitch right out the door and onto the street. I saw the driver’s eyes in the mirror looking back, wondering what the commotion was. His shoulders shrugged as if to say, ‘whatever man,’ and he drove off watching that fool in his side view mirror, arms raised, acting like he was the one what was wronged.”

Good to See You

By Dina Inderlee

Smelling the delicious chicken dinner in my basket was torture as I waited at the grocery store checkout on an empty stomach. Only a few more minutes of pretending I am patient, I look around for a distraction. Just as I turn to read the latest headline for another exciting celebrity scandal, I see face from the past.

Not wanting to embarrass myself by talking to the wrong person, I look straight at him, squint a little, and crane my neck to get a closer look. Then he sees me and a gleam of recognition hits his eyes. He remembers me too.

It appears we are both amazed that we recognize each other. He looks the many years it has been since our last encounter. Grey hairs have overtaken the natural blonde in his long beard, but not his head as he lost the hair battle long ago. He carries his own basket of random items. I see candy and bread. He is still not taking his diabetes seriously. He never did.

He slowly walks toward me, shuffling his feet like a child going to his room with no dessert. I put on a wide smile and say hello. I want to hug him but he is holding his basket with both hands in front of him to avoid contact as if to say “no touching.” He shrugs his shoulders and looks down at his worn out tennis shoes as he kicks the linoleum making a piercing screech sound. He sheepishly smirks and without opening his mouth, mumbles what I think is “hello.”

“How have you been?” I ask to see if I can get him to open up a little.

He looks up and awkwardly says “Fine. How about you?” Looking behind him as if anything else is more important to him than my response.

“I am doing well. I am working a lot and my mom is nearing retirement.” I try to be pleasant and upbeat as I really want him to like me, something I was sure he never did even though he said he loved me when we were in contact. Maybe I can finally learn why he changed his number without telling me. Perhaps it was an oversight, but I am not so sure. “It’s been about twenty years since last I saw you. How are Sara and Jean doing?” “Doesn’t seem that long. Oh, well. They’re doing well. Sara is married now with a baby on the way and Jean is retired.” I think he is going to keep going, but his voice starts trailing off as he swings his basket between arms and looking over to the front of the store.

“That’s great. You retired as well?” I ask, trying for just a few more moments of his time.

“Yep.”

Good to See You cont.

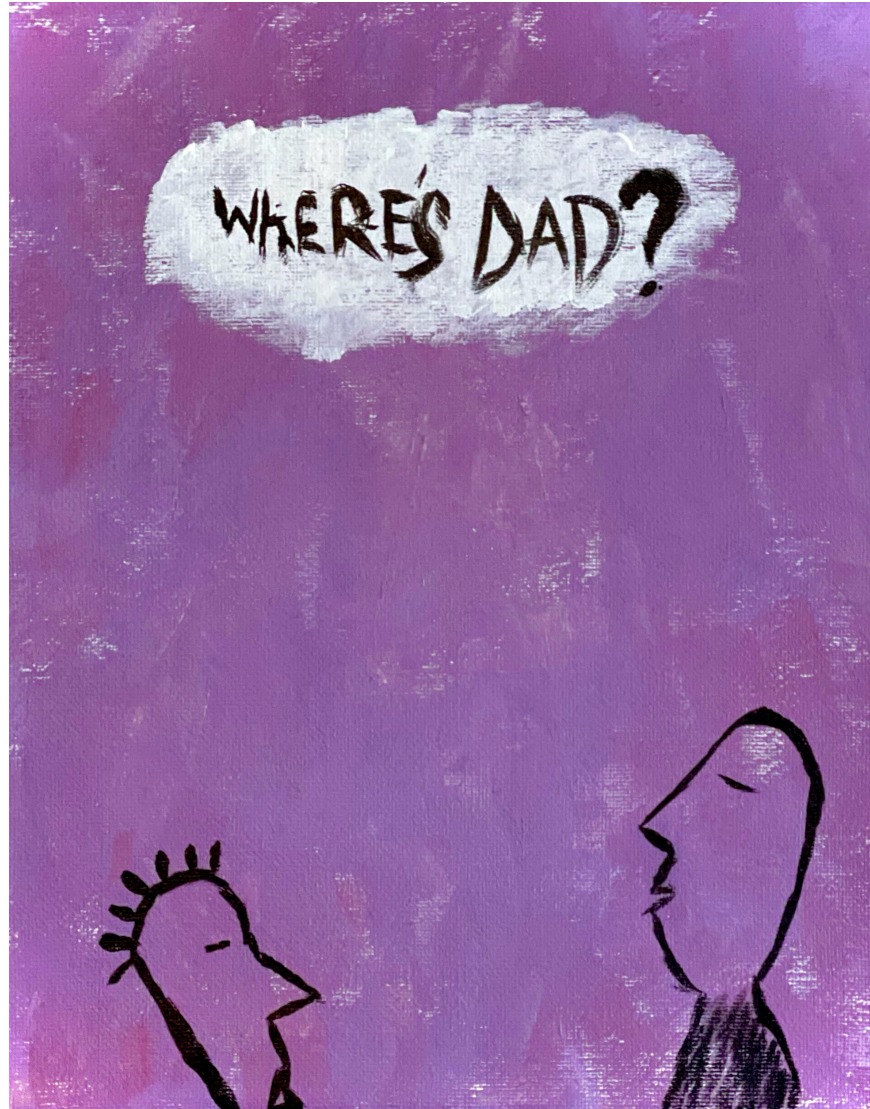
As I continue the stilted conversation, I'm about to ask for his updated phone number when he cuts me off.

“Well, we have to get going. It was good to see you again.” And without looking back, he walks over to Jean who is already waiting at the checkout.

As I look from him to Jean and back again, I whisper, reconciled, “Yeah, it was good to see you too, Dad.”

Where's Dad?

Andrew Kasmarek



THE FALLING WALLENDAS

By Andrew Kasmarek

I understand that all human life is bound to death, but it seems to me that some humans are more bound than others.

And so, I sing:

*Let the material note in triumph float,
and liberty extend its mighty hand
a flag appears, 'mid thund'rous cheers,
the banner of western land.*

You see, I never really had a choice like some people do. Some people grow up and choose what they want to be based on their interests. Maybe they feel safe with their math skills and choose to be an accountant. They buy a house in the suburbs and have a golden retriever named Max. Or maybe they choose to be a traveling salesman, eating high-end steaks in every city they stop. I couldn't choose to be a landscaper getting dirty digging holes all day or a masseuse at a high-end celebrity spa massaging the plastic out of Kim K's fake ass. I could never have been a construction worker, or a tree trimmer, which as the words fall out of my mouth, I realize tree trimming could have been the answer: A profession that satisfied my family's apparent dying need to be up above the trees looking down on everyone. But no, none of that was ever possible for me because my fucking Great Great Grandpa Karl decided he was going to be a circus per-

former, but not just any circus performer, he was going to become the Babe Ruth of circus performers. And he became so good at tight rope walking that while he was doing a European circuit in the 1920's he was recruited by John Ringling, like The John Ringling, of the Ringling Bro. & Barnum & Bailey Circus. Grandpa Karl accepted the offer but with his head ever high in the clouds he forgot to pack his safety nets when he made the move from Europe to America. Unphased, when the time of the first show came, Great Great Grandpa Karl went out there and did a high wire act with no nets and everyone in the Madison Square Garden lost their collective minds. The circus was never the same again.

Karl Wallenda, in all the fanfare, became "The Great Karl Wallenda" and soon after, he started to employ his own family on the highwire, and they soon became "The Great Flying Wallendas" and so on and so forth. So no, I couldn't be a property manager or a landscaper or schoolteacher because I had to be tight rope walker. And because my dad Nik is even fucking crazier than my Great Great Grandpa Karl, we aren't even doing our acts in circuses anymore. No, I find myself out here shuffling on a rope some 6,000 feet over the Colorado River because my dad thought it would be "rewarding" if the entire family did the "Grand Canyon together" even though some of us are still getting over the fact Aunt Lijana fell off the wire right in front us a few years ago in Sarasota and broke

THE FALLING WALLENDAS CONT.

literally every bone in her face.

She survived, but she doesn't look like Aunt Lijana anymore...

And so, I sing:

*The emblem of brave and true
Its fold protects no tyrant crew,
the red, the white, and starry blue.*

And because I have the time, what's even crazier is that Aunt Lijana breaking her entire face isn't even an isolated event in my family. Nope, there is a laundry list of these catastrophes. One of the first being the disaster in Detroit in 1962. When Great Great Grandpa Karl's ingenious seven-man tightrope pyramid scheme crumbled and Karl's son-in-law Richard fell to his death, as did his nephew Dieter. And even though he didn't die from the fall, his adopted son Mario, snapped his neck and was paralyzed for life. You might think that this tragedy would have deterred the "Great Wallendas" from performing without a net, but with a simple google search you can find pictures of the gang the very next day in the Detroit Free Press carrying on like Dieter and Richard hadn't just died. But you all know how the saying goes: the show must go on.

A year later in 1963 Karl's sister-in-law Yetta

died when she fell off the wire. And then again tragedy struck in 1973, when Karl's son-in-law, Chico, died from an electrical shock while helping set up the circus.

And as you can guess, despite the fame and fortune, the Great Karl Wallenda even died his own public death in Puerto Rico, in the year 1978, when he fell off his wire while waltzing between the bell towers of the courtyard of the Condado Plaza Hotel. He bounced right off a taxi parked below the act. Some two hundred people saw it happen. He was 73 years old. What a show.

But don't worry, my dad went back and completed the walk in his Great Grandpa Karl honor with my grandma in 2011. And it's because of stuff like this that I don't get to choose to be something normal: No, I grew up being forced to watch and eventually partake in these daring highwire disasters.

And so, I sing:

*It's freedom shield and hope,
other nations may dream their flag best
and cheer them with fervid elation,
but the flag of the North and South and West
is the flag of flags, the flag of freedom's nation!*

THE FALLING WALLENDAS CONT.

By now you are probably wondering what in God's name am I singing to you so here it is: the tune I'm singing is "The Stars and Stripes Forever" written by marching band behemoth, John Phillip Sousa. There is a secret protocol amongst circus personnel that if things go awry at the show, the band will break into this specific song to signal distress to all the other circus workers. This was the case when my Great Great Grandpa Karl and Company survived what is now considered one of the greatest fire tragedies in United States history.

On July 6th, 1944, at the Hartford, Connecticut fairgrounds, the Wallendas were up in the air making waves with their regular derring-do when the Barnum and Bailey Circus Tent broke out in flames. Karl's Wallendas, in their celebrity, were able to get away, but as the fire grew, and with some of the exits mistakenly blocked with moving trucks, 166 people were swallowed by fire inside the tent and burnt to crisps. Some 700 more were injured before they got out. The legend has it, that the band played Sousa's rousing cheer the entire time.

And I choose to sing it to you now because I, Ramon Wallenda, am a circus performer in distress. And moments ago, just at the start of this monologue, I took a big step to the right and officially quit my job as a Flying Wallenda and officially accepted an offer as a Falling Wallenda.

I just hope I live to see another day on the job.

The Exploits of a World Famous Vampire Hunter

By Tommy Shreve

In the summer before my sophomore year of high school, my parents forced me to get a job. Not wanting to join the evil billionaire corporations that control our world, I looked for a more unusual job. On the very last page of Craigslist I found a single ad:

Legendary Vampire Hunter seeking full-time assistant.

No experience required.

Pay: \$14/hr.

Benefits: personal vampire-hunting training, wealth of worldly knowledge, partially covered dental insurance

If interested, go to the old lookout tower of Vallenwood Castle in the forest.

After an arduous hike through the forest, I came upon the old lookout tower. The slanted red bricks peaked out of the overgrowth of weeds surrounding it. I knocked on the old wooden door, but there was no response, so I decided to let myself in.

Inside the tower was dark and musty. The few rays of sunlight that poked through the slits in the boarded up windows lit up strange machinery that was strung about the place.

“Hello?” I shouted, “I’m here for the job.”

“Ah yes,” I heard above me, “the first applicant.” The voice came from a silhouette that stood above me

on a walkway. “There is but a single requirement for this position. Drink from the glass on the table beside you.”

Sure enough, there was a glass of what looked to be cloudy water on the table next to me.

“There are worse places to get roofied, I guess,” I said before taking a swig from the glass. I immediately spit it out. “Oh my god, that tastes like rotten eggs.”

I heard a swooshing noise and a towering character landed right in front of me. He aimed an ornate crossbow directly at me.

“What the hell are you doing?”

“Take another drink or I will blast you where you stand, demon!”

“Fine, fine!” I shouted and took a smaller sip. I forced it down my throat with an audible gag.

“Well, well,” he said lowering the crossbow, “looks like you’re not a vampire after all.”

“You thought I was a vampire?”

“You scoffed at the taste of holy water and garlic, two of vampires’ greatest weaknesses.”

“I think anyone would have the same reaction, vampire or not.”

He smiled at me and looked me in the eye, “My name is Emilien Blanchet and I am the world’s greatest vampire hunter. Would you like to be my assistant?”

For the next couple weeks, Emilien trained me rigorously. I read 18th century vampire guides, sharpened wooden stakes, and I may or may not have stolen a few water bottles of holy water from a catholic

The Exploits of a World Famous Vampire Hunter cont.

church. Once Emilien was satisfied with my training, he brought me to some super fancy ball hosted by billionaire Franz Giorgiani.

Emilien entered the sprawling manor with gusto in his pristine white suit. I trailed behind, dragging a crate of vampire weaponry.

When I finally reached the top of the stairs, Emilien stood in front of the doors talking to the host, Franz Giorgiani.

"I'm so glad you could make it, Mr. Blanchet," said Franz, "I'm always on the lookout for more obscure entertainers for my parties. DJs, bands, comedians, they're all so boring. So, when I found someone who claimed to be a vampire hunter, well I just had to indulge."

"Glad I could be of service, Mr. Giorgiani."

"So, what is it that you actually do? How will you be entertaining the guests tonight?"

Emilien chuckled, "I'm a vampire hunter, Mr. Giorgiani. I hunt vampires."

Franz tilted his head in confusion but then noticed a teenage girl dragging a giant crate toward him. "Who is this?"

"Please, meet my assistant, Ms. Ruth."

"How do you do, Mr. Giorgiani?"

"Ruth," Emilien cut him off, "would you kindly hand me the sharpened crucifix?"

"Umm," I squinted, "sure." I pried open the

crate and handed him a small wooden crucifix, the bottom of which had been sharpened into a stake.

Emilien tossed the crucifix in his hand for a little. He then grasped it firmly and plunged it into Franz Giorgiani's neck. Blood poured from his throat and he quickly slumped to the ground.

"Oh my god, Emilien!" I shouted, "Why did you do that?"

Emilien took out a white handkerchief and began wiping the blood from his suit. "He was a vampire, Ruth. Did you not know? Maybe you need more training."

"How did you know he was a vampire? You just stabbed him in the throat and murdered him!"

"Ahhh, yes. It may look that way; however, crucifixes are one of vampires' core weaknesses. Only a vampire would die from such a thing."

I stood there in shock, watching him calmly dig the crucifix from the bloody body. He looked back at me hesitantly.

"Well, don't just stand there, Ruth," he said, "hand me the assault rifle loaded with silver bullets. There may be more of them in there."

Turtle Surf

Andrew Kasmarek



A STREET TOO FAR

By Jason Emrick

“Let’s stop here a moment.” The command comes from my father, bundled in a wheel chair, his voice struggling to be heard over the gusting Northwest wind. I have pushed his wheel chair three blocks, the wheels leaving four sets of track as we slide along the slushy walk. An icicle is forming in his moustache. His once chiseled face has grown round and fat along with the rest of him. We are gazing across the parkway at Lake Calhoun, Bde Maka Ska now, where my childhood was held and my youth was spent. No other plans were needed if the sun was out and the wind was up. My dad loved sailboarding and I loved being there with him at the lake. Hours and days passed, sitting in the sand, watching the world pass by on foot or skate.

There was one skater whose regular appearance completed each day. He was probably in his mid-forties as judged by my 12-year-old eyes. He wore black roller skates over long white socks with stripes circling his knees. His short shorts and hairy chest, blond-gray beard and golden tan swayed in sync to his music, pure 70’s disco, rocking from the transistor radio he passed from hand to hand as he danced down the path.

There were sailors too. They were all a little older than my dad, most of them divorced. Midwest weekend beach bums, pretending for a few months each summer that they were not teachers and engineers but stars in their own rendition of Endless Summer. As they arrived I’d wander over with my report: How was the wind; what size sail was working; which boards were doing the best? A sort of caddy to the

sailing class.

There were two teams at the beach back then, back when Calhoun was the epicenter of sailboarding, before everyone aged out or moved to the bigger suburban lakes. They were divided by their loyalties to different brands and shops. There was the Bavarian Surf Shop whose Jessenig sails were adorned with a giant “J”. On the sides of their boards, the brand, “Horny” stenciled in contrasting colors, orange against green, pink over black. They were marshalled by the shop’s owner Yan, The Bavarian, whose thick German accent seemed cartoonish to my young ears. He held court each afternoon, a Lowenbrau shrouded in his hand, long blond hair blowing behind a widow’s peak in the wind, his wetsuit top rolled down exposing his colossal biceps flexed from steadying his beer. His girlfriend Chikky wore beach bikinis regardless of the weather and managed to keep both pieces precariously in place while still sailing with the proficiency of a pro.

The other side, my father’s team, were from the Scuba Center. They sailed Mistral boards with Gastra sails. The skipper of their squad was Larry. He owned the shop but was more comfortable with a tank strapped to his back than a board beneath his feet. His lieutenant was Dennis, a smooth talking, semi-pro sailor from California. During a raffle at the shop, a sort of see-what’s-new-to-buy-this-spring event, I won a pair of Vuarnet sunglasses, a brand I knew was cool because Dennis sported them.

The rivalry was friendly but when one from

A STREET TOO FAR CONT.

each side giped into matching runs, their arms and legs fought for every ounce of speed they could muster. My dad, a regular competitor in the inter-tribe races, would stop by for a report after his victories. “Did you see me come across with Frank on the western reach, how’d I look? Was I pulling away?”

He knew the answer but wanted to hear it from me, “Yeah, you had him beat easy.” He’d lean back in his beach chair with a contented grin, sun warming his bare chest, eyes closed behind brown tinted Raybans.

But those days are gone, he sold off all of his sailing gear last summer. Now we are here, on the corner of Xerxes and the parkway. It is mid-November and the lake is turning over into ice. Two years ago we would have tested it, walked out on the thin sheet. Laughed when one of us fell through into the icy water. It snowed last night and my sure footed boots, the ones I’ve come home from my freshman year of college to retrieve, struggled to push his wheelchair the short distance from home. “Should we cross over, get a little closer?” Standing near the crosswalk I notice cars stopping for us and each one is met with my dad’s waving hand.

“No, this is close enough...” He says while sinking in his chair. “Let’s go home.” I turn his chair, slipping but not falling, and begin the short slog home.

We never returned to that place. He died the next March and I still swallow hard when I remember that moment, standing there just out of reach of our favorite place. It was five years before I felt whole

enough to return. It would be another fifteen years, after the birth of my second son, that the hole his death left finally scarred over.

Birthdays

by Tommy Shreve

I hate birthdays. Well, not necessarily all birthdays, but I really do hate my birthday. Ever since I was a child, I have always been deeply disappointed whenever my birthday would roll around. People hype it up for weeks beforehand, like it's gonna be the greatest day of all time, but when it comes around, it's just another day. Maybe I'm just bitter about the time my Mom promised me a huge party with all my friends but ended up forcing me to watch the High School Musical trilogy while she slept.

Once I got older, I stopped setting expectations for my birthday and tried to treat it like any other day. In fact, I tried my hardest to forget it even was my birthday. But that disappointment still rears its head at the end of every birthday. But why? If I have zero expectations how can I still be disappointed? It makes no sense.

One year, I tried throwing a party and going out for a night out on the town with my friends. It was that night that I remembered that I don't have many friends and I also hate being the center of attention. So that was a no-go.

On my 21st birthday, which is apparently the most exciting one, I worked for 12 hours and then went home and fell asleep. I loved that I had an excuse to not be the center of attention and to not go out and make a fool out of myself, but as I laid in bed that night, I still felt the creeping disappointment. So

basically, I can't win. Because if I do nothing I'm disappointed, and if I celebrate I hate it.

But really, what's even the point of a birthday? What are we celebrating? That you're alive? Yipee. It's not like a graduation or a wedding where you actually accomplish something, it's more like a participation trophy, like congrats you did it, you participated in life. Actually, a participation trophy means you at least tried to do something. You could do absolutely nothing with your life and you still get a birthday. So, no. Birthdays are not the participation trophies of life, they're worse than that.

Birthdays are not even a rare thing, like I understand when people celebrate having a kid cause you actually did something that not everyone will do (even if that thing was just unprotected sex). But, everyone has a birthday every single year. And not just that, there are millions of people that share your exact same birthday, so how special is it really? Hell, there are two people in my family who have the exact same birthday as me, and for some reason people make a big deal about it? What's so amazing about that? Our parents just happened to have sex around the same time, that's it.

You know what? I take back what I said at the beginning, I do hate all birthdays.

Seriously, fuck birthdays.

Maturing On a Farm

by Bryant Rooney

My poetry is mixed by shit and rotten tomatoes.
jobs on most farms require the cultivation of compost
home for undesired, over-ripe fruit and vegetables
baskets of rotten tomatoes with bruised skin
banquet for clouds of flies who drink
the pungent ooze that leaks from
old tomatoes like puss

next, I douse it with water
letting it bask unprotected in the sun
the pile boils in a crock pot of earth
when the rabbits filled their cages
I would mix in their piss and shit
a foul and important ingredient
for days I would stir, adding more to the pile of mold, water, and sun
when the pile of shit, tomatoes, and other foul elements no longer
look as they once were

I would sprinkle them in greenhouses filled with tomatoes, carrots, and lettuce
letting the hot sun cook through the milky plastic
gently coating the plants with divine rays
condensation fell from sprinklers decorating vines, leaves and blossoming red fruit
the compost became nutrients
fruits for fruits
I would pluck the tomatoes from the vines, dicing them with carrots and lettuce
the salad tasted as organic as the poetry that made it.

OLDIES

Amerti Kitila



In The Lobby

by Andrew Kasmarek

The Nord Haus Apartments were akin to a cherry on top of a milkshake, a luxury high-rise living space with an interior set for a movie. Long, flat, and deep couches ran the east and west walls inviting you into their sea-grey cushions that harbored bushels of white square pillows. The north wall was a giant set of windows that stretched three stories high letting the sun shine on a carton of egg chairs fixated perfectly before one of the room's two massive art installations. The first installation, a set of hanging wire beams that were clustered and lacking any uniform of length, was designed by the owner's daughter and were to be seen as implication of "Strength". The second installation, as if made from the scales of some great dream fish, was a gigantic shimmering sheet of shifting purple and green sequenced hues. It hung from top to bottom along the East wall as it wrapped around an extravagant staircase that brought you all the way to the third-floor community lobby.

To the West of the wires hung three wicker swinging chairs that would normally sit empty until the late evening when the rich drunks would amble out of their homes to wait for their Ubers and delivery treats. And finally, to the West of those swings, sitting in front of the lobby doors, sat the concierge desk, where Patrick Waterman spent most of his time.

It was 2:50 pm, just ten minutes before the end of what should have been a regular Wednesday, however Patrick Waterman's long face said otherwise. He removed his glasses and let his lazy eye roll away from

his nose and to the right as he pinched his eye bridge. He tried to exhale his thoughts, but his mind wouldn't allow it. *Why must this new age employee not work for works sake! He thought. Do they not feel the satisfaction of having a job? It's undeniable! Our minds place a premium on discipline and a job is the golden elixir!*

Patrick had been a manager for over ten years in an industry that was older than America. He saw the practice of hospitality as a staple of good culture. Patrick believed a good service worker was to be empathetic and caring as well as enchanting; a sort of malleable water that can appear as nothing while saving the day. The responsibility of molding luxury atmospheres, he reasoned, was payment enough.

He put his glasses back on and reached into the drawer where he kept the notebook he had labeled: "A Manager's Notes". He started thumbing through the black notebook that held compilations of quotes, tips, and bits of advice that Patrick thought every manager should have for when the going gets tough. It was his job to make sure that everyone at the workplace was being held accountable. It was his job to make sure that everyone was feeling heard. He sat at his desk and breezed over hundreds of handwritten notes until one caught his eye, "When they complain about work it was not because they wanted change, but because they needed emotional release" – Elton Mayo. He rubbed his thumb over the penned words. *As much as I admire your wisdom Elton, I think these workers are starting to actually mean it...*

In The Lobby cont.

Patrick looked away from his notebook and refreshed his inbox in hope that he would find a slew of new employee applications, but there was nothing. He checked the clock. Five minutes until John arrived. He heaved a sigh, *why can't he just follow the rules?*

John Jenkins was on his way to work and set to be three minutes late. He was raced across the Hennepin Bridge with his head tilted slightly to the right to shelter his face from the Mississippi River's cold breath. His long sandy brown hair rode the wind around his cheek and over his mouth and eyes making it hard to see. He cursed his thoughts knowing that once he arrived to work and freed himself of winter's bite, he would be forced to defend himself again.

John was continually aghast at his manager, Patrick's, belief in the corporate system. Everything was by the books with Patrick. You must follow this list exactly this way. And then you must log that information not just here but there as well. And you may never wear this or speak to a person like that. And you may never accept any type of food or drink from any resident or do anything that might make people believe we favor someone over another and... Patrick's particulars seemingly went on for forever because he truly believed it was his position that made people choose to live at the Nord Haus. While on the contrary John couldn't help but believe that a lobby man was no more than a paid dunce, a standing drumstick glazed in a neutral sauce, producing a smile that was manufactured for the rich and blind to the poor.

John had been at the Nord Haus for only four months, but he had already endured several, as Patrick would call them, "On Clock Malfeasances." Some of the infractions, John admitted as a former property manager himself, were completely reasonable; like the time that he decided to leave work early because three women who lived in the building asked him with pouty eyes and rouged cheeks to escort them to a party. There was also a time when he was accused of smelling like weed after his lunch break, but aside from those two, John felt most of the emails, write ups, and sit downs with Patrick had little to do with things that mattered at all. A great example was when he forgot to check the shared concierge email account. Another was for the time he wore his red winter hat from 2:00-4:30 am as he monitored a destitute lobby.

And so, as John trudged over the bridge and through the first neighborhood of Minneapolis's new Northeast, he fretted that another one of Patrick's sit downs loomed. Yesterday he had chosen to ignore Patrick's email about him sitting in the swinging chairs for the final 15 minutes of his shift.

John arrived at the building and paused before entering. He stomped the snow out of his black dress shoes, and he situated his mask. He drew in one last deep breath in hopes of thawing out his cold thoughts of Patrick. *I won't call Patrick a friendless twat. Or bring up the fact that he doesn't own the building even though he thinks he does, or that his rules are garbage, or that I know he can't even fire me because we are*

In The Lobby cont.

already short staffed or that no one should even be working during a fucking global pandemic or... but the deep breath didn't help.

Patrick watched John swing open the door and felt the cold run up his pants causing him to shiver and sigh as he thought about his own walk home. John took two steps toward Patrick with his eyes diverted away before looking to find his boss. "Afternoon Patrick," John said flatly as he walked to the right and around the long end of the desk, "Can I get the shift keys so I can set my jacket down and we can talk?" "Sure thing" said Patrick, wishing he would have gotten in the first word. He handed John the keys.

"How is it out there?"

"Really cold." John replied like his answer. He snatched the keys from Patrick and headed around the corner toward the coat room. Patrick sat upright in his chair as John walked away and tried to find the posture that best hid his belly. He flattened his plaid shirt as a pang of insecurity rushed into his ears. He thought about how he had recently started buying his shirts one size bigger. He heard the door to the coat room close and he thought about Mayo's quote, give him space to vent but remain strong. We have been here before.

As John set his coat down, he decided he would keep his covid mask on for the conversation. He made his way back to the desk and found himself a seat on the swivel chair to the left of Patrick.

"Sorry I didn't respond to that email about me sitting in the swinging chairs." John said staring direct-

ly into Patrick's eyes. He furrowed his brow and squinted slightly hoping that Patrick would just say thanks for admitting to it and move on.

"So, you are acknowledging you saw my email and you actively ignored it?" Patrick pined. John tried hard not to roll his eyes, but his eyeballs ended up looking as far to the left as they could while he breathed in.

"Yes, that is what I am saying."

"And can you explain to me how you could you think you didn't need to respond to that type of email?"

John closed his eyes. He bit his lip under his mask, and he started to count breaths like he had learned to do in one of his therapy sessions. His started cycling through all the sacrifices he had made to work under Patrick. He thought about the 5-week-bout with covid he had after those assholes from the 11th floor had a 30-person party bus right before Thanksgiving. He thought about how he had to cut six inches of his hair off for this job and how he'd been keeping his beard trimmed and his neck shaved. And then he thought about how he had to wear these dumb dress pants, and these horrible shoes that didn't make any sense for Minnesota winters. And then he thought about all the compliments he had garnered on the Nord Haus community board that praised his cheerful nature and good service. And how Patrick never got any of those compliments. And how the leasing team loved him and then he thought about how that

In The Lobby cont.

he had promised himself back when his valet company crashed at the beginning of this pandemic that he would never suck up to a rich shmuck for money again and yet here he was every weekend getting yelled at by some rich trust-fund kid who lives on the 10th floor and claims they are having financial hardships but pays for an apartment that is five thousand dollars a month. And somewhere in the middle of these thoughts John started breathing through his nose and then he opened his eyes and looked directly at Patrick's lazy one and said, "I didn't respond to your email because your email was fucking curt" And then he dropped back into his chair.

Patrick, who was mask-less, sat stunned at John's accusation. While John, watched Patrick's forty-something year old blue eyes fill with tears.

Patrick harshly swallowed the lump in his throat down and brushed the top of his thighs twice before leaning back towards John and whispering the only thing he could think to say, which was, "I can't believe you would be reading my emails with intentionality." He stood up, and grabbed the keys to the coat room and walked away with as much dignity as he could muster.

John rolled his chair over to Patrick's spot and started to log in to the computer. He spun around and reached into the cabinet behind the desk for one of the shift checklists that Patrick had created for the employees to follow. He began to review the first couple duties on the list:

3:00pm-3:05 PM: Clock in and then log on to computer and check all email accounts and community board messages. Respond to anything pertinent. If need be, situate the desk chair and computer monitors to your own convenience.

3:05pm-3:10pm: Scan lobby and decide whether anything needs cleaning. Go around and fluff all lobby pillows for desired appeal.

In the coat room, Patrick dried his eyes and reminded himself about how easy he made things for everyone. And how he knew that the order of this place was due in part to his diligence and dedication to good service. He knew that despite John's egregious venom, he must continue to maintain a welcoming and accepting culture. He zipped his jacket and walked out of the coat room hoping to summon the power of the lobby's wires.

When he got back to the desk, he was about to drop the keys in front of John and leave without saying another word when John looked up him and lowered his mask. "Patrick, I'm sorry," John started, "I was just mad at myself for screwing up such an easy rule. I knew better than to sit on those swings and I was even more wrong to call your email "curt" I know how much it means for you to have everyone on the team on the same page. So, that's what that was all about...."

Standing over John, Patrick first looked up toward then ceiling, then over to the wires and then his eyes found their way back down towards John as he

In The Lobby cont.

composed himself, “Thank you, John,” he said as matter of fact as he could, “I appreciate you saying that.” And then he plunged his hands in his coat pockets and started on his own mile long walk-through Minnesota’s cold.

John let almost twenty minutes pass before he looked back down at his shift checklist:

3:30pm – 3:45pm: Take shift keys and walk around the property to inspect for any suspicious activity. Make sure to straighten up the community rooms and the bike lounges. Be sure to fluff pillows if need be.

John reached under the desk for the hook where the shift keys should have been but felt nothing there. He paused before looking in the top right drawer where they were sometimes misplaced, and then checked around the corner to see if they had been left in the coat room door but again found nothing. “Fuck” he muttered. He took a deep breath and pulled out his phone and started to text Patrick: “Hey Patrick, I was looking for the shift keys and was thinking you might have accidently taken them with you?” John decided to add the chattering teeth emoji to imply nervousness. A minute later Patrick replied: “yeah I have them I will make my way back.”

John read Patrick’s text and grimaced. He looked back down at his phone and for some reason felt compelled to type: “I’m sorry Patrick” And then John just sat for a minute watching the cursor blink

as he realized that he had to quit his job. He couldn’t and wouldn’t ever care about Patrick’s rules, and that wasn’t fair to Patrick, who was never going to stop believing that what he was doing was important. Something had to give.

John looked back down at his phone.

I’m so sorry that you have to be the manager.

Author & Artist Biographies

Tommy Shreve is a Creative Writing and Professional Communications student at Metro State. He enjoys writing screenplays and short fiction when he can find the time. His main inspirations come from comic books and video games. And he hopes to one day write a feature film worthy of the big screen, but for now, he's just happy to be included in this issue of Haute Dish with so many amazing writers.

Jason Emrick is a former Automotive Technician now college instructor. He is pursuing a Creative Writing B.A at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, MN. He has always enjoyed writing and is thrilled to have this opportunity to pursue it academically.

Louise Reed is a senior at Metro State, expected to graduate in the spring. She is rom-com connoisseur, self-proclaimed tattooed icon, and a cat mom to two. By day she is a high school TA and by night, she strives to be the next John Green.

Miranda Okonek graduated from Metro State in 2022 with a major in English. She is currently working on her first novel and utilizes photography as an inspiration to write.

Zach Murphy is a graduate of Metropolitan State's Screenwriting program. His fiction appears in Reed Magazine, Maudlin House, Still Point Arts Quarterly, B O D Y, Ruminare, MoonPark Review, Wilderness House Literary Review, and Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine. His chapbook *Tiny Universes* (Selcouth Station Press) is available in paperback and ebook. He lives with his wonderful wife, Kelly, in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Robin Locke When not studying Robin can be found hiding under blankets, writing strange tales, the odd poem and talking to their imaginary cats.

Bryant Rooney says that he doesn't have much to tell about himself other than that he wanted to share some pieces that show an insight into his mind. He hopes to keep writing, and that he can learn from the pain, and realize that it isn't always that. He says, "Hope dwells underneath the vile reth we believe ourselves to be, only when we stick our hands into the filth, will we find the fruits growing within."

Author & Artist Biographies

Spencer Vik is a Creative Writing major at Metro, currently in his second year, and a Poetry Editor for the Haute Dish. As a writer, musician, and aspiring music critic, he is always working on way too many projects at once. He hopes to complete one someday, whether it's a book of poems, a film script, or a rap album. These poems were written several years ago and were recently revised. To Spencer, they represent a time of freedom and aimlessness that occurred between the end of high school and the beginning of college

Arien Mormul is currently a student obtaining her Bachelor's degree in the Individualized Studies major program. She is working towards a minor in psychology and a minor in creative writing. She dreams of becoming a psychologist one day and hopes writing will be a part of her journey there. Her educational goals are directed towards her desires of wanting to help broken people. She thinks both her interests of psychology and writing will work in unison together to help her accomplish these goals as well as her desires.

Dina Inderlee is an employee at Metro State and a lifelong learner. She has an Applied Mathematics BS, Graduate Certificate in Database Administration, and is currently working on a Creative Writing BA. Dina discovered her love of writing while remote working during Covid, starting a blog for friends at Metro to keep them connected and entertained with crazy stories working at home and insane thoughts of the day.

Andrew Kasmarek is a senior at Metro State and will graduate with a bachelor's degree in Creative Writing. He enjoys challenges and live music. On time he hiked the Grand Canyon rim-to-rim in one day. He hopes to go down in history as an excellent house guest.

Amerti Kitila was born and raised in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia. She moved to the USA 2 years ago and she is currently a student at Metropolitan State University majoring in international business. "Art is a safe place for me that I can feel myself."



