



LITERALINES

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Statement of Policy and Purpose

The *Literalines* Editorial Board accepts original works of fiction, poetry, black and white photography and line drawings from students at IUPU Columbus and IUPUI. Each anonymous submission is reviewed by at least three members of the student editorial board and is judged solely on the basis of artistic merit.

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A Field Exercise
Lori Smith

The smell hit Cole in the face as he stepped out the back door. There was no stench in the world like boiling pig fat in an iron kettle over an open fire. Cole walked around behind the barn where his father stirred the congealed mess with a long wooden paddle. Vainly, Cole tried to move upwind of the vile odor while he talked.

"Are we that damn poor?" Cole asked.

Dan Coyote stirred the kettle in slow meticulous circles. "Used to be. Might be again."

Cole sighed. His father's generation had known the United States when its citizens had still referred to their country as a superpower, before the oil ran out. Without gasoline, the U.S. automobile-based economy had collapsed.

There had been a great starving time, especially in the cities, not from a lack of food, but from an inability to get the supplies to where they needed to be. Produce and eggs rotted on rural shipping docks while city dwellers fought, first for pigeons, then for rats, to feed their children.

"We're not getting a military escort to the depot this year," Cole said.

"We got five trucks of foodstuff. Law says you only need three to get military protection."

Food had become more valuable than gold. No amount of money in the world would keep you from starving to death if there were no food available to buy. The wheat fields of the Great Plains had become a battleground between the farmers and the thieves who hoped to turn a quick profit with a stolen load of grain. And since the highwaymen were willing to sell at bargain prices, there were always buyers who would look the other way in order to widen their own profit margin.

"Seems the great father in Washington has decided that the military has nearly wiped out the plains bandits and therefore there is no longer any need to expend men and money to protect the nation's food supplies."

Dan snorted. "So he's just pulling out all our promised protection and leaving us swinging in the wind?"

"Not exactly. Six or more trucks, you still get an escort. Us small-timers were all thrown into a lottery to determine who would get an escort and who got to fly solo."

"So we drew the short straw?"

"Shorter than you think. All convoys without an official escort will be accompanied by one military outrider, to prevent us from crying wolf and claiming we need protection that we don't really need."

Dan laughed. "So the military doesn't trust us?"

Cole grinned. "Some things never change."

"What never changes?" Jamie asked.

Cole turned around. His daughter Jamie stood behind him, her head bobbing to the beat of the music blaring from her CD Walkman. How she could hear anything besides her music was beyond him.

"Military justice," Cole said. "We no longer rate an escort."

Jamie pulled the headphones from her ears and let them rest around her neck. "I keep telling you. Its all about the money."

Cole did not know which was sadder, that his fourteen-year old daughter was that cynical, or that she was right.

Jamie's disgust with the military was short-lived. She smiled as she looked past her father to two approaching riders.

Twin paint ponies galloped across the pasture that separated the Schoultz's farm from the Coyote's. Their riders were the seventeen-year-old identical twins Roane and Ryan Schoultz. Jamie ran to the fence to meet them.

Dan looked at Cole. "You look about as cheerful as a rattlesnake that just lost his rattle."

Cole glared at his father. He had nothing personal against the Schoultz boys. It was just human nature for any father of a teenage girl to distrust all teenage boys, especially the ones your daughter viewed as Greek Gods incarnate.

Being twins was their one redeeming value. For the moment, Jamie was in love with both of them. Cole figured until Jamie could make a decision about which one she was truly in love with, he was safe.

The twins brought their ponies to a skidding stop. Excitement sparkled in their bright blue eyes. "Is it true?" Roane asked.

"Do we get to take the convoy in alone?" Ryan asked.

"Do we GET to?" Cole shook his head in disgust. "What do you think this is, a game?"

The twins, leaning forward in their saddles in excitement, involuntarily pulled back from Cole's wrath.

"We could lose everything we've worked all year for, or worse someone could get killed."

Roane looked at Ryan. "He sounds just like Dad."

Grinding his teeth together, Cole stomped back to the house. Idiot kids.

Cole added the long columns of figures again. Intent on his work, he never heard his wife Janetta come in the room. He leaned back with a sigh as her strong hands began to massage the tension out of the knotted muscles in his shoulders.

"Those numbers haven't changed since the first hundred times you added them," Janetta said.

Cole laid his pencil down on the ledger book. There would be three semis, two with wheat, one with corn; a cattle truck carrying twenty head of live cattle; and one panel van loaded with smoked hams and sides of bacon. The caravan would pull out at tomorrow at dawn to make the forty-mile trip to the railhead.

Janetta removed her magic fingers from his shoulders. "I've got the video conference set up."

Cole sat in front of the web cam in his living room listening to Private Steven Spoonamore lay out the military's grand plan. Of course, if the highways were really as safe as the military experts said they were, they would not need a plan at all. There would be no contingencies, no need for caution; but military logic had always had its own twist.

Private Spoonamore stood at ease, feet precisely eighteen inches apart, shoulders square, hands behind his back, in the Schoultz's living room. "The military has

eliminated the hijackers in this area. Therefore, Washington has determined that military escorts are no longer necessary for every farmer.”

“Then why are you here?” Jamie asked.

Spoonamore ignored Jamie and proceeded with his well-rehearsed propaganda. “Also, since the hijackers won’t know that certain groups will not have a military escort, Washington sees no added risk to the groups, such as yourself, who will be traveling unarmed.”

Cole wondered if Spoonamore realized how stupid he sounded. If the military truly believed that they had wiped out the hijackers, why worry about them at all?

Spoonamore’s voice droned on. “The semis are a good way to haul large quantities of grain, but their size makes them vulnerable. Some of the hijackers’ tricks are simple. A simple explosive charge can blow a hole in the road. Water will then be hauled in to form a mire on either side of the road. A sheet of plastic covered with a couple inches of dry dirt over the mire fools the driver into driving the rig straight into the muck. With the semi buried up to its axels, the hijackers can dispatch the driver and offload the cargo onto waiting wagons.

Removing part of the supports from a bridge can produce similar results. The heavy semi can’t cross over it, but lighter trucks or teams and wagons can. The first and last vehicles are the most vulnerable. If the front truck can be stopped, it can be used to block the road, giving the hijackers time to attack the rest of the convoy. If the hijackers are less ambitious, they will pick off the last truck.”

Cole gritted his teeth as Spoonamore continued to recite what every six-year-old farm kid already knew. The Hobb’s Crossing co-op watched the roads and guarded the bridges in their own county. The railroad maintained tight security in Saulks County where the depot was located. The roads would be good and the bridges sound. It was the twenty miles of road in between, through Porter County, which worried Cole.

The Schoultz twins would be the outriders. Mounted on motorcycles, carrying walkie-talkies and binoculars, they would ride ahead and warn the convoy if they saw anything suspicious. Cole and his father would be in the last semi along with Private Steven Spoonamore and his video camera. Seems the military did not even trust its own to tell the truth.

By the time the conference was over, Cole’s head was pounding. At least Spoonamore was bunking at the Schoultz’s. Cole did not know who he should feel sorry for, the twins or Spoonamore.

The diesel engine roared to life in the pre-dawn grayness, sending the horses in the corral into a frenzied milling. The passenger door opened and closed with a blast of cold morning air. Not even diesel fuel could mask the smell of lard.

Private Spoonamore’s face screwed up in disgust but he did not say anything. Cole was not sure if it was military training or good manners. One of his fathers’ worn leather boots was suspiciously clean and shiny.

Dan checked the loads in his shotgun. “How’s the oil pressure?”

“Oil pressure’s fine.”

“So what are you waiting on then?”

The convoy rolled across Hobb County without a hitch. So far, the only life they had seen was the small herd of deer they had startled at Jackson’s Ford. Crossing the

county line over into Porter County, Cole could feel the sweat bead up on his brow. He was a farmer damn it. If he had enjoyed fighting he would have stayed in the army.

He had joined the army to see the world and learn to drive. He had learned to drive. He had also learned how to beat back rioters in Los Angeles, where starving men and women tried to storm a food warehouse reserved for military use. Then he froze his tail off in Alaska, patrolling the wasteland surrounding the pipeline to keep the radical environmentalists from blowing up the only oil reserve they had left.

Spoonamore picked up the walkie-talkie. The oldest twin, Roan, rode cross-country, parallel to the road. "Shotgun to M1, how's the weather?"

"M1 to Shotgun, sunny and clear."

The second twin, Ryan, traveled the highway, a mile in front of the lead truck. "Shotgun to M2, what do you see?"

"M2 to Shotgun, its smooth sailing as far as I can see."

"Are you sure?" Spoonamore asked.

"Yes."

Dan Coyote chuckled at the exasperation in Ryan's voice. "As much as you worry, you should have been a woman."

Spoonamore glared at Dan. "I don't like surprises."

Dan leaned over studying the something in the rear view mirror. "Well, I guess this just isn't your day."

Spoonamore leaned across Dan to look into the mirror. He swore as three hang gliders appeared in the sky behind them.

"Might be nothing," Dan said. "Could be just three honest citizens out for a joy ride."

"Do you really believe that?" Spoonamore asked.

Dan picked up the shotgun. "No."

Spoonamore picked up the walkie-talkie. "We've got trouble in the sky behind us. Get ready. And nobody stops. Proceed as planned."

Cole looked at his father. "What do you think their plan is?"

Dan continued to monitor the hang gliders' approach through the side mirror. "The twins didn't see any other vehicles, so I don't think they plan to offload. I think each glider is going to land on a trailer, shoot us through the roof of the cab and try and take truck and all."

Dan took the walkie-talkie. "Stay on the road. Maintain your speed."

"So we just sit here and do nothing?" Spoonamore asked.

Cole smiled, but there was no humor in his face. "Don't worry private. Can't possibly be hijackers. If there were any real danger, the military would have provided us with an escort."

Dan Coyote put on his best stone-faced chief look. "The great white father would never lie to the Red man."

They watched as the first two gliders passed overhead, targeting the two semis in front of them. Private Spoonamore, true to his duty, had his camcorder in his left hand, his pistol in his right. Cole tensed waiting for the thump that would signal the third glider had landed on their trailer.

With military precision, the three glider pilots landed simultaneously on the tractor-trailers. But something went terribly wrong with the skyjacker's plan. As fast as they hit the roofs of the trailers, they slid off.

Braced for disaster, Cole nearly jumped out of his skin as the skyjacker, hang glider and all, rolled down the windshield and over the hood of the old Peterbuilt. Cole gripped the wheel hard as the semi lurched up over the top of the unlucky skyjacker.

As quick as it had begun, it was over, the only evidence, a piece of pink nylon fluttering in the breeze on the windshield wiper and smears of white grease down the windshield.

Spoonamore, his side arm still pointed at the windshield, stared at the greasy smear on the windshield. "What just happened here?"

Cole laughed, a great big whooping laugh of relief that rolled up out of his belly. "It worked. Hot damn! It worked!"

Dan grinned. "We greased the roofs of the trailers. That god-awful smell you smelled when I got in the cab, that was lard. Do you know what lard is?"

Spoonamore nodded dumbly.

"Then you know," Cole said, "that it is slick as hell."

Spoonamore remembered the gun in his hand and slowly holstered it. "But how did you know?"

"Hang gliders kept making passes over the fields while we were harvesting. Those bandits have been watching us for weeks," Dan said.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Spoonamore demanded.

"Tell you what?" Cole asked. "This was just another field exercise. The military throws X amount of small farmers to the wolves then weighs the body count against dollars saved. Throwing in a couple of soldiers was just good PR."

Dan tapped Spoonamore on the shoulder. "When you get to the depot, maybe you ought to ask your commanding officer why he didn't tell you."

Dear Deer
Will Wills

I head into the curve, snapping the transmission down a gear, easing out of the throttle. The tires drag, the rear-end mushes around and then I am fully into the curve. Through the first half the centrifugal force drags sideways on the tires, so I keep out of the throttle. When I feel the apex pass I increase pressure on the accelerator, keeping the tires fully loaded. The car flings out of the curve, accelerating hard and I pop it up a gear, and then another. Another curve.

I downshift two gears, ride the first half through and then chase the tires back out of the apex. The car is running hard; the engine is responding. The torque coils out of the crankshaft on the straight-aways; I reel it back in on the curves.

I feel the power. I feel the traction. I use the former to punish the latter. Curve after curve: decelerate, squirrel through and scoot out.

Euphoria. Rapture. The squall of hot rubber fighting the asphalt, then the hoot of the throttle sucking air as the engine strains against its mounts, chasing the tires. Curve after curve swing past: squall, hoot, squall, hoot, squall, hoot--deer.

It's just standing in the road looking over its shoulder toward me. No fear; it's just curious about the brilliant lights rushing toward it. I can't swerve or brake; I have left myself no margin for maneuverability: -THUNK-. It disappears from my pool of light. I stop.

I back the car up and the deer comes into my lights again. It is lying in the other lane, still looking over its shoulder with the same curious expression. With my lights shining on it, I get out and walk toward it. I don't know what to do.

It's alive; steam is playing off the tips of its nostrils. It lays passively, just looking at me. I step closer. Suddenly, it thrashes its wicked hooves, trying to get up and run, or trying to drive me away. I can't tell which, but I stop.

I want to put it out of its misery. I return to the car and retrieve the tire iron from the trunk. My hands feel small and weak holding the iron. I know that even if I could get close enough to hit it, I couldn't kill it.

The deer stares at me. Its gaze isn't accusatory--it looks as if it's grading a math problem. Its eyes simply say "you got *this* one wrong, Bubba." I did get it wrong. I have created a problem I can't fix. I've taken something I can't give back. Desperate to end the encounter, I decide to run it over.

I get into the car and roll toward it slowly, thinking. Run over its head? Run over its body? I ease slowly between reverse and first, back and forth, thinking. Suddenly, with a clatter of hooves, it scrambles off the road and falls into a black ravine, sparing me. I quickly drive away, slowly.

Kala's Song
Adam Bunnell

I walked briskly past her, my backpack jouncing clumsily as I struggled to look cool and uncaring. There she was . . . Kala: only the single most amazing girl God had ever put on Earth. She was leaning casually against her locker, her black clothes meshing with the orange metal to form a Halloween-like backdrop. She spoke with a diplomat's ease, and moved with fluidic grace. I still couldn't believe I had ruined everything.

Staring at her, I didn't see the trashcan in the hall until it was too late. Uttering a few words Mom had always forbade, I stumbled into it and knocked it over. I got up lightning fast, my hands darting like electric impulses to grab the trashcan and fling it upright again. I cleared my throat, "Ahem," and turned with my fingers crossed.

The damage had been done. She, my princess, my flower, my radiant sun, the girl I had loved and lost, had seen me along with her followers. Hoping to make light of the situation I looked right at them, shrugged broadly and shook my head.

"I'm just starting out with this whole walking thing. Man is it hard!" I joked, smiling.

The others burst out laughing. Whether it was because of my sad little joke or my tangible humiliation I'll never know, because the others didn't matter. She didn't laugh.

"Are you okay?" she asked. She was confident, cool—the very qualities I struggled to attain. I nodded once and walked away. I was hard-pressed to fight back tears.

I met her in the seventh grade. I had gotten to the bus stop late, and my usual seat was taken. I stood in a panic, feeling the gazes of all the other kids boring into me. I could imagine the driver's impatience and anger at my hesitation. I walked slowly to the back of the bus. The only open seat was next to some weird girl! I couldn't possibly turn back now, and have to look at all the others whom I just knew were whispering and laughing at me.

"Uh . . . c..c..can I sit here . . . by you, um please?" I stammered.

"No," she said flatly.

At the utterance of her words, pure terror seized my soul in its icy grasp.

"Just kidding, sit down," she said, smiling.

I sat down quickly, relieved beyond comprehension. Then I looked at her, really saw her for the first time. She was . . . pretty. She had short, black hair and smooth white skin. Her nose was small and turned up slightly. She was wearing a black skirt and an old Sex Pistols t-shirt. She was new, yet familiar. She was something I couldn't quite put my finger on. She was mysterious. We got along well that day on the thirty minute bus ride from my house to the school. We liked the same music, books, and movies. She even laughed at my jokes. Her name was Kala.

I was always conscious of how odd she must have looked talking to me. She had style. She wore strange skirts, cut-up jeans, and dark shirts with cool logos. I wore solid colored Wal-Mart shirts, bright red being my favorite, and Faded Glory jeans coupled with a single pair of six-dollar Dunlop shoes. I had unruly hair and a tendency to rub my nose while talking. We belonged to two totally different groups, but that didn't seem to

bother her. I knew nothing about girls, and just assumed they were a lot like boys. I was, in a word, a nerd.

It was because of my lack of knowledge concerning girls that I went to my older brother for advice. Chris was eight years my senior and I figured he could help me sort out my feelings. He helped me to understand that I “had a crush,” as he put it. He told me I should ask her out. I nearly went into anaphylactic shock. Ask her out? My mother had told me enough horror stories about dating to have me staying away from girls until I was thirty-five! I thought about it, and it dawned on me that I would have to tell Kala how I felt. I sought my brother’s counsel on the matter, and he told me to write her a poem. Write her a poem. He said it as if it wasn’t the single most important task I would ever have to complete in my life!

I thought for hours, days, about what to write. I ended up with drafts of things like, “Roses are red, violets are blue. The sky is pretty, but not as much as you,” and “You are nice, you are great. I like you in that special way.” It was revolting. I threw these horrible excuses for poetry in the garbage almost the minute I had finished them. I needed to write something great, something profound. I needed to write something good enough to be song lyrics. That was it, song lyrics. I had the odd habit of getting songs stuck in my head at school, then writing down all the lyrics in my notebook in order to forget about the song. I listened to a lot of music, and about half of it no one had ever heard of. Sometimes, someone at my school would see the lyrics to a particularly obscure song in my notebook and ask if I had written them.

“Um, yeah, you think it’s good?” I would say, and they would always reply with praise. I thought about those praises then as I sat in study hall with my pencil resting on empty paper. I tried to think of an obscure song, something no one would have ever heard of. It came to me! I would use a Goo Goo Dolls song from their newest album. It was called Acoustic #3, and it went something like:

“They painted up your secrets
With the lies they told you
And the least they ever gave you
Was the most you ever knew
And I wonder where these dreams go
When the world gets in our way
What’s the point in all this screaming
No one’s listening anyways . . .”

It was a love song, and it fit perfectly. It wasn’t a song that no one would have ever heard of, but Kala didn’t listen to the Goo Goo Dolls. I jotted the song down, and it looked great in my handwriting. I decided to test it out. I gave the notebook to several of my friends during the day and had them read my work. Everyone said the poem was amazing, and no one knew it wasn’t truly my work. I felt great.

The following morning I took the notebook on the bus with me, fully prepared to give my masterpiece to Kala. I sat down next to her, as usual, and she started talking about a homework assignment she didn’t finish. She asked if she could copy mine, and I said she could. She spent the rest of the ride copying down the homework assignment. I didn’t get to give her the poem. I decided to try again the next day, but Kala wasn’t in school. My stomach began to form knots, which gradually grew bigger each time I tried to give Kala the poem and failed.

The next day I meant to give it to her. We were even talking about poetry, but my hands wouldn't reach for my notebook. By the fifth failure, it felt like a small, but ravenous creature had taken up residence in my abdomen and was delighting in gnawing at my insides. I couldn't do it. I just couldn't give it to her. I threw the poem away before lunch.

I rewrote it later that night. I don't know why, or even the details of how and when I did it, but I copied the lyrics down again. My gut instinct was to just throw the poem away and forget it, but I resisted my urges. She had to read it; she had to hear my feelings. She had to praise me! The next day on the bus I gave the poem to Kala. I just sat down and handed her the poem. She read it carefully, thoughtfully. I watched intensely, praying she wouldn't know the song.

"Did you write this?" she looked up and spoke softly.

I nodded slowly.

"It's beautiful," she said, and started re-reading it.

I wanted to scream in triumph, to jump up and down, to run along the bus aisle yelling in joy and happiness. I had done it. I had told her how I felt in so many words, though the words were not my own. It would be great from now on. She would like me as I liked her. I would copy other songs and give them to her. She would never know. Happiness was mine.

"It's beautiful, but you didn't write this. This is a Goo Goo Dolls song, track number ten on their new CD."

The words slid from her mouth as if she had inserted her fingers into it and drew forth a long, wicked dagger. She plunged the dagger into my chest as the words computed in my brain.

"Did you think I wouldn't know? Do you think I'm stupid?" she said, hurt.

"I . . . I . . . I didn't say it was my words, I just said I wrote it. I meant it as in I wrote it down . . . not that I . . ."

She left me then. I didn't notice that the bus was stopped and the other kids had already filed out. She just got up and left me. I had no choice but to follow, my feet slowed by the mire of broken dreams I was forced to slog through. The rest of that day seemed to last eighty-six hours. I didn't sit by Kala on the bus the next day, nor would I ever sit by her again. She only spoke to me enough to be courteous, not friendly. I had ruined everything.

Ever since that day, I have never written anything but my own poetry. At first I just wrote about Kala and the heartbreak I felt. As I wrote more and more, I gradually got better at it. Now I write original poetry all the time, but I'll never forget Kala. She moved away at the beginning of High School, and just before she left I told her I was sorry. She just nodded, and smiled that same old smile I saw on that first day I met her, the smile that I would never forget: the smile that changed my attitude, my writing, and my life.

Who Needs It?

Lori Smith

High school graduate,
Finally, I am free.
Who needs a degree?
Into the workforce I will leap.
How hard can it be to earn your keep?

I have a cool hat.
I am an employee.
Who needs a degree?
With minimum wage I can keep,
On driving my twenty year old heap.

A factory job,
Now that's for me.
Who needs a degree?
My supervisor's name is Zeke.
I only work sixty hours a week.

My back is aching.
This job is killing me.
A college degree,
That is what I will go and seek,
I need it now, because this job reeks.

Lift Up Your Hands

Jennifer Phillips

It's one of those moments when you're sitting alone and you've been up far too long already but you don't consider going to bed just yet. You're feeling a little surge of hormones in your brain, tripping away to the music that's become the only sound within you and around you for the past few hours that has felt pleasantly slow. You've reached the stars.

And then you start thinking about people, or maybe just that certain someone.... Yeah, you start thinking about him or her and of all the thoughts and feelings that come to mind about that person as you sing along with Midnight Radio. And you think - if he or she was here now I'd say all those things to them and we would be *so* connected.... And you think - what if I sang this song to them and they could somehow just receive all those things I think or feel for them, things that can really have no words used to express them anyway, because they're too pure and too complex. Eternal.

And you smile as you sing, imagining that he or she is somehow hearing and feeling and returning that vibe back to you. You imagine there is perfect understanding. And you're wondering how many life times you've spent with this rush and how many cycles of life this person has followed you along on the ride and it all makes sense. It all has resonance.

And then the song fades and you lower your hands and your emotions have become less pure and more muddled by the beast of reason you're taught to keep on your shoulder. You think of all those thoughts and feelings you have for this person and you know you'll probably never reveal them. You know you'll never be one with them. You start to doubt that there can be such a connection, that there would never be that perfect understanding. You know you'll never share that Midnight bond because you've turned off the radio for fear he or she would be too shocked to share the dance and song if they knew what you were thinking about them to begin with....

Soldiers and Sweethearts
Brad Whetstine

In 1943, during the Second World War, a group of Italian POW's confined to a forty-five acre lot within the fifty-thousand acre compound of Camp Atterbury, a Central Indiana U.S. Army training center, was granted permission to build a house of worship.

A small chapel in a meadow is all that remains of this fact.

The lightning the night before had split an oak within the remotest part of the compound, severing a limb and crushing a portion of the fence bordering the old military camp. Spying the ruins of the Italian chapel among the camp's overgrowth, Evan abandoned his morning mushroom hunting to push the fallen branches aside, stepping across the broken wire and splintered posts to the place where mass was no longer held.

Great patches of stucco were missing from the walls, exposing the brick and mortar just visible beneath the chapel's ivy veil and the ferns trimming its foundation. Evan caught a whiff of lime and urine as he stepped into the mouth open to the east. His eyes struggled to adjust from the dimness.

Inside was dank and musty. Leaves and twigs that littered the stone floor which had once been painted red, were crisp beneath his step, breaking the sanctuary's tranquility as he walked across the simulated carpet. Flaked and faded frescos adorned the north and south walls where, between the small crucifix windows, swallows had built their nests.

Straight ahead, in back, stood an altar. Raccoon droppings lay clumped along its top. Above it, scantily clad cherubs painted with dyes mixed from leaves, berries and blood glorified the building's west end. Like the other frescos, some were fading while others were peeling. Most, however, were pocked and defaced from the buckshot of trespassing hunters. Evan left quickly; wasps from the nests pasted to the eye of God on the ceiling were beginning to explore *him*.

Having shown Valerie the ruins he had discovered, Evan rowed the wooden skiff back across Miller's Lake.

"Evan," Valerie said, "why didn't we just walk to the chapel?"

"You don't like the boat?" Evan asked, working the oars.

"I love the boat. It's just that...you know...not being able to swim and all."

"This way is much easier than crossing all those ravines, trust me."

"Weren't you scared of being shot? There are a few guards around the camp yuh know."

"Guards *guard*. These guys are too busy cleaning their rifles and playing cards. No, I wasn't afraid of being shot...were you?"

"Of course not," Valerie said, looking away from Evan to peer over the starboard side.

On the boat floor, her hands folded in her lap, Valerie sat very still, leaning against the empty seat opposite Evan's and watching the oar blades break and turn the gray water. She was wearing her favorite dress, the paisley one; and a clearing in the trees let in the sun, warming her legs outstretched which were and crossed at the ankles.

"Whose boat is this anyway?"

"Dunno," Evan replied, pushing down on the handles, lifting the blades from the water. "It's always been here...so far as I know, it's always been here to be used by whoever needs it." A frog ceased its croaking and plopped into the water.

"Do you think it's silly that I never learned to swim?"

"I never learned to fly—do you think that's silly?"

Valerie giggled.

"We're almost to the bicycles," Evan reminded his passenger. "I'd say our chances of drowning are looking pretty slim."

Stretching her arms along the boat seat, she closed her eyes and leaned her head back, listening to the lapping water and the oars groaning in their locks, pretending she was on a gondola being rowed down the still waters of the *Canale Grande* of Venice.

"Evan," she began, speaking to the sky, "what do you suppose ever happened to the soldiers who built the chapel? Do you think they got to go home after the war?"

"Oh, I'm sure a few did..." Evan replied, answering the best he could.

"You don't think they *all* went home?" Valerie inquired, raising her head to look at him. One hand was now a visor against the sun.

"Even the soldiers who do go home never make it home in one piece. I'm not just talking arms and legs, neither. The Great War has been over fourteen years now and ol' Curtis Lapkin still scoots under the bed with the dogs whenever it storms."

Valerie felt sick and folded the hand down over her eyes, shuttering the image.

"How awful," she whispered, returning her head to the seat behind her.

Wincing at her reaction, Evan pushed down hard on the oar handles, staring at the elms and poplars along the shoreline, hating himself for how honest he was at times.

Continuing to row, he admired her innocence as she rested, still unable to believe she was here with him; it was such a risk.

"I thought you might like the chapel—the paintings—I was thinking of the paintings. I thought you might like the paintings...I shouldn't have taken you there."

"I *do* like the paintings!" Valerie exclaimed, lifting her head to look at Evan again. "I do like them—the frescoes—oh, they're wonderful—all the pretty angels. Did you notice that no two faces were alike?"

"I'll be damned. No. No, I never noticed that."

"I bet the faces were family from home—yuh think? Mothers, sisters...sweethearts?"

"Possibly," Evan said, working the right oar more than the left, maneuvering the skiff along the bend in the kidney shaped lake.

"I've read that the faces painted on the Sistine Chapel ceiling are of Michelangelo's servants."

"Didn't know that," Evan admitted, completing the maneuver. Valerie laid her head back again. Evan studied her.

My God she was beautiful. *Exquisite*, was the word that best suited this nineteen-year-old. Blessed with black-satin hair and a coppery complexion, she had fooled her

father into believing that she was out running an errand that would take most of the day. What she saw in Evan, a simple man who worked at a lumber mill, Evan didn't know.

"How wonderful it must have been for you," Valerie said, one night in her father's yard behind the house, "to bathe under a water fall and dry in the sun on the rocks." She held one end of the bed sheet while Evan held the other. The sheets were her signal to him: if they were left drying on the line after dark, Evan was to meet her in the yard.

"There's not much else like it," Evan admitted, snapping the sheet between them, folding his end while Valerie folded hers. Sawdust from the day's work had settled in the cuffs and pockets of Evan's faded work clothes, which were missing buttons at the sleeves and worn through at the knees. Valerie was in her nightgown. The white satin robe that covered her met in front and cinched at the waist.

They folded the sheet lengthwise again.

"If you could go anywhere in the world," Evan asked, gently whipping the cloth into a wave, "where would you go?"

"Italy," she replied, walking toward his end of the sheet, pressing the ends together upon her arrival. Their hands brushed in the dark.

"Why Italy?"

She draped the sheet over her fore fingers, tucking the middle under her chin to free her hands. "I promised my mother before she passed away," she explained, releasing it to double over her hands. Folding it again, she brought the pallet to her breast and smoothing it out, dropped it into the basket with the other linens. "My family's roots are there."

Evan rolled a cigarette.

"To live a life as free as yours," she said dreamily, sitting down on the step of the old gazebo that fronted the creek.

Evan gave the second story window of the house a glance before striking a match, making certain there was no light in her father's room. How stressful it has been, meeting in the yard, having to constantly watch the window, watch for a light. Evan had to be ready to run. Always.

"It costs sometimes," he said, taking a drag and flicking the ash, passing her the cigarette. "A guy can be *too* free."

They smoked in silence for a while.

"Who did you write while in the Navy?" she said, wondering aloud.

"Why do you ask?"

Valerie passed him the cigarette. "After mother died, father discovered a whole tin of letters written by a soldier in the army who wrote her during the war because he didn't have anyone else to write. I managed to save one before father threw the rest out. It read as if they were friends but was signed as if they were lovers; though I don't think they loved one another like soldiers and sweethearts do. So I was wondering who you wrote to while at sea."

Evan was silent.

"Like I said, a guy can be too free at times." He turned his back to her and watched the darkness shift where the water flowed between the banks, the stars twinkling

against its surface. "I can relate to the guy. Trust me, your mother did him one hell of a favor." He attempted to blow a ring.

"Mother had a big heart," she said, drawing her legs up under her robe and hugging her shins.

Evan took a short drag then dropped the butt at his feet, flattening it between his sole and the earth. He turned his back to Valerie, glancing up at the unlit window.

"You're awful quiet tonight Evan."

"I'm tired of sneaking around like this. Let me talk to him Val."

"Don't spoil it. Don't ruin the what we have by wanting more. Your twenty-five; I'm nineteen; I'm Catholic; you're not. And even if you did have a place of your own, it wouldn't be good enough for him. Let us just enjoy one another for as long as we can...please? You want that, don't you?"

"I want you free! —He keeps you tied to this house and that café of his like a damn slave—you have no life!"

"Don't yell Evan. Please don't. You'll only wake him. It's hard enough."

Valerie rested her head against her knees. The rush of the big creek filled their cars.

"If we leave by the end of the month, we can be in Venice by Christmas." Evan continued, speaking softly and turning to her. "Don't you wanna leave Indiana... forever?"

"Forever is a cruel word," she hissed.

They listened to the creek some more. He turned his back again. She wasn't going to cry.

"What do you dream about, Evan?" she asked, rocking a bit.

"Settling down. I'm tired of roaming; it's a young mans life."

"You *are* a young man."

"I feel so old. Old and empty," he said, his voice quivering. "I don't feel splinters in my hands anymore. Isn't that strange?" he asked, fishing through his shirt pocket, thinking he might have enough paper for one more smoke.

Valerie removed the clips from her hair, combed her fingers through it and shook it out. "Evan?"

"Yeah?" he said, looking up at the stars.

"It's late. Come hold me before you go."

Valerie stood and Evan turned and walked a few steps toward her as she undid the sash on her robe, releasing the ends and letting her arms hang slack. But Evan saw none of this. All he saw, instead, was how the evening blended with her hair and complexion, and how the whites of her eyes matched both her robe and gown and were brilliant under the starlight.

He slid his hands inside the robe until they were on her hips, stepping closer so his palms could trace her waist to the small of her back. She raised her hands until they were on his ribs, stepping closer until their chests met. His scent was vague amid the much richer maple and pine that his clothes carried, and Evan could smell soap as he nuzzled Valerie's glossy hair, running his hands up her back, feeling the warmth grow between them and the smooth material of her gown moist with sweat. He leaned into her, and when she felt his weight, trembled a bit.

“The sun keeps winking at me through the branches,” Valerie said, shading her eyes. “Could you row out to it? I just want a little; I just want to feel it on my face. A little won’t hurt...will it?”

“A little sun never hurt anyone,” Evan reassured her, changing course, watching his passenger indolently lift one arm overboard so her fingers could drag along the boat side, leaving behind a watery trail.

The sun was, as Evan promised, gentle to her face. When the rowing ceased, she heard the oars being folded into the boat, felt the cool shade on her bare feet and opened her eyes to find herself beneath the canopy of the big willow where they had parked the bicycles. Leaning forward, drawing her knees up under her skirt, Valerie gripped the boat sides as the skiff parted the moss and cattails. Evan stepped from the boat onto the bank and gave the craft a tug so it wouldn’t drift. The girl gave each of her sandals a wild toss onto the bank before making her way to the nose of the boat on her knees. She handed Evan his knapsack, and he tossed it beside the sandals with the aim and grace of an experienced paperboy. Standing up, the boat rocking, her wide eyes told Evan she was in trouble. Wailing, Valerie pitched forward into Evan, knocking him into the tall grass after he had failed to steady her.

Valerie’s collarbone had crashed into Evan’s lip, leaving it numb and puffy.

Face down on top of him, Valerie breathed hysterically, and Evan felt the whole of her convulse on top of him. A fear suddenly welled up inside of him; the same fear, perhaps, that surged through old man Lapkin and the dogs during a thunderstorm. He didn’t know.

“Hey...hey....” he said, softly but urgently, pressing his chin against his chest, struggling to see if Valerie was crying or laughing.

“Weeee!” she cooed, brushing her hair from her face, rolling her eyes, making them look all silly....

Lashing the oars against the boat seats, Evan capsized the skiff onto the bank to keep the weather out.

“There,” he said, proudly, brushing his hands against his Levi’s.

Valerie played with the chain that kept the small pewter cross around her neck, making certain the clasp was in back.

“I best get back,” she warned Evan as he fitted the knapsack to his back. “Father likes me to be at the café early on Fridays to wrap silverware for the dinner crowd.”

Evan leaned Valerie’s bicycle away from the willow, escorting it to the border of its shadow. Gathering the hem, she lifted her skirt just above her knees, knotting the cloth to one side to keep it out of the chain. Hands on the handlebars, she stepped across the frame and spun the top pedal until it was flat against her sandaled foot.

“This could be our new place,” Evan said. “Our little Italy.”

“But what about the fence? Won’t the guards see that it’s down and fix it? How would we cross when they do?”

“We’ll cross that fence when we come to it,” Evan said, tracing the nape of Valerie’s neck with the back of his hand, opening his palm to the small kinky wisps of hair the barrettes failed to tame. She pressed her fingers to his lips.

“Don’t, Evan. Don’t spoil it.”

They stared hard at one another. She felt the kiss coming anyway.

Pulling her hand away, leaning forward, he closed his eyes, leaning straight in until his head was against hers. She reached out and held him tightly once he began to tremble.

“Did I do that?” she pouted, tilting his head back by his chin, running a finger along his swollen lip.

“We did that,” he said, hoarsely, smiling and scratching her back between the shoulder blades.

She squeezed his hand. “The chapel was a pleasant surprise. So good of you to share it with me.”

Evan’s throat tightened as he watched the rusting bike with its empty basket wobble to speed as Valerie worked the pedals round and round. He stood in the shade of the willow and gave her a tired smile, watching her cycle down the dry clay road, disappearing into the covered bridge spanning the big creek that rushed along Miller’s Lake.

Crumb Cake
Jessica Schoettmer

The county coroner is going to exhume Greg's body today. She was going to do it last week, but Tuesday's snow clung through the week until Sunday, when finally the sun's rays ate it. She had to give the ground a few days to leak out some of the dampness. They would proceed with the task this morning, Thursday morning, any minute now. It was almost noon and I was waiting for my brother, Aaron, to pick me up and drive us over to the cemetery. I had hoped the trip would take my mind off the cat I'd just seen get backed over by a burgundy Bronco. It happened right in front of me, in the school parking lot. I wanted to feel sorry for the lump of twisted fur, but I didn't like cats, and I was too worried about seeing a real dead body raised from the ground -- that place where they were supposed to stay and be forgotten--a legacy on a tombstone. I knew Aaron would insist that we speed to the cemetery. He couldn't miss it, and he wouldn't let me miss it either.

I wanted to watch the body come out of the ground, to see what it looked like after it'd been buried a year, but I didn't want to be there, to know it was real. I'd rather watch it on video or on the Discovery Channel. At least there, poor little animals got some kind of remorse, some kind of little speech by the narrator before they died, even if it was just about the circle of life, and how it happened to us all, and all that goop. At any rate, I just didn't want to see this exhumation for what it really was. I wanted dramatic music in the background, tears, and the shouts that "Yes! There WAS foul play after all!" I couldn't imagine that happening, so what I really wanted to find a way out of the whole disgusting thing. I knew Aaron would never accept a "no" to our upcoming adventure; he'd only accuse me of never being there for him, for missing another "chapter" in his life.

"It'll be a snap," Aaron had said, when we discussed how we were going to pull it off.

I wanted to know just how we were going to do it. Graveyards are always so secretive. The caretakers probably wouldn't like for us to hang around to see a body entering or exiting the ground. They probably thought that it was best to remember the carnations and the tears and maybe go off to therapy for six months of healing and be done with it. I always wondered if they didn't just dump the body into the six-foot gash in the ground, tree roots visible on its tightly packed sides, like veins writhing in the soil. Then they'd just cover the body with lumps of mud or dirt, depending on the weather, and let the brown clumps tumble onto the surrounding grass--like topping on a crumb cake. I think the cemetery folks wanted you to think of crumb cake or yummy birthday cake, with grass and flowers for frosting.

I could never eat after I'd been around death. It didn't seem natural. I had this strange fear that I'd be the first to die of embalming fluid poisoning, like from breathing in it or coming into contact with it by touching some object that it had splashed onto, and feel it seep into my bloodstream and lungs. Not that there'd be any around the gravesite, but it was just one of those irrational fears that everyone secretly has and totally denies. It was kind of like a phobia and I wondered if other people had it. My fear seemed even more real to me now that we'd gotten a cadaver at school. I'd heard that some people had seen formaldehyde drip from it as it was unloaded from the second floor

elevator.

A few kids from my psychology class shuffled out the front doors to my left, tugging me out of my morbid thoughts with their bright yellow, green, and orange sports shirts, attracting my eyes like a fish to a lure.

“You waiting on a ride?” April asked, her flat blond hair clinging to her cheeks in the wind.

“Yeah. What time is it?”

“It’s a few minutes after noon, I think. We just finished studying for that awful mid-term. You need to use my cell phone or somethin’, hon?”

I shook my head.

“Nah. My brother’s always late. He never keeps his cell turned on, anyway.”

“Well, I can wait here with ya.”

Christina and Lucas had walked ahead to the blue Ford Ranger that they all squished into. Since they all came from Badger County they claimed it preserved gas funds. I think that Lucas just liked riding between the tall bodies of two ex-volleyball players. I couldn’t blame him, and I smiled and waved to the shaggy guy as he took his usual place in the middle seat.

“That’s alright,” I mumbled, my mind on Aaron’s own shaggy appearance, and the cell phone that he probably had lost somewhere down in the crack between the passenger seat and door when he’d pulled another U-turn down Michigan Avenue.

“Thanks anyhow,” I added.

As April skipped ahead to the blue truck I felt my heart beat quicken, my throat lurching, as though it wanted to throw up my voice, making me yell after her to take me with them--or at least to call Aaron and cancel the whole thing. I swallowed. My legs were heavy, dormant, and metallic. As my eyes watched my Badger County friends peel out of the parking lot, my mind was stuck thinking about the phone conversation Aaron and I had few days before.

“You have a cadaver at school?” Aaron had asked me over the phone.

“Yeah, we do. I can’t believe it. I mean, why waste a body by sending it to a community college no bigger than your average high school? Well, not WASTE it, but, you know, they could have better use out of it.”

“I wanna see it. How long are you going to have it there?”

“Two years. At least that’s what Dr. Norsely told us. I can’t imagine keeping it here two whole years. Can a body even stay good that long?”

“Oh yeah, if it’s soaked in formaldehyde. It can stay good for a long time. Listen, if we get time when I come to pick you up from school on Thursday, we’ll go up and see it. I gotta cut you loose right now. I’ve got a major ghost story idea in my head and I need to get it on the page.”

“Juss!” Aaron’s dented red bug had pulled up while I was thinking. The car he’d named Chelsea bang-bang let out little toy beeps as he waved to get my attention

“S’up girl?” He pressed one of his red Chuck Taylor’s on Chelsea’s accelerator before I could even shut the door, let alone answer him.

“Not much.” I watched his fingers tapping the air over the steering wheel.

“Where’s the back entrance to your school. I want to see this body.”

“We aren’t going to have time--”

“It’ll take ‘em a while to get the body dug up and everything. And they’ll be at it

for an hour or two.”

“How do you know?” My eyes searched his face, which presented itself like one of those cross-laden shields mediæval knights used to carry to ward off evil, only in his case it functioned backwards--a shield that did not keep doubt from entering, but kept it from escaping.

“Think about it, Juss. Do you think they’d go through all that trouble digging a body up just to look at it for a few seconds, take a couple of snapshots, and then bury it again? No. They may even take it to some kind of laboratory or someplace private.”

“But if they do--”

“Benny’s there, waiting to see what happens. He’s got my cell-phone number, if anything does get a little wild.”

I found Aaron annoying sometimes, but he was one of those people I couldn’t stay irritated with for long. I found myself wanting to be like him, wanting to throw myself into the crazy places he went--abandoned houses, alley fire escapes, and morgues. I still couldn’t believe how he’d once pretended to be a hospital employee, fooling a nurse, sneaking into the elevator, and slipping down into the morgue. He came back and told me how the bodies are accessible, not locked away, some of them naked underneath a white hospital sheet. Ours was a small county hospital. I didn’t imagine that in hospitals in major cities the bodies just loitered in vacant hallways and basements, like quiet guests waiting for someone to come down and join their party.

“Let’s go.” Aaron stepped out of the car that he’d parked in the emergency fire lane. “It’ll be alright.

I thought about when I’d first heard of the cadaver--images of the yet unseen, Frankenstein-like moist and rigid body in a hospital gown flashing in my brain like the lightning that brings such creations to life. I’d been sitting in philosophy class. We’d been discussing existentialism, and the guy that I’d named Donald (for his ability to rant like Donald Duck) brought up the cadaver.

He’d said, “Speaking of existentialism, while we’re on the topic, did anyone know about the cadaver? It makes me think about cadavers traveling in crates and stuff. Even in airplanes. You know how superstitious some of those pilots can be. Why there are legends about cadavers popping out of the crates and taking over planes. Can you believe that? Taking over the planes.”

A cadaver. I’d never heard of such a thing.

“Which lab is it in?” Aaron asked me. It took me a moment to switch from hearing Donald to focusing on Aaron. “How should I know?”

“It’s your school!” He jiggled one of the firmly locked knobs. “They’re all locked.”

“I could say I forgot something in one of the rooms. I could go and get maintenance.”

“Well, first we need to find which lab it’s in. Look in all the windows on the doors. You take the left side and I’ll take the right. We’ll just work down the hallway.”

“Ok, but tell me if you find it,” I said, looking down the vacant hall that housed nothing but doors and lifeless, loosely scattered chairs. This was the only lab hall in the school (other than the biology lab, which was, for whatever reason, separate, and around the corner). I didn’t think I’d say anything if I DID find the right room. The whole thought of it disgusted me, and I didn’t know what Aaron planned to do, once he got

around the body, saw it with its open chest, its exposed organs.

"I'll call maintenance and tell them I lost my bag. I have school I.D. on me, and they may ask for that," I said.

"Check," he said.

I thought about my philosophy class again as I peered into the first room. We had learned Descartes' theory in philosophy class—"I think, therefore I am" the same day Donald had mentioned the cadaver, and my thoughts returned now to the clay-like body in its juice of formaldehyde. It made me think of a game I had as a child, where the players were scientists, opening up this toy monster body, and pulling out glow-in-the-dark slime that must have been the organs, and the gummy worms I'd put in there for intestines. I was sick of thinking about bodies, just as I'd been sick of it that day in philosophy class, hearing Donald's take on it and then listening to the whole class coo in murmurs of fascination.

"Ooh! We have a cadaver here?" the girl sitting next to me had asked. She looked like a mole, I thought, as I'd watched her sit up with a certain curious excitement. She wore glasses and her playful hands always plopped about on her desk. I'd never heard her speak before and I'd wondered if that's what a mole would sound like—soft, quiet, somewhat anxious.

"Yes. We got it the other day. Someone even told me that they cut his chest open. They used a scalpel. There's a hole in the chest, and they ripped some of the ribs out, so you can see the organs," Donald ranted.

Dr. Norsely had shaken his head. "Well now, I don't believe they've cut the cadavers' chest open yet, Mr. Tucker. You do know that we have the cadaver for two years, don't you? We haven't even had the organs plastic-zed yet, and--"

"Look at her face!" the red haired girl across from me had exclaimed, pointing a hot pink fingernail at me.

I'd known my face must have been revealing the horror I felt inside, but there had been too much excitement going on for anyone to take notice. We were all listening to Donald, to all the things that make us cringe, yet are even more exciting.

"So where is the body now?" It was the mole girl talking again.

"It's in one of the labs. The biology lab, I think. The anatomy classes meet in the biology lab. When they took it off the elevator, some girl screamed. She screamed right there, and it set my buddy and the funeral parlor lady to laughing. Juice had dripped out on the floor. Formaldehyde."

"I'm an organ donor." I'd spoken suddenly, surprising myself with the sound of my voice, which seemed to bounce off everyone else's eardrums, amplifying in my own. I'd continued, trying to speak above the clangor of echoing, nervous laughter.

"This doesn't mean that I'm donating my body to science, does it?"

"Ah no, silly," The red haired girl seemed to be the only one who'd heard me. "They pay you to donate your body to science!"

"You know, sometimes medical students hide cadavers in the schools. Sometimes the dean finds them dangling in the closet, waiting for teatime. You know-- skeletons in the closet. In the closet." Donald laughed as though he were coughing.

"Any luck?" Aaron's voice was coming towards me, now. I jumped slightly, having not realized that he'd already been down the length of the hallway, and was heading back down mine.

“Nah. I think we’d better head on to the cemetery. I can’t imagine--”

“Can I help y’all find something?” I jumped again. I really had to start paying attention to what was around me. I turned my head to glance over my right shoulder and the clumps of black wavy hair that rested there.

“I mean, ya seem to be a lookin’ for something.” It was the woman who came to water the greenhouse and biology lab plants. I tried not to stare at the beady eyes of the lizard that peered from the woman’s breast pocket.

“My sister left something in one of these labs. The room with the new cadaver in it. Her keys.”

“In the biology lab?” The lizard and the woman both watched me with black, protuberant eyes.

“Yes.” I watched Aaron, who was nodding and grinning, shifting his weight impatiently from one foot to the other.

“Could you let us in? We would SO appreciate it. You have no idea. We were going to have to drive forty miles over to South Arnsville to get a spare apartment key from her ex boyfriend.” Aaron had a way with strangers. “You’re really saving our butts.”

“Well now, I don’t see why I can’t let you in. You seem like nice kids, anyway.” She continued talking while we walked around the corner and she opened the door for us. I didn’t really pay attention, and I don’t think Aaron did either, until we both heard the last lines of “I’ll be back in a few minutes to relock the door. Just one piece of advice, honey. When you break up with yer boyfriends, change the lock to your door.”

I nodded, and followed Aaron into the room.

“Wow,” Aaron said, bouncing over to the far back corner of the room where a body lay just beneath the folds of white linen, on what looked like a large diaper changing station.

“Aaron, I think I’m staying here.”

“Come on, Juss. We don’t have much time.”

I watched as he gently peeled the sheet from the face and shoulders of the corpse. In the space between Aaron’s right hip and raised arm, I could see pasty brownish skin and coarse kinks of black hair. He turned his head around to look at me, his eyes moist, and his jaw jutting to the side. His fingers were twitching.

“Someday.” His voice was almost wistful.

“What are you talking about?”

“This’ll be me someday, Juss. When all the fighting’s over. When this body that has worn itself out already by lifting weights and bailing hay . . . when it goes down, it’s going to stay around. I’m not letting myself go out without having a purpose.”

I was confused, and maybe angry. Tense. I thought I must have been hearing him wrong.

“You’re not gonna be a cadaver, Aaron! I mean, why would you want to do something like that?”

“Why do you want to go to school?”

“What’s that got to do with anything?”

“A lot. You have the brains, Juss. You have all that. What have I got, huh? THIS!” He gestured to his own body.

“Is that all you think you have?”

“Why does this upset you so much? You’re clenching your fists and everything. What are you thinking?”

I paused, trying to hang on to an idea that was slipping from me like the white cloth that Aaron had pulled completely off the cadaver, dropping it onto the floor. The idea that Aaron had a future, that he was going to publish his stories someday; or direct the first horror film to receive multiple Oscars; or win the lottery that was going to pull him out of the dangerous fumes and chemicals that swam in the foundry air. He was going to be more than just a cadaver.

“Don’t you see? Because of volunteers like me, maybe some kid will know her anatomy better, and go home and impress her boyfriend. Or maybe it’ll help some nurse get their license. It doesn’t matter. I just want to know that I’m doing my part.” Aaron paused, his voice softening. “That we’re each doing our part. Even if it’s after death. And that this part’s mine, Juss. This is what I’m doing. I hope you can understand.”

I nodded, not knowing what else to say. I was still reflecting on his speech as we pulled into the cemetery twenty minutes later, watching his blonde hair stand up like tufts of dandelions as it danced in the sun that showered us through the windshield. There sat Aaron, maybe the future cure of cancer, maybe just my older brother that could belch out the alphabet one and a half times. Either way, he glowed in my eyes, even when the sun grabbed the clouds to cover its naked, shining body.

We saw Benny’s black afro before we even saw him. He was rounding a line of shrubbery that had been concealing him from the part of the cemetery blocked off for the exhumation.

“Benny, my man, what’s happening?” Aaron parked the car in the middle of the cemetery path.

“No such luck seeing the body, Rinfield.” Aaron was Rinfield. Benny was Rumfield. Don’t ask me why.

“Oh yeah? Why not?”

“Well, first of all it was already gone when I got here. I guess Loraine gave you the wrong time. I’ll bet they do that kind of stuff in the early morning, when nobody’s around.”

“So nothing at all?” Aaron sounded only half-disappointed.

“Nope. In fact, there hasn’t been a soul around this place. Get it, soul” Benny chuckled at his own joke, poking at my ribs. “Smile, girl. Greg isn’t in this place anymore. He’s already off and flyin about.”

“I know.” This was a reflex response. “We just wanted to know the truth. About what happened to Greg, I mean.”

“Well, you aren’t going to find anything blowing around here, except for the hair on your head. They have that entire area blocked off. That whole corner of the cemetery. There’s a funeral tent up, too, so there’s nothing to see. Anyway, I’ve been here an hour, and no one has come in or out. Looks like case is closed until Lorraine tells us her version of it.”

Lorraine was Greg’s mother, who, for a year now, had refused to believe that her twenty-one year old son had died of a heart condition she had never known about. First, it was that his cigarette had been laced with Ecstasy. You could never tell about his friends, after all. Then, it was that the two girls he’d been hanging out with the night he died found out that he had \$500.00 on him, and poisoned his Bacardi. Then, when she heard

back from the autopsy that Greg had been taking OxyCotton, THAT had been laced with Ecstasy. After all, her own son would never do something so “white trashy.” Her favorite insult for anyone, of any race, was that they were none other than down town, street slum, good ‘ol sticky white trash.

“Well, let’s just light out of this place, then. We all know they won’t find anything anyway, rest his soul. I’ve got a story I’ve got to get down on paper. I think I can come up with a better ending than Lorraine can, anyway.”

“I’ll raise you one,” I said, grinning.

“You’re writing two stories?” Aaron was envious, I could tell.

“You’ll see.”

We waved to Benny, scrambling back into the car once more.

“Good ‘ol Chelsea Bang-Bang” Aaron said, revving her engine and petting the dashboard.

While we waited for Benny to start his car and lead us out of the cemetery, the new song “Your Body is a Wonderland” came on over the bug’s radio. I listened, trying to picture it in my mind--a wonderland of trains passing over the veins, rope swings made out of hair, and a giant heart for a trampoline that popped people up and down, rhythmically, so they didn’t even have to jump. I thought about all the fashion models in the world; all the young bodies; all the smooth skin and milky grins, and how it would all end. The wonderland would eventually shut down and be condemned.

“Are you proud of me, Juss?”

“Of course I am” I nodded.

I tried not to think about Aaron’s body someday being soaked in formaldehyde. I tried not to think about what it would be like if I was still around when he died, and didn’t get to visit his actual, buried body for up to two years after his death. I still had the faint Frankenstein image in my head, but maybe those kinds of visions never totally leave. So I thought, instead, about the sound Aaron’s voice and my own made together, when we interrupted each other by shouting out names we read off tombstones.

“Quick. Nagel. Hymann.” He was engrossed.

“Neiman, Robison, Armstrong.” I was challenging him.

We laughed. Aaron flipped the radio station, and I felt myself shudder at the wind that pushed through the crack of his window. I clutched my arms around my ribs and waist, hugging myself to keep warm, feeling partial to my own body. Aaron continued his name chant.

“Norton, Collins. Look there’s Marshall, like us. Maybe they’re related.” The tombstone read “Marshall. Husband. Wife. Forever remembered.”

Names, voices, bodies. I wondered how many of them had their organs.



Lighthouse
Marlene Kraszeski

The Man on the Doorstep
Ben Garlick

For one night, all of Grammer, Florida, was completely shut down. Hurricane Marcus had the town in a death grip of gale force winds and lashing rain. It was icing on the cake for Michael Jenner; days like the one he just had could only end with being stuck in his little Honda in the middle of the night during this weather. Only *he* could be suckered into a business trip to Florida with a hurricane coming. This clinched it; if he found a place to make it through this storm he was quitting his lousy job. While this thought ran through his head, Michael saw the dim light from the sign of some economy motel through the sheets of flying water. Realizing he would probably die if he kept to the road, he pulled in, hoping to find safety.

What he found was a mess. It seemed like all of the residents of the motel were gathered in the modest lobby, their faces bearing the same stricken expression. At first, Michael believed it was the hurricane blowing like Hell outside, but then he saw the body in the middle of the room. Lying on the kind of cool brown tiles that you always find in these kinds of joints was a dead man. There was no mistaking it; his skin was white, and his eyes were wide and staring. The corpse didn't have any obvious wounds, there wasn't any blood on the clothing, and he was soaking wet.

Michael realized he had been standing in the doorway for a few minutes when a fat man wearing a cheap blazer with the motel's logo on the breast pocket sidled up to him. The man was sweating profusely, destroying his attempt at a comb over. Michael had seen this man a hundred times in a hundred places. The man had no grasp of the situation but believed that he was in charge of it. To cover his own fear, the motel manager had a big uneasy grin on his face. Michael hated people like this.

"Some weather we're having!" The manager said with false levity.

"Right," Michael said with an open, but stern expression. He knew how to handle this type of guy.

"What happened to this character?" Michael asked the small crowd at large, trying to find someone competent to talk to. No one spoke up.

"We just found him like this, lying on the front doorstep, an hour ago," the motel manager wheedled in.

"How did he die?" Michael asked, hoping the storm was involved. He wasn't so lucky.

"We don't know. We think he walked himself to the door," an older man said from his position among the twelve or so motel patrons. He had the bearing of a life of activity, with strong shoulders and a short, efficient hair cut. Michael guessed ex-military or ex-police. The man continued.

"The phones are out, the radio is broadcasting the same emergency message over and over, no one's coming, and I'm frankly surprised that you made it here with the roads the way they are."

The old man reached into his breast pocket for a beat-up cigarette and matchbook. As he raised the butt to his lips, the obese manager tried to say something, most likely to the effect that there was no smoking in the lobby, but fell silent as a look from the old man explained to him the futility of his effort. The manager instead went back behind the

desk to try the phone again. Michael decided he liked the old man.

“Michael Jenner,” Michael said as he put forward his hand. It was met with a firm grasp and introductions were made all around. The old man was Pete Sommer, a retired army sergeant. Others in the crowd included his wife, a married couple vacationing on off-peak rates, a few locals not feeling safe in their condos, and a young man who just sat in the corner looking frightened. Michael was instantly a little suspicious, which was the natural human reaction; after all, someone might have just been murdered.

The manager gave up on the phone and rejoined the group. Michael gazed around at the strained faces; it wasn't just the body that was freaking out everyone; no one could forget the hurricane pounding outside. Every now and then, the building shuddered or glass could be heard smashing in some motel window. Needless to say, people were stressed out.

Seeing that some of the guests were starting to panic, Michael decided to take charge. Stealing his own nerves, he adopted a stern visage and started giving directions and pointing.

“You, manager, is there a basement or windowless room we could go to?” Pointing at the crowd, Michael continued. “You guys, why don't you start gathering some blankets and food. I know I sure as hell could use a cup of coffee right now!”

With some nervous laughter, people started to get moving. The manager led everyone to a meeting room in the middle of the motel. Michael was just easing down into a chair when he heard a scream. The old sergeant and Michael took off at once for the lobby. Standing there was Mrs. Wagner, the married woman here on vacation with her husband. She was staring down at the young man who had been so frightened earlier. He was lying on the brown tiles, his head twisted unnaturally to the side. His eyes were wide and sightless, but at least death had taken the look of fear from them.

“OK everyone, back to the conference room,” the old sergeant said, as he gently started pushing Mrs. Wagner away from the body. Michael was the last to go; he just couldn't take his eyes away from the two bodies lying on the ugly motel floor. Something was horribly wrong with this picture, he just couldn't decide what.

Michael's mind started working furiously. Obviously there was a murderer in their midst. Who could it be? Who could have killed the young man without making any noise? Michael resolved to keep a close eye on the remaining motel guests.

As he returned to the meeting room, he found that all eyes were on him—he was in charge. Even the manager was gazing at him with a look of frightened expectancy. All Michael felt was tired, and he could see that the feeling was mutual among the rest of the stranded motel patrons.

“I know this is going to sound impossible, but we should all try to get some rest. I think we should stay here, with someone staying up to make sure we don't have any more accidents.”

With some effort the plan was agreed upon, and the guests started getting comfortable, which wasn't easy in the crowded conference room. Michael and the old man decided to stay up and watch out for everyone. An hour passed by, and Michael and the sergeant got to talking.

“So, Michael,” the old man whispered, “what do you think is really going on?”

“Do you want me to say I think those people in the lobby were murdered? Is that

it?"

"No . . . well, yes. You don't honestly believe that there were two accidental deaths in the same basic location in one night?"

"There is a hurricane outside, isn't there?"

"You can't tell me that young man was killed by the storm in the lobby!" the old man said in an exasperated whisper.

"I don't know what is going on, but the answer is probably on those bodies out there." As Michael said this, there was a loud crash as a tree collided with the side of the motel. The noise woke some of the sleepers. Michael saw an opportunity.

"Don't worry, folks, it was just a tree or something. Pete and I are going to go check the damage."

Pete caught on, and they left, admonishing the group to lock the door behind them. The manager didn't even volunteer to come along—he was just too frightened. They got to check out the damage anyway because the tree had broken straight through the plate glass door of the lobby. Branches and chunks of the trunk were lying everywhere, including on the bodies. The sergeant approached the body found on the doorstep and bent down over it.

"So I wonder what hap...." The old man never got to finish what he was saying. As Michael turned to see what the old man was saying, the blood in his veins turned to ice water. The old sergeant was still bent over the corpse, but the cold white hand of the thing had a bone-crushing grip on his neck. The wide, staring eyes of the corpse were full of a malevolent life. Pete slumped to the tiled floor, and the thing turned its grotesque white face toward Michael.

"What the....," was all he got out before he was knocked to the ground by something that felt like a charging linebacker. Michael realized it was the corpse at about the same time he felt its cold wet mouth on his neck. The pain was excruciating; the tugging on his veins as his blood was stolen from him gulp by gulp almost made him pass out. In his desperation, Michael's hands clutched around for anything that could be used as a weapon. The second he grasped a broken branch from the fallen tree, he bashed it into the back of the corpse.

The scream it let out was deafening. Michael felt the shard of wood from the shattered tree sink into the hard dead flesh of the thing; he raised his hand and brought the weapon back down again into the creature's back. The second scream was followed by convulsive shudders as the thing slowly died, if died is the correct term. The body wasted away, becoming only a desiccated husk lying on top of Michael. With a cry of disgust and pain, he pushed the light remains off of him and crawled away from it. It was over.

That had been two nights ago; the hurricane had moved on and so had Michael. He was worried about the wound on his neck. He thought he might have gotten an infection from the open sores. That was why he couldn't eat no matter how much the hunger gnawed at him. It had to be the reason.



Utility Pole
Brad Whetstine

Window Stains
Jessica Schoettmer

You will no longer stand at my window
where your finger smudges are still clinging –
glued like wrinkled relatives at a reunion
huddling around stale clumps of cake
on a paper plate;
stuck on talking about how funny Uncle
Charlie was and how he caught
forty nine fish in one day,
though no one mentions the affair
with Betty, the red haired waitress
who had a six inch gash in her netted hose.

And this is all that remains until the rain comes
and someone else joins Uncle
in that cloud of remembrance that
drops the water which clogs the fingerprints,
pushing the sticky residue
down the sill
as though the window is swallowing it,
along with accusations for Uncle and you
and I realize I can close the blinds
I can walk away
or I can nod to you, wink and smile
and I can leave you standing at the window
of that abandoned bedroom,
that place where you are who I think you are.

A Desert Raid in 1991: "What was it Like?"

Will Wills

What was it like? The answer to this question might sound a little like the beginning of Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities: It was hot; it was cold. It was quiet; it was loud. It took forever; it was over in a second.

A lot of veterans have some trouble with "what was it like," and most do not talk about their experiences. It's not because they are afraid to discuss them; it is just too complicated of a thing to get a handle on. Most veterans simply don't attempt an answer. They just bury their experiences in mounds along with the other things people carry that are too complex to contemplate.

Maybe there is a way to answer "what was it like." Maybe, instead of trying to heap a series of highly textured events together in order to synthesize an answer, it would be best to kick over these mounds one at a time and simply show them to the questioner; let the questioner be the judge of what it was like. So right now, I am kicking over one of mine.

It's a cold, clear, January night in the Arabian Desert and I am sitting behind the wheel of my six-wheel-drive truck in a low area between two hills. Hitched to the rear of my truck is a 155mm howitzer. Arranged throughout its covered-wagon bed are ten men. The canvas sides are rolled up, and the dark figures of the men sit motionless, their faces shaded by the brims of their Kevlar helmets, their rifle muzzles pointed outboard. Only the upper halves of their bodies are distinct above the black mass of gear piled in the bed of the truck, and the collective appearance is that of a crouching, black, heavily-armed, hydra.

I put on a pair of night-vision goggles (NVGs) and the entire world assumes a grainy, black-green cast. The stars stand out like a cloud of motionless fire-flies hovering high above, winking in the distortion of the atmosphere, their numbers crowding infinitely into the cloudy haze of the galaxy.

Cutting through the clouds of fire-flies are long luminous streaks that curve their way from horizon to horizon, north to south, directly over our heads. I follow the streaks with my eyes, and, at their southernmost end, they suddenly terminate in a distant flickering, like the glow radiating from a giant pot of green gold at the end of a green rainbow. After a few moments the flicker is followed by noises resembling those in a bowling alley but in reverse: first the muffled crash of pins, then the ball thundering distantly up the alley.

As the arcs of light fade from the clouds of stars, diesel engines rumble to life around me. My head splitting from the eyestrain induced by the goggles, I remove them and toggle the starter on my own truck. The big Cummins engine shudders violently and then rumbles smoothly like a giant, gentle kitten.

In the blackness of the night ahead, a tiny red light on the end of a howitzer's muzzle begins to dance rhythmically as the truck in front of me lurches forward over the deep sand. I pull my truck into gear and begin to follow, almost mesmerized by the tiny dancing siren that is the light.

For hours I follow the light. Unable to see the ground or the sky, I stare unblinkingly at the light. That single light is both my tormentor and my savior. To blink and lose it could mean to be lost and alone in a hostile world. To stare at the light means salvation; but, like a pilot flying through deep fog without instruments, up and down lose their significance, and the confused mind is tortured with boredom and fatigue. Shapes spring up in the peripheral, tempting me to look away, yet I dare not. My eyes burn and the desire to blink is overwhelming, but I dare not. But it's involuntary, and I do and whip my eyes back open with the feeling that I have had them closed for hours. I desperately search the night for that little light and see a hundred tiny lights in the white-receptors of my eyes. A huge relief washes over me as the dancing light is recovered, and I accelerate to capture it and violently brake an instant later when I realize it is only 20 feet in front of my face. The men in the back, tossed painfully into the pile of gear, curse. The scene repeats itself as the night relentlessly whiles away,

In range of the enemy, thirty minutes is a career, and our advance-party man, who suddenly clambers onto the step of my truck, seems, for the moment, a seasoned veteran. He holds onto the side of the truck and guides me around in a circle, through the dark, to our designated spot. Mountains of sand loom up in the star shadows and then disappear under us as tiny mounds; the desert night is a shape-shifter: its massive, empty volume expands feet into leagues.

A hundred yards before our position the advance-party man jumps off the step and sprints ahead; his boots, scoured gray by abrasion, scrub deeply into the sand, churning for traction. He has a flashlight with a red lens, and it lasers a scarlet arc on the ground around his feet as he runs. The 65-foot mass of the truck and gun lumber obediently after him. Then, a stripe of white engineering tape appears at his feet and I aim the truck along it as he illuminates it with his light. He clicks off the light, and I stop the truck. Hesitantly, I cut the fuel to its engine.

Out in these vast, dark, dangerous spaces, the deep, comfortable rumble of the diesel engine soothes us, perhaps in the way an unborn baby is soothed by the beating of his mother's heart and the gentle thumping of fluid waves permeating through her womb, massaging his tiny body. When the engine stops, the silence screams nakedly; the vibration ceases to warm us, and we are cold and alone.

As I swing down out of the cab, the 40-foot shadow of the gun is already covered with figures. The hollow ringing of accidentally struck aluminum and the resulting fierce, quiet curses ripple up and down the gun line as seven similar scenes unfold around us. Aiming sights are mounted. Heavy parts are lifted, carried, and lifted again. Pins, catches, and latches are thrown. Large hand-wheels are heavily spun, and the howitzers lift their long necks skyward, their carriages twisting toward targets miles away.

The men go about their tasks as they have done a thousand times and soon the gun is emplaced and aimed. The ammunition is on the ground; the shiny black fuses gleaming in the red light of the marine checking the time settings through their small, indifferent, plastic windows.

I walk around to make sure all the numbers on the sights and fuses are correct; the gun is properly emplaced; the powder and ammunition are properly prepared. I make sure every man has his weapon, body armor, and gas mask at hand. Up and down the gun line the men are pacing nervously, not afraid, yet, but pumped and eager for action. This is the wait that precedes every mission.

Assembled, briefed, supplied, and moved into position, it is now up to an unseen force in the universe to decide when shells should be loaded into the guns and fired seemingly blindly into the thin night air.

The heat of exertion, the thrill of fear, and the excitement at being so close to the enemy all dissipate, lost with the sun's heat into the empty atmosphere. Some men lie on the ground trying to sleep, their flack vests pulled tight around them to trap in heat. Some sit on the trails of the gun staring out into the ominous night. A couple of them sit up in the bed of the truck, gently rattling plastic ration wrappers. Taste is as loud a sense as hearing in the dark, and any sensory input reduces the oppressive, cottony feel of the blackness surrounding our heads.

One man stands between the trails, and as I pace by I see his eyes are weirdly bright under the brim of his helmet. They are full of uncertainty, or rather the certainty that nothing will be the same after tonight. He watches me pass by and I feel his aura tugging at mine, attempting to gain strength from my presence. In lending him courage, I too am bolstered. The ordinary man is not brave when he is alone. Eventually, I tire of pacing around and rechecking what has been checked a dozen times, so I sit on a trail and doze.

Finally, we hear a small piston-driven plane buzz over our position heading north. It is the Forward Air Controller (FAC), who will direct our firing. With the knowledge that we will soon be shooting, the gun line buzzes to life. The breeches of eight howitzers are twisted from their chambers and clang open heavily. On my gun, two marines pick up a steel tray with the 110-pound shell on it, carry it to the black hole of the chamber and hold it in position while a third man rams it home. A cylindrical bag of grainy powder is thrust up behind the shell, and the breech is slammed home and screwed shut with a metallic bang. A large cartridge similar to a 45-caliber blank is thrust into the firing hole, and the firing block is slid shut with a snap. A lanyard is hooked to the trigger on the firing block; again we wait, but not for long.

Suddenly, a Hummer's headlights flash on, the glare almost audible as it slashes open the immense blackness: the signal to commence firing.

Released by a firm tug on the lanyard, the firing pin strikes the tiny primer on the cartridge. The powder in the cartridge ignites, sending a spurt of flame into the igniter pad sewn into the base of the powder bag. The igniter pad erupts in a furious gush of fire enveloping the primary propellant charge, exploding it. The resulting gases expand at a phenomenal rate.

With 5 million pounds of encouragement behind it, the heavy shell pops into the black night sky. A gleam from a late-rising moon reflects steadily from the spinning surface of the glossy black fuse as the projectile accelerates toward the unseen apex of its trajectory, thousands of feet over the desert floor. At this apex, the shell will tilt over and begin its descent, the ticking fuse holding back a loaded firing pin.

In the desert far below, an Iraqi soldier sits between two quad-barreled anti-aircraft guns. He is in a hopeless conflict against an omnipresent, yet unseen, force that he neither understands nor dislikes. He has been forced out here by his government to man these ancient and useless weapons, weapons that cannot be aimed by radar, because to turn on the radar would mean instant death from a missile fired from an unseen enemy aircraft and not by sight because by the time an enemy bomber can be heard screaming overhead, it is already past.

So he sits and waits because he and his people have always sat and waited. He waits without news and without orders. The communication vehicles were destroyed by rampaging fighters on the first day of the war, and any attempt to drive a vehicle is suicide. Miles above the desert an American plane circles, listening for radios, ready to send a vicious attack plane down to home in on the signal. So the soldier waits.

He won't have to wait long; three miles ahead of him and a mile in the air, the shell has reached the highest point of its trajectory and is coming down. As it tilts over, the moon's reflection shifts from its fuse and slides down to its base.

Loading and firing is a sport. The gun crews race to be the first gun set up and ready to fire; they race to be the first to fire; they race to fire the fastest; and they race to get loaded up and back on the road after the firing is over.

As each gun fires, it stops time. A howitzer doesn't "BOOM", it "CRACKS": it is an enormous rifle. But for a given volume of space in a rifle's chamber, a howitzer has three times the pressure. The air around the gun is viciously compressed by the concussion of its report. The collision of molecules that have been struck by the shock wave generates heat in the skin. Men's skulls and body cavities ring with the knock of the pressure wave. The compression of the fluid in their skulls makes their eyes bulge.

The shells flash away, tearing the clear night air like the ripping of enormous canvas sheets as they race toward their invisible destinations in midair, where gravity finally defeats the energy imparted to them by expanding gases and pulls them back down to earth. Gravity doesn't know that it is being used this way by the men on the ground. And like the men on the ground, it is just doing its job.

The men on the ground are struggling with gravity as well as they continue heaving the heavy shells into the maws of the cannons, ramming them up into the barrels, tossing in the gunpowder, slamming the heavy breeches closed, inserting the primers, and pulling the lanyards.

The first volley is always in unison. All eight guns fling their shells into the night air, and the barrels hurl back along slides in reaction to the huge force required to deliver the shells to their positions high in the sky, miles away.

With the energy of the recoil transferred into the earth, nitrogen gas, compressed by the action, expands to push the barrels back up into place and ready for another shot. With each massive "CRACK", the ground thumps under the load applied by the gun carriage.

Initially, each muzzle blast is a pure white scar on the black body of the night. After a few rounds, the inside of the barrel is dirtied with powder remnants, and the flash of the muzzle gains an orange, oily cast. The now sporadic firings of the howitzers chew up the darkness like scaring emergency lights at the scene of an accident.

After a shot, the smoke flickers hesitantly at the muzzle of the twenty-foot-long barrel. Then the breech is opened and the smoke slides out, filling the space between the gun's trails with its wet, acrid, urine scent. Through this obnoxious cloud, the crew struggles to fight another shell into the chamber. Then, "CRACK", and with a mournful howl another shell is gone; another acrid cloud slides down out of the open chamber, and the crew struggles up with another shell.

Time has run out for the lonely Iraqi. In the air above him toward the south, he hears a clear "POP": his "POP". Even if he had options at this point in his life, he would have no time to employ them.

The shell has fallen, still spinning, within sight of the anti-aircraft guns. The fuse's timer has run down and it releases its firing pin. The pin surges forward and strikes a primer, which lights a charge down a tube through the center of the shell. The base of the shell is blown off with a "POP", audible from the ground. Then, 88 small bombs spray out of the spinning shell and converge toward the ground, racing toward the guns in a large elliptical pattern.

The small bombs in this shell, called a Dual-Purpose Improved Conventional Munition (DPICM), consist, in part, of 66 simple fragmentation grenades, each the equivalent of a hand-grenade. In operation, they strike the ground and detonate, killing anything within 5 meters and producing casualties at ranges up to 15 meters. That is the guaranteed range. Beyond 15 meters the fragments are still flying at lethal speeds, but they have dispersed enough that the chances of hitting an individual soldier have diminished past the point of being a sure thing.

The other 22 bomblets are shaped-charges. These shaped-charges are designed to focus their explosive force at a tiny point, like a jet, rather than simply detonating to scatter fragments. They are weighted to fall with their jet pointing downward. When they strike an object, they detonate and can penetrate through a half-inch of steel armor. They will puncture the armor on anything short of a main battle tank; and even then, they will tear off parts: range finders, machine guns, and external fuel tanks. These DPICM's were designed during the Cold War to be fired by the thousands over an attacking Soviet armored force in order to chew it to ribbons. But, it's not Soviets that are getting chewed to ribbons tonight.

The bomblets rain down directly over the two anti-aircraft guns which are spaced 100 feet apart. The first bomblet to hit detonates, "BOOM," like a massive bass drum. But the flying fragments are riding the shock wave of the detonation, and four pieces hit the Iraqi before the sound does. He never hears it. The bomblets are small cast-steel cases, etched inside to facilitate their fragmentation; much in the way a glasscutter etches a piece of glass before he snaps it. This etched hollow case is filled with an explosive known as "Composition B." The four pieces that strike the Iraqi are each traveling with the speed and mass of a 22-caliber rifle bullet.

The back of the Iraqi's green fatigue shirt flaps like a beaten rug, and the muscles in his back involuntarily contract, throwing him backwards onto the ground. The fragments expend their energy within two inches of penetration and as he looks down towards his boots in amazement, nothings seems wrong, except that he can't move. He hasn't even heard the other 703 explosions that have torn his entire battery literally to ribbons.

God's gift to the grievously injured is shock, and right now shock has isolated the Iraqi from any feeling but a thick, viscous confusion. His mind spends the eternal few seconds it takes for the life to ease from his body not in reflection on his life and family, but in a bog of simple confusion, asking: What? Why? What? Why? What? Why? Then he is gone from this existence. His body is already on its way back to dust.

It's not over for the other 200 members of his anti-aircraft battery. Each of the howitzers is aimed at a different area in the enemy battery's position. The first wave of eight shells breaks open in the air, scattering its bomblets over the entire thousand-square-yard position. The collective detonation of these devices ripples the air like a

long, giant belch. From the observing aircraft, the ground looks like grease frying in a pan.

Almost every part of the space above ground in the target area has been in the trajectory of a razor sharp piece of flying metal. Most of the Iraqis have been killed while sleeping and the living are now cringing against the ground, their minds and bodies paralyzed in fear.

A twenty-second eternity after the enormous roar that tore the night into ribbons, a series of pops, like the last few exploding kernels in a bag of microwave popcorn, drift through the cloud of dust and smoke. Another wave of bomblets comes whistling in. This time, the roar lasts a full ten seconds as the American gun crews, each working alone in the dark, have lost synchronization.

Behind the howitzers, crews are furiously feeding shells into the guns. The contrast between the silent, pitch black of night and the concussive, screaming brilliance of muzzle flashes is shocking. The guns are packed much more tightly together in a raid than in a standard defensive arrangement, and the heat-light-blast of adjacent gun muzzles overwhelms the senses. Corporals are shouting at their crews who are dropping things in the dark. Neither can tell if the outgoing fire is incoming; all just work furiously in a near panic.

Once a crew opens fire with an artillery piece while they are in the enemy's back yard, they want to leave as soon as possible. Foremost in every artilleryman's mind is the risk of the shells being picked up on radar, their trajectories traced, and a responding attack. The fabulous light and sound show can be enjoyed for leagues over the empty expanse of the desert, but eventually a response is imminent. This knowledge is like a gremlin in the mind, disrupting motor skills and blanking out familiar procedure. The NCOs primary purpose is to combat these gremlins, and I am so occupied. I offer encouragement, assistance, and guidance; the gun keeps firing.

Finally, after five minutes of furious firing, the command is shouted down the line to "C-S-M-O" (Close Stations, March Order), which means pick everything up, hook everything up, and clear out. It's every gun-section for themselves. As with setting up, there is the banging of aluminum and cursing, but it's unrestrained on the way out. In spite of the fear of a counter-attack, the crews are still racing to see who can get out of the position first.

Once everything is loaded and the gun is reattached to the truck, we are on our way. My gun is the second to get moving but, due to an illegal engine modification, I win the race out of the position and am the first back to the rally point. In six hours we will all be back behind the protection of our infantry, our patrolling aircraft, and even our own muzzles. It will soon be over for the Iraqi anti-aircraft battery, too.

At the rally point, I put on my NVGs and look toward the north. A bright, green glow flickers low on the horizon: secondaries. The fuel and ammunition in the Iraqi position are burning. A bright dot separates itself from the mass of hell on the horizon and makes a small, silent arc. The charged electrons it leaves in its path hang luminous, as if keeping a brief record of its passing. This record also burns itself into my vision, and I see it the rest of the night. An artilleryman rarely connects directly with the results of his work and this small connection is my first.

In the Iraqi position, the five-minute roaring inferno of hell is over, and a new, quiet hell sets in. Everything is hit and everyone is either dead or dying. There will be no

ambulances. No helicopters will come beating in to pick up the wounded. No concerned corpsmen will inject morphine, fit IV's, or lend encouragement.

Dust and smoke lie in a dense blanket about 50 feet thick and the flame from burning equipment reflects its light off each tiny dust particle. The survivors look up into its brightness, confused about the time of day. Occasionally, an article of ordnance cooks off and screams into the air or cart-wheels in a shower of sparks across the ground. A few men shout in fear, but the attack is not resuming.

Instead, the cold night is getting colder; one by one, like the lights in a village as night wraps it up, the lives of the survivors begin to wink out.

By the time the sun peeks over the low distant horizon and sends its golden shafts stabbing through the cold desert air, the dust has settled. Several blackened piles smolder, the smoke trailing straight up into the air without a breath of wind to alter its course, as if the souls of men were lifting from the ground with their troubles.

Our troubles, such as they are, go on. We make it safely back. At the same time the sun's rays are illuminating our deeds of the night before; they are warming our backs as we stand shivering in the morning air waiting for green scrambled eggs and greasy fried potatoes to be served to us out of steaming, green metal cans. Interestingly, there is no relieved chatter from the groups of dirty-tan figures holding paper plates with soot darkened hands and sipping coffee into smudged faces.

We have not hated our enemy, nor are we complicated with the morality of what we have done, because we haven't yet seen what we have done. But we will. Later we will drive through the results of our work. We will see our Iraqi soldier, lying flat on his back, his once-thin body bloated and stretching taught against his green uniform, lying alone between the wreckage of two useless guns.

Eventually, months later, bulldozers will come and bury the remains of this battery, man and machine, under ten feet of sand and it will be gone from the knowledge of man. The families of the men who died here will never know what became of their fathers and brothers.

We will all go home, and most of us will bury the day and others like it, under as much sand in the dunes of our memories. But I know that the winds of time will uncover the bloated green form in my mind. I will look back on the night I watched missiles carve rainbows in the atmosphere and ponder: what was it like?

The Jumping Tree
Jason Clason

It was just an average oak tree that happened to be too close to the riverbank; we had never noticed it before. The base of the tree was at the edge of an embankment that dropped off about seven feet to the river below. Years of erosion had finally caught up to the tree, and it began to lean over as if trying to reach out for the other side of the river. When we noticed it, the very top of the tree was about twenty-five feet above the water, and it was hard to resist staying away from this rare find.

It was late in the summer of '95. I was about two weeks from starting my sophomore year of high school. These were good times for us--before anyone had girlfriends or jobs or any other hassles that we would eventually come to know--just the guys. I remember I was with my two best friends, Phil and Adam, who I had known for about two years, but which felt like a lifetime. We had found the tree earlier in the summer and built a walkway leading from its base, up the trunk, and to platforms that we had built in the top branches. It was just big enough for a few people to sit and watch the river go by. On that evening, the three of us were lying on our backs looking toward the sky; I can remember it just like it was yesterday. My eyes were closed and I could feel the warmth of the sun on my face and hear the leaves of the tree rustle softly in the gentle breeze.

We would lay there, tired from being on the river all day. We played on the river every day--fishing, canoeing, or taking long hikes through the woods to see what we could find. Just downstream there was a canoe livery that rented canoes all day long. Every day they would take people about six miles up river and drop them off at a certain point to float back down. To the owners of the livery we were known as "The River Boys of Driftwood River." We were always rescuing lost canoes and oars for them. We became quite proud of the name. That particular evening, the three of us were not ready to go home. Even as the sun was sinking closer and closer to the horizon, we could not bring ourselves to leave the sanctity of our river. The imminent start of a new school year was in the back of our minds.

With my eyes still closed, I could hear Phil beginning to move. I turned and watched with one eye squinting in the sun to see him lying on his stomach. He gazed down at the water.

"How deep do you think it is down there?" Phil asked.

"I'd say pretty deep," Adam replied with his eyes still closed. I rolled over on my stomach and peered down at the swirling waters. It looked deeper than most parts of the river looked, but you could never tell for sure with the water always being so muddy.

"You think it's deep enough to jump into?" Phil asked.

I looked at Phil and knew that he was itching to jump. Phil got crazy little ideas like that all the time; one minute he would be fine, and the next he would be doing something crazy.

"I don't know, probably deep enough," I said, beginning to catch onto the idea.

By now, Adam had rolled over and was staring down at the water also. "That's a hell of a drop; there would need to be a lot of water down there," Adam said.

"You said that it was pretty deep," Phil said to Adam.

"No, I think it's pretty deep; I don't know for sure."

“Well, let’s measure it.”

Adam looked at Phil for a moment. “How we gonna do that?”

“I don’t know, but we can’t do it now; sun’s going down. I have to get back to my house,” Phil said, making his way down the tree. Adam and I followed closely behind. We all three went to Phil’s, hoping that maybe his mom had made something to eat for dinner. She had, and we all stayed at his house for the night. That was the normal summer routine for us: staying at Phil’s. Looking back on it, we must’ve driven his parents crazy because we would stay up all night in the garage listening to loud music and seeing what we could get into. They never really said much to us though as long as we stayed in the garage and not in the house.

The next day, the three of us woke up late but set out as soon as possible for the river. This day was different than most in that we actually had a mission. The night before, we decided we were going to jump out of that tree, and that’s exactly what we were setting out to do. The first thing that we had to do was measure how deep the water was. We couldn’t find a stick or pole long enough to measure the water, but, luckily for us, in his garage Phil’s dad had just about anything you would need to make anything you want. We found a rope and tied ribbons off at five-foot intervals; at the bottom was a cast-iron skillet to act as an anchor. The plan was to drop the rope from the tree and sink one end of the line. Then, by measuring how much rope went under water, we could tell how deep that part of the river was. At the time we thought that we were geniuses.

We hiked through the woods and down to the riverbank where our tree stretched out into the mid-day sunlight. The temperature was quickly warming up and gave us even more reason to jump. Already the canoers were coming down the river by the dozens. That was expected, but we learned over the years that they were to be ignored. Of all things on the river, the canoers were the most unpredictable. Some of them were just tourists looking to get a taste of Mother Nature; others were trying to get the same experience, only they wanted to see how much beer they could drink over the course of their trip. There were many times when we had unpleasant encounters with them, but that is a whole different story.

We went to work on our mission; Phil and Adam climbed out into the tree with the rope, and I guided our canoe underneath where they stood.

“Does this look right?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Phil said as he dropped the rope. I stood in the front of the canoe; the weight shifted, and I nearly fell out before I had a chance to do anything. I heard the guys laugh a little bit as I regained my balance. Next, I carefully reached out, grabbing the skillet at the end of the rope.

“Okay,” I said to signal them to begin lowering the rope. As they did, I watched the skillet sink under the surface and disappear into the hazy water.

As I stood there watching the rope, I noticed out toward the middle of the river a canoe slowly drifting by. In it sat two very attractive-looking blondes. The girl at the front of the canoe was wearing a red one-piece bathing suit, and the other was wearing a blue bikini top and dark sunglasses. They looked at me standing there in my tattered army shorts and soiled shirt. At the time, my hair was long, and every strand stuck out in a different direction. The girl in the red bathing suit smiled at me and waved. As they

drifted by, all I could do was wave back and wish they would stop and talk, but they never do. I turned my attention back to the task at hand.

The first flag went under the water, then the second flag.

“Holy crap,” Adam said, looking down at the water.

The rope stopped, and I saw that the third flag was waist high above the water.

“Is it stopped?” Phil asked to make sure.

“Yeah, I’d say it’s about 12 feet deep.”

“Twelve feet, is that enough to jump into?” Phil asked.

“Hell, eight feet would probably be enough to jump into,” Adam said.

“Well, let’s do it then,” Phil said excitedly. “Jay, park the canoe and get up here.”

I didn’t hesitate at all. Nearly falling out again, I steered the canoe to the riverbank and tied it to a small root that stuck out of the ground at the waters’ edge. I then climbed up the steep muddy bank and used the roots to get onto the trunk of the tree. I held onto a small wooden railing we had made and climbed higher and higher until I was with Phil and Adam. When I finally reached them, I was out of breath from moving so fast. I stood against a limb that stuck straight up into the air and watched Phil, who was standing out at the very end of the tree. We had long ago cut off the very outer branches that had obscured the view of the water. There was a spot where three branches had once forked out, and this was a perfect jumping spot. He stood with his legs on the bottom branch and held onto the two at his side, looking poised to jump. It became quiet as we waited, and I could tell by the way he was hesitating that Phil was having second thoughts.

“Phil, it’s just like jumping off of a diving board,” I said.

“Okay, here I go,” he said, standing motionless. With smiles on our faces Adam and I waited to see him jump, and then we realized that he was ready to do it.

“Phil, don’t be a wuss; it’s not that high,” Adam said.

“That’s easy for you to say. You’re not the one standing out here.”

“Well, let me get out there and I’ll do it first.”

“All right,” Phil said much obliged. He turned around and walked back to the platform, and Adam walked out to replace him at the fork. Adam crouched down looking like he might just do it but stopped for a moment. He peered quietly down at the water as Phil had before him.

“Come on, jump,” Phil said with a bit of sarcasm.

Adam stood a moment then asked, “How deep is the water again?”

“Twelve feet,” I said, “give or take a few inches.”

“You’re sure it’s not just in that one spot?”

“Yes, now jump!” Phil said, growing impatient. Adam continued crouching, just staring. About that time, a couple of guys were coming by in a canoe and noticed us up in the tree.

“Jump!” one of them yelled.

“I’m going to,” Adam said to the strangers.

“What’s wrong? You afraid your tampon will get wet?” The canoer yelled as they drifted downstream. Phil began laughing, and I couldn’t help laughing myself. Adam turned around and began walking back toward the platform.

“Stupid jerks,” he said when he finally reached us.

“What, you’re not going to do it now?” Phil asked

“Not any more I’m not. I lost my concentration.”

Phil sighed, and then looked at me, as did Adam. “Looks like it’s your turn, Jay.”

“My turn?? Why do I have to go first?? I don’t want to go first,” I said, really not wanting to go first.

“Well, if you don’t, then who else will?” Phil replied.

I looked out toward the end of the tree. “Damn it,” I said as I began to make my way out to the fork. The limb leading out to the jumping area was small, and there was an even smaller handrail to hang on to that you could not put your weight on or else it would break. I could feel the end of the tree bending toward the water as I slowly moved toward the end of the branch. My legs shook a little as I thought about how high I was. Finally, I reached the end and got down into position with my feet on the bottom limb and my hands holding the remaining two. I became very still, looking out over the river and the swirling currents twenty-five feet below. It was a long drop, and it looked even further down from where I stood. I gathered some saliva in my mouth and spit (as most people seemed to do when standing atop something tall). I counted: one one thousand, two one thousa... then heard a tiny little slap as it hit the water.

I looked back at the guys who stood there waiting for me to take the dive. “I don’t know about this man; that’s a long fall.”

“What are you worried about?” Adam asked, as if he hadn’t been nervous when he was out there. “The only thing you have to worry about is if there is a log or something floating under water.”

Phil shook his head with a sarcastic smile. “You’re an idiot,” he said to Adam. “Now he’ll never jump.”

Phil was right; the first thing I did was look back to the water and imagined a log floating just under the surface, waiting for me to jump in and hit it. That kind of thing could really hurt a person. “All right,” I said. “I’ll pass.” I walked back to the platform, a lot quicker than I had before, and sat down, defeated.

The day passed, and we lay sprawled out on the platform, absorbing the sun’s heat and trying to muster up some courage. Occasionally, one of us would get up and claim to be ready to jump. But once we stood out on that fork, looking down at the water, whatever courage we had turned to fear.

The day grew late, and eventually the sun once again inched its way toward the horizon. We knew that there wasn’t much daylight left, and we felt that if we didn’t jump today, the tree would win. The thought drove us crazy.

The three of us were lying on the platform not saying much to each other, just accepting defeat, when we heard the sound of oars hitting the sides of a canoe. We always recognized that dull metallic thump. The three of us sat up simultaneously, looked upstream toward the setting sun, and saw a single canoe with two men in it about fifty yards away. It was odd that a canoe would be out that late; usually, they stopped running earlier in the day. Onboard were two older men, and they noticed us right away. I instantly knew exactly what they would yell up at us.

“Jump!” One of them yelled, like hundreds of others before them had. I was about ready to speak to them, but Phil did first.

“Nah, we’ve been jumping all day; you guys come up and jump.”

I glanced at Phil, and so did Adam. It was genius.

"All right," the man in the front of the canoe said, and the two began paddling over to the riverbank.

"Good thinking," I said with a smile as the men began to climb up. They were obviously drunk by the way they stumbled up the tree, muttering profanities under their breaths. Their shoes were covered with thick brown mud, and they both had bright pink sunburns on their backs. Once they reached the platform, they stood for a moment, winded. We had never had that many people in the tree before, and I was surprised that it was holding up.

"How deep's the water?" One of the men asked, looking down. He wore a red tank top that had a picture of Alan Jackson playing a guitar on the front. He smelled of beer when he spoke.

"About fifteen feet," Adam said.

"Damn," he said looking out over the water. "Is it safe?"

"Yeah," Phil said. "We do it all the time."

"Cool," the man said. He carefully made his way out to where the tree forked, and his buddy stayed back on the platform with the rest of us. As soon as he came to the fork, he stood up and paused a moment. Just when I began to think that he wouldn't jump, he leapt out as far as he could, arms and legs out. The end of the tree lurched upward from the loss of weight. The man seemed to fall forever before splashing down in the water. I nearly laughed at the sight of him sailing through the air. But then I noticed that he hadn't come back up to the surface. We all watched with stressful eyes and hoped that he would pop back up. *What have we done?* I asked myself. *We just killed a man because we lied and said it was safe.*

A couple of seconds had passed by, and I began to move down the tree toward the bank, as did Phil and Adam. I guess we figured if we made a run for it, no one would know who we were. Just as we had begun to make our move, the man popped his head out of the water and let out a yell.

"Wow! This water *is* deep," he said and began swimming back to shore. His partner in the tree laughed. "He used to be a Navy Seal. He can hold his breath for five minutes," as if knowing we were worried about it. He then made his way out to the end of the tree followed his friend.

The two men each jumped three times, all while we sat on the platform watching them, not really saying a word. Afterward, they got back into their canoe and continued down the river. The three of us were left alone, feeling disgusted with ourselves. The sun was nearly set, and we had not done what we set out to do. Then Phil hopped up and walked out onto the limb that leads to the jumping spot.

"What are you doing?" Adam asked.

"I'm going to jump," Phil said, turning around and looking at us like we were idiots.

"It's going to be dark soon; you going to jump in the dark?" I asked.

"I am not going to accept defeat. If a couple of drunken canoers can do it, so can I," he said, positioning himself on the fork of the limb. He became very still and stared down at the water just like we all had done before.

"Don't think about it; just do it," Adam said to Phil. "The longer you think, the harder it will be."

For some reason, I felt it was the perfect time to start an argument with Adam. There were times when he said things that I just had to comment on. "Yeah, just like Adam did before he jumped," I said with a sarcastic laugh. "Oh wait; you didn't jump, did you?"

"I would've done it, but that canoer broke my concentration."

"Oh bull, you were just as scared as the rest of us, and don't try to hide it," I replied, annoyed.

"Whatever, man, you know what? You can be a prick sometimes," Adam said, starting to become angry.

"Yeah, well, I'm not the one trying to tell people how to do things when I can't."

"Go to hell," Adam said, his voice growing louder.

"You go first," I said. Just after I had uttered the phrase, the tree suddenly shifted upward, and we both grabbed the nearest branch, thinking it was falling in. Adam and I looked just as Phil was leaping out through the air. His arms and legs swung wildly as he fell.

"Holy Jesus!" he yelled in true terror just before he hit the water with a loud slap.

"Oh crap!" Adam said with a smile and ran to the end of the tree; I did the same, forgetting our argument and waiting for Phil to pop up. We didn't have to wait long; he returned the surface as quickly as he had gone under.

"How was it?" I yelled down to him.

"I wanna do it again!" he yelled, swimming back to the riverbank.

Adam grabbed one of the branches of the fork of the tree.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm going to hang and fall," Adam said. He then swung himself out over the water with his feet dangling in the air. I looked down at him as he hung there for a moment.

"You know, the more you think about it, the harder it will be."

"Okay, I've thought about it, and I decided I don't want to go."

"What?" I asked with a frown.

"Come on, man, help me back up," he said as his feet began desperately to try to get back on the lower branch of the fork, but I just happened to be in the way.

"I'm not going to help you back up," I said, almost laughing. "You're going to have to let go."

"Come on, lift me back up!" Adam yelled, beginning to panic.

"There's only one way down," I said.

I guess that Adam realized that I really wasn't going to let him back up because he glanced down at the water and let go. He fell the 25 feet into the water. His head bobbed out of the water, his eyes still closed, choking, and spitting up water.

"You all right?" I asked, trying not to laugh.

"I got water up my nose," I heard Phil laugh loudly as he came back up the tree for a second jump.

It was my turn now, and I looked toward the water. It was intimidating to do so, but I knew if I didn't, I would never hear the end of it from Phil or Adam. I prepared to jump; my legs trembled, and my heart felt as though it was trying to leap from my body. I finally took a deep breath, leaned outward, and pushed off. Everything seemed to slow down and become quiet as I did so. I remember, just before my feet left the tree when I was leaning out too far to catch myself, wondering *what in the world was I doing?* But

as everyone on this planet knows, peer pressure from a friend can be one of the most powerful motivators.

For that instant, I felt the freedom of being weightless as I soared out over the water; everything around me seemed to become very clear as my body became one with the air, and I could see every tree, every leaf, and every rock on the sandbar further downstream. I could see the sun sinking below the horizon and all the purple clouds in the brilliant orange sky, then the sickening fall toward the water. I stared down the whole time and watched as the water rushed up to meet me and spoil the euphoria that I felt just seconds before.

I splashed down with a slap, and everything became dark. I was totally submerged in the cool waters of the Driftwood River. I could hear all the bubbles of air that had followed me down now racing back to the surface. For a moment, I was still, expecting to touch the river bottom, but I didn't. Instead, I began swimming upward, feeling my head come out of the water and into the air.

I took a deep breath and looked up at where I had just come from. Phil already stood at the fork for his next jump. Adam was climbing back onto the tree. I let out a loud "Whoo hoo!" and swam back to the riverbank. Phil yelled as he leapt again and splashed into the water. I was smiling as I climbed up the tree, water dripping from the ends of my shorts, ready to go again.

That day marked the beginning of one of my favorite memories of growing up on the river. We spent the rest of that summer and the next summer after that jumping from its branches. Countless other people also jumped out as we told our friends of it, and that tree made a lot of aimless kids happy.

Sadly, after nearly four years of jumping, the tree finally gave in to the erosion from the water. On June 20, 1998, the roots gave out, and the tree fell into the river while Phil and some others were out on the platform. I guess the tree had just decided we had used it enough. Sometimes, when all my old friends get together, we sit around and talk about the jumping tree. I think we mostly talk about the tree just as an excuse to live in the past for a little bit. Whatever the case, I will always remember that tree.

Biographical Notes

Adam Bunnell, a first year student at IUPUC, has never published or written anything famous. Adam enjoys writing (with quite a bit of satire) about people he knows of and about his past situations. Aside from writing, the eighteen-year-old, 2002 graduate of Seymour High School enjoys making and listening to music, watching movies, skiing, and foreign cultures. His major is undecided. He currently lives in Seymour.

Justin Clason, a freshman at IUPUC and not really sure at this time what to major in, has been writing for as long as he can remember and hopes to one day make something of it. He was born and raised in Columbus but plans on getting out and seeing the world—especially if things work in his favor.

Ben Garlick is twenty-one-year-old and is still not dead. IUPUC is his third college after Indiana State and Indiana University. He has settled on a business major. His “turn-ons” include live action role-playing and writing. His “turn-offs” include math and hard work.

Marlene Kraszeski is originally from the coastal area of North Carolina. Marlene and her family moved to Columbus four years ago. She is currently a student at the IU School of Dentistry and is seeking a degree in Dental Hygiene.

Jennifer Phillips majors in psychology. Jennifer, a senior at IUPUC, hopes to counsel but dreams to work as a published author. Her creative work is a testament to her love of writing. This is her third *Literalines* publication.

Jessica Schoettmer writes, “Sometimes, the writer seems to be an elusive or mysterious part of me, like a shadow at night that only appears beneath the street light. Sometimes I look for traces of it in the mirror and with the hair that is left over in the shower. Alas, I can only find the writer within my words—so it is within my writing that it comes out and dances with me, hopping from letter to letter as I type them on the keyboard.”

Lori Smith has attended IUPUC part time since 1992 and received her Associates Degree in Arts & Humanities in May of this year. Lori is a forty-year-old mother of three. Her oldest daughter is a college freshman at USI, Evansville. Her youngest daughter is in the third grade. Her son is a construction worker living in Florida. Lori had been married to husband Greg for almost fourteen years.

Brad Whetstine is a junior majoring in English, now attending Indiana University in Bloomington. Brad is the 2002 winner of the Mary Louise Rae Short Story Award, as well as a budding photo journalist. This year's cover is a self reflective piece that says as much in black and white as his written words.

William C. Wills—born in Mississippi and raised all over the world—is a former marine artilleryman and embassy guard who now stays at home with three children and burns the midnight oil doing homework. A few of William's interests are yacht design (five years of study through Westlawn School of Yacht Design), four-wheel-drive vehicles, and kayaking. He is roughly 90 credit hours into a General Studies Degree with a focus on history and writing.

2003 *Literalines* Staff



Dana Fields has been a dedicated member of the *Literalines* Editorial Board for several years. A former contributor to the magazine, Dana is currently pursuing a major in English with a Communication minor. When she is not working, Dana enjoys spending time with her husband and two dogs, Sweet Pea and Mooch.



Rawley Fear is enjoying his first year as a member of the *Literalines* production staff, and his second year as a Writing Center tutor. Rawley is a Political Science major who enjoys discussing philosophy and current events. He plans to finish his degree at IUPUI and continue his education while teaching.



Zac Smith is a sophomore majoring in English. This issue marks his debut as a member of the *Literalines* production staff. This is his second semester as a tutor in the Writing Center. He enjoys writing fantasy stories and hopes to eventually be a professional writer. Pictured with Zac is his cat, Mittens, who as Zac remarks, is the biggest cat any of his friends have seen, weighing in at around 20 pounds.



Brad Whetstine, a former IUPU Columbus student, is a junior majoring in English, and is now attending Indiana University in Bloomington. Brad is the 2002 winner of the Mary Louise Rae Short Story Award, as well as a budding photo journalist. This marks Brad's second year as a member of the *Literalines* Editorial Board, as a contributor, and as the creator of the magazine's cover art.

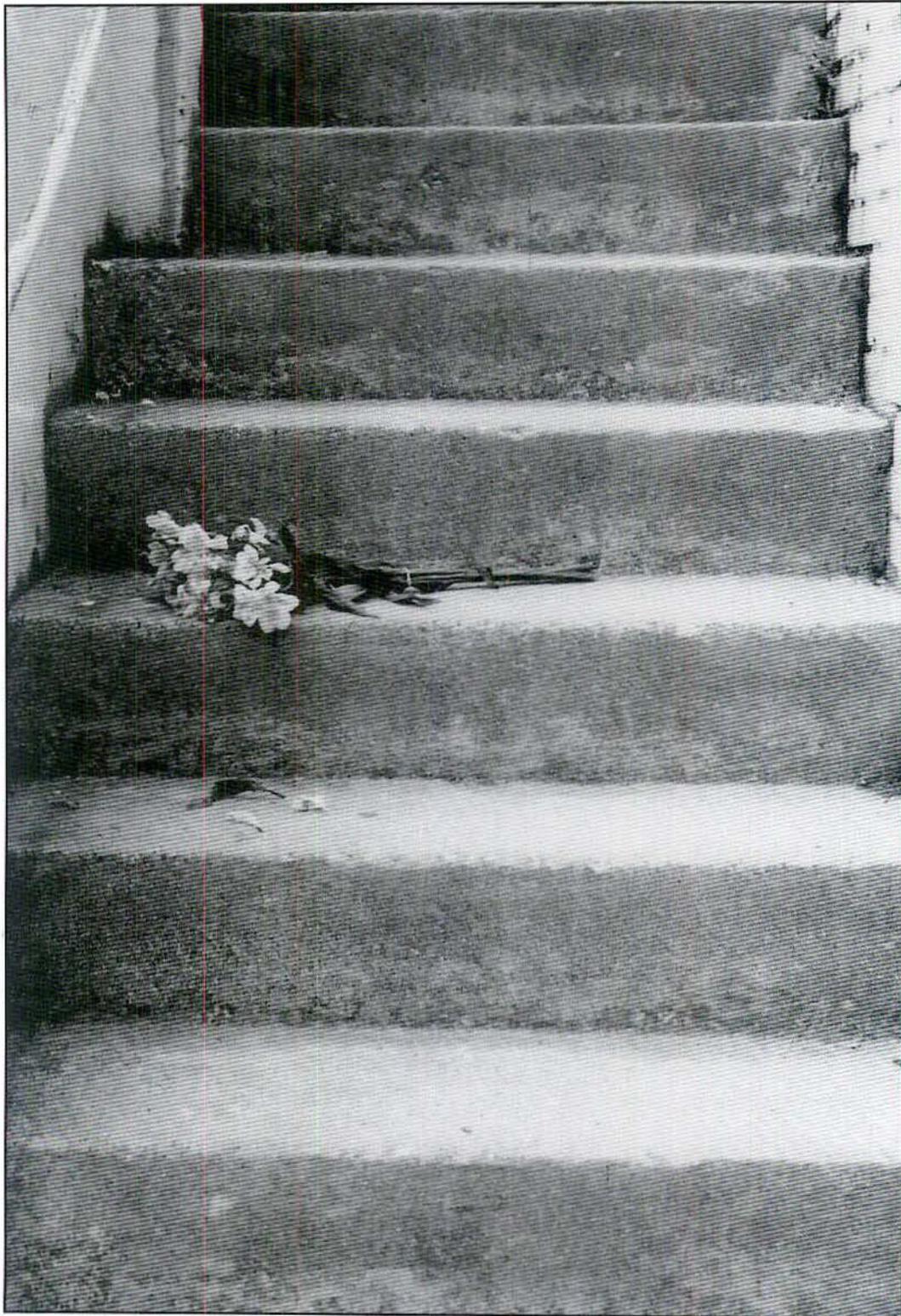


Debbie Sexton is in her fourth year as the senior editor for *Literalines*, fifth year as senior tutor in the Writing Center, and seventh year as an English major. One of five IUPU winners of the 2003 Loretta Lunsford Scholarship, she is currently developing an IUPUColumbus web site that will highlight the work of W206 creative writers and the campus Writing Center .

Alex Clark, although not pictured here, is an English major in the Liberal Arts program. Alex divides her time between class and working in the campus library, as well as joining the Writing Center team as a first time tutor and production staff member. Alex's keen eye for detail made her especially valuable to this year's issue of *Literalines*.

Acknowledgements

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