

*The Scrivener - Spring '13*

*The DeSmet High School  
Literary Magazine*

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- 3 A Matter of Principle, short story by Patrick Callahan
- 4 Dazed, artwork by Jonathon Salter
- 5 Liveforever, artwork by Xavier Williams
- 8 Loud, poetry by Mackenzie Smith
- 9 The Money, short story by Joe Swafford
- 9 Her, artwork by Xavier Williams
- 12 Foundation 3.0, poetry by Mackenzie Smith
- 13 Hysterics, sculpture by Nate Andrews
- 13 The Parable of the Forgiving Businessman by Jacob Linomaz
- Middle Spread: Open Arms, Closed Heart, artwork by Michael Andrus
- 16 The Memory of a People - The Dying of Cry of Chief Nbamba, poetry by J.H. Heidger
- 16 Opticallusion, artwork by Xavier Williams
- 18 The Parable of the True Sportsman by Jonathon Spray
- 19 The Parable of the Two Musicians by Michael Adams
- 20 The Forgotten Boy, poetry by Alex LaBarge
- 20 Realization, artwork by Xavier Williams
- 21 Sweetheart in Afghanistan, short story by Robert Hutchison
- 23 Untitle, artwork by Logan Mueller
- 24 The Smugglers Route, artwork by Chris Nowak
- 25 Helena, artwork by Jonathon Strickland

# A Matter of Principle

by Patrick Callahan

I woke up at 8:00 in the morning. I put on my jersey shorts and my maroon pants over them. I slung my jacket and T-shirt over my shoulders. Then I finally put on some socks and laced up my Kimvara shoes. Then I picked up my backpack. It contained a black spike bag, Nike Victory shoes, black shorts, compression boxers, my jersey top, two water bottles, one Gatorade bottle, one watch, one winter hat, two mittens, and two pairs of socks. I walked downstairs a little jittery but not nervous. As I drove my blue 2007 Honda Accord away, I heard my mother shouting, "Good luck! Be safe on the roads". I turned on my iPod to *The Final Countdown*, my favorite song. My cellphone started vibrating so I flipped it open.

"Hello" I said.

A shaky, teary voice replied, "Jack.. Jack"

"Who is this?" I replied.

"Jack, please," the voice on the other end replied even more shakily.

"Catherine!" I replied exuberantly. "Wait What's wrong?" I asked now a little worried.

"Jack". She replied then started crying.

I wondered what was wrong. She had always been a drama queen. Maybe she got rejected or she and one of her friends got in a fight.

"Jack, I know you've gotta race, but you've gotta believe me. I need your help.

Please!" she exclaimed shakily between sobs.

I sensed desperation and defeat in her voice. "Where are you?" I asked.

"In Mcgruber Park please hurry," she replied with fewer sobs but the same sense of defeat.

Her voice and sobs seemed way too hard to fake. I stole a glance at my watch and noticed that I had plenty of time before warm-up. I pulled a U-turn then pulled a sharp left on Weidman Road. Mcgruber Park was a hilly park with a four mile gravel running loop in it and other intersecting trails. It was also extremely hilly with tennis courts, a couple of lakes, and an ice rink near the center off the main road that bisects the park. Much of the park was also covered by forest, which provided plentiful shade during hot summer runs. I ran at Mcgruber Park almost every day during the summer and often times spent a half hour fishing afterwards since I knew the hot spots at all the lakes. I had met Catherine at Mcgruber. It was early morning and she came up to me and started talking to me. I should have known right then and there that she was crazy since she was talking to me. We hit it off pretty well, so we started hanging out a lot. It wasn't until the end of the summer that I began to realize how crazy she was. For one thing, she always bitched about her trivial problems. At first I didn't notice it, but by the end of the summer, more often than not, I was annoyed whenever we had a conversation together. She always talked about her boyfriend Timmy who was out of town for the summer. Timmy this. Timmy that. Before the school year started, she told me she wouldn't be able to hang out with me as much since Timmy was back in town. I was extremely grateful, but, at the same time, she completely blew me off even when I tried to say hi to her at school.

"Jack, are you still there?" Catherine asked through the phone sounding fearful.

"Yes, Catherine listen I'll be there in fifteen minutes, are you alright?"

"No," she replied.

"Call the police or an ambulance," I replied.

"Uhhhhh," she replied then started sniffing.

I began to doubt, but still believed enough to keep driving.



artwork by Jonathon Salter

“Catherine, Catherine calm down, I’m gonna be right there, how hurt are you?” I asked.

“I-I don’t know,” she replied quickly.

My mind was racing, thinking of all the possible scenarios: rape, kidnapping, car crash, broken bone. I decided that if she was flipping her shit because of a broken bone, I’d just leave. I barely made the light turning left up the monster hill.

“Jack, are you almost here?” Catherine asked.

“Yeah, I’ll be right there.” As my mind kept racing I remembered Catherine was supposed to be on a date with Timmy this morning.

“I swear to God,” I mumbled.

“What?” Catherine asked on the other end.

“Nothing,” I replied.

I wheeled a left turn into the parking lot.

“Cat, where are you?” I asked.

“I’m like fifty feet down that one trail off the running trail that you always used.”

I started running, I loved that trail. There’s a sweet lake at the end of it where I like to go fishing. As I ran, I passed one of the park’s maintenance workers with a bag pack walking by looking pissed. I heard some static on the phone. “Catherine, I’ll be right there,” I said

then closed the phone. I bolted down the path and saw Catherine sitting on a rock stifling tears.

“Cat, I made it. What’s wrong? Are you hurt? Where’s Timmy? I thought you guys had a date,” I said urgently while scanning her for injuries.

“Timm.. Timmy broke up with me,” she replied with a couple tears rolling down her face while sniffing.

“What???” I asked.

“He broke up with me,” she yelled then looked down as tears rolled down her face.

My pulse slowed and my whole body relaxed; then I sighed agitatedly. As her crying subsided, I rolled my eyes and glanced at my phone. 7:20 A.M. I glanced at her again and started to say something but thought better of it. I sighed again trying to calm down so I didn’t induce her to tears for her second time this morning. I grabbed her elbows and helped her up. She looked at me and mumbled, “Thanks”.

“So why in God’s name did you call me?” I asked. “Seriously, I mean I guess we’re friends, but what about Kimberly, or Maggie, or Audrey or John.. I mean they’re all well... better friends to you than me.”

“Kimberly and Maggie wouldn’t pick up. Neither would Audrey and John is one of Timmy’s friends,” she replied with dried tears staining her face. She hugged me and I, slowly, almost regrettably, hugged her back.

“Where you parked?” I asked.

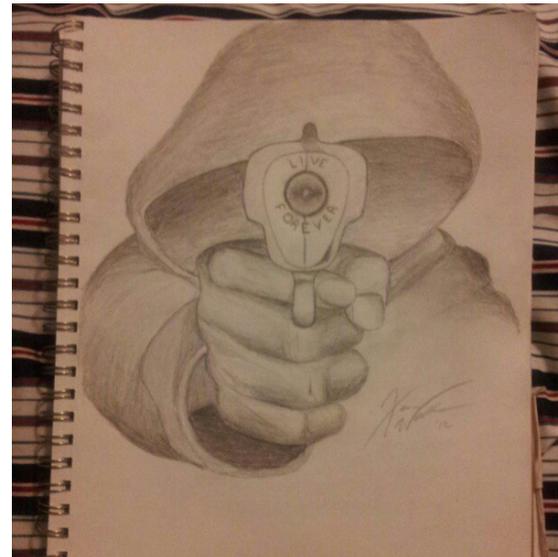
She looked at me with those sad, pleading eyes little kids used and replied, “North Lot.”

“Oh, well I’m parked up there,” I replied pointing in the opposite direction. “Ok, I’ll walk you back to the main loop,” I said while practically biting my tongue.

“And then to my car? Or you can take me home if you really want to and I can pick up my car later” she said pleadingly.

“Yeah, no,” I replied quickly.

“Wait, what, are you kidding me? My boyfriend of two years just broke up with me,” she pleadingly replied with a couple tears rolling down her face.



artwork by Xavier Williams

I finally stopped biting my tongue and dropped my filter and replied nonchalantly, “Yeah..., I don’t really give a shit about you and your boytoy. I’m sure when you get back you can call Kimberly and she’ll cry with you all you want.” I heard a distant bang.

She started sniffing and almost burst into tears. “WHAT? Are you kidding me?” she screamed.

I looked at her with a nonchalant face. “No” I replied shaking my head.

Her face started shaking trying to hold back sobs.

“I thought we were friends,” she shakily replied.

“I haven’t seen you outside of school in like four months, and when I did, you talked to me for like ten minutes,” I replied with my voice a little raised.

“But, but, but... I just went through a bad breakup, why can’t you be here for me?” she asked, her voice the most controlled I’d heard all day.

“But, but, but I’ve just been through a bad break-up” I replied mockingly. “Whup-deedo, oh man, your life must just suck major ass. You just went through a bad breakup, just the worst thing that could happen to you. It’s not like people die every dam day. It’s not like hundreds of people are dying fighting for their freedom over in Syria. It’s not like people are being murdered right here in St. Louis. It’s not like thousands of people starve to death or are raped every freaking day,” I screamed at her.

“But hey look at you, all your family members are alive you go to a private high school, you’re going to college next year and it’s being paid for by your parents, you’ve got it all and the best part is you didn’t do anything for it,” I yelled.

“But, hey, you just went through a bad break-up, so even though you have all these great things like freedom, like a car, like an education, like going to college in a year so many people on this planet don’t that people in some other part of the world are risking their lives to get. You just went through a bad break-up so your life is automatically worse than everybody else’s,” I yelled a little quieter this time.

I didn’t think I’ve yelled like that since the seventh grade. She paused for what seemed like forever.

“Sorry,” she mumbled while sniffing. She then started walking up the hill to the main loop. I stared at her for about ten seconds then jogged to catch up to her. As we walked I thought about what I had said and I thought about apologizing. I was never good at apologizing, though, and I only believed apologizing for things that I regretted doing, and I definitely did not regret saying that. When we got to the main loop she turned right while looking straight down as if looking up would cause her to burst into flames or turn to stone. I turned and followed.

“I thought you were only coming with me to the main loop,” she said.

“I’ll walk with you a little farther.”

“Thanks,” she replied quietly.

As we walked I heard sirens getting closer and closer. Then I heard footsteps ahead like the staccato of a sprinter. As the footsteps grew louder, I saw the same maintenance man I had seen earlier when I entered the park running towards us with sweat rolling down his face and what looked like a gun in his left hand. He stopped in front of us and brandished his gun with an outstretched arm. Catherine started screaming bloody murder.

“Give me your car keys!” the man demanded. My pulse immediately quickened. My arms and legs loosened one hundred fold as adrenaline coursed through my body, and I was barely able to stop my bladder from letting loose as fear coursed through my mind.

“Here take them,” Catherine said meekly with tears rolling down her eyes as she offered her car keys towards the man.

Almost mechanically, I snatched the keys out of her hands just before the man grabbed them.

“What are you doing?” Catherine asked shocked.

I just stared at the man in silence. He then put the gun to my head and cocked the hammer at the back of the gun like all the movie stars. If you’re wondering, my life did not flash before my eyes in a split second; however, my future did. I saw myself graduating high school, standing proudly on a Navy aircraft carrier. I saw myself getting into the cockpit of a fighter jet aboard that aircraft carrier. I saw myself jumping out of a helicopter into the ocean to save someone. I saw two little kids who looked like me then my thoughts dissolved into blackness. I saw people dressed in black crying at my church with a coffin at the front of the altar. All this in a second, maybe two. I was awakened from my dream by Catherine.

“Jack, Jack, give him the keys,” She said pleadingly with tears rolling down her face.

“Give me the keys, I’m not shitting around,” the man said in an intimidating voice.

My legs were shaking and I started to give back the keys, but then I noticed his legs were shaking too. Instinctively my left arm moved up and grabbed his gun arm digging my nails into his wrists while pulling the gun away from my head. BANG, BANG, my eardrums rattled as I tackled the man. As soon as we hit the ground with me on top, I shifted my knees and my body weight onto his left arm and simultaneously elbowed him right in the neck. Then with my body weight and left hand still on his gun hand, I started beating on his face with my right hand. He kept trying to grab my right hand as I kept hitting him with his free hand, but never stopped me.

Next thing I knew, a police officer dragged me off him. Another officer was handcuffing the man while yet another cop was holding the gun the man used.

“Hey, hey, you alright?” the officer who had pulled me off kept asking.

“Huh, what? Uh, yeahhh,” I replied.

“Here sit down.”

As I sat down I looked off to the side and saw the man with a contorted nose and a bleeding face sitting on a log with his hands cuffed behind his back. Another officer was calming down Catherine, who was sitting on a log. The realization of what I just did started to hit me.

“That was a really brave thing you did,” the officer talking to me said admiringly.

“Thanks,” I replied.

“What made you do it? Most people aren’t that brave?”

I gave a slight smile and thought about her question for a good ten seconds before answering.

“I guess it’s a matter of principles. And I didn’t wanna die,” I said.

# Loud

by Mackenzie Smith

All I wanted was to be free  
So I could escape my past  
A past where I sat in the corner alone  
A past where I was afraid of what others thought of me  
A past where I was even afraid of myself  
All I wanted was to feel okay  
But I can't even have that glint of satisfaction  
Because your words cut me like knives  
Rupturing pain through every single pore in my body  
Similar to cold steel meeting warm, desirable flesh for the first time  
I wanted to fall to my knees with each keen blade thrust into my flesh  
Cry, so that I could find kind some amount of comfort in the pain that you caused me  
Because you pointed out my flaws  
But I can't give in  
The pain will only prolong if I show weakness  
So I sat there and ingest every blade projected at me  
You act as though I'm invisible when you say the things you say  
Like I'm made of paper  
As though I lack ears  
When you talk  
As though I have no eyes  
When you glare at me that way  
I feel nothing in your eyes  
So I walk with my head down  
Because I don't meet your desires  
All because I showed my true colors that have always been inside of me  
A rainbow  
Whose rays of light grows dimmer  
Whose colors fade into mortified grey shadows of hopelessness  
Now a cascade of color fall along the cracks of my fingers  
Causing me to lose hope  
Because I'm nothing more than broken glass to you  
So I sat here catching tears in my hands  
Looking at the clear, reflective chunks that are me  
I looked deep within that glass  
Searched for answers  
For the reasons I was beaten, broken and scarred by you  
And the answer lies clear  
I was consumed by desire  
Because I wanted to please you  
It was always about pleasing you  
But enough is enough  
I'm not going to cry anymore

# The Money

by Joe Swafford

The blueness of the vase looked like someone had successfully captured the ocean in glass. Its texture exceeded the most magnificent craftsmanship. It held its own on the table near the door.

Abby walked into her home and smiled as she passed the vase. She set her coat down on her couch and meandered to the fridge. She opened it up with high hopes and quickly closed it with an empty stomach. A hard day's work at the office tomorrow would pay off. The money her boss left near his desk would be hers. He left it on a table near his door and she thought she had almost seen him write an invitation for her to take it. Her crappy job at INRE Insurance wasn't paying the money she wanted.

Abby had wanted to become an actress when she was growing up. She was in all the school plays and had a bright future. She moved to Los Angeles after high school to pursue her dream. Her bright face and busty appearance got her roles as an adult film star. This had her living paycheck to paycheck. After several years of rejection from casting agents and big name movies, she decided to pack up her bags and move back east.

She worked the plan over and over again in her head. It was a full-proof plan. 100% successful. She imagined walking over to the table, setting her purse down and magically lifting the money into her purse. Abby even worked up an alibi for if she got caught. "What? Stealing? You seriously have gone bonkers, haven't you? No, I'm just moving the money away from the door, so no one tries to take the money." She imagined the look on her boss' face when he couldn't find the money. "What the hell! Where did I put that damn money?" he would say. She smiled as she started to doze off, looking forward to

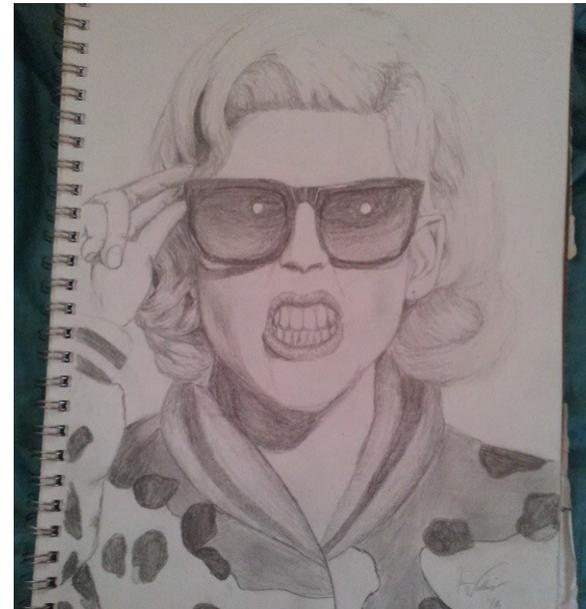
tomorrow and the future.

The day started with rain pattering her bedroom window. The inconsistent beat woke her. She dressed in her best suit and walked into the garage. She took a deep breath before getting in.

She arrived early. Putting her things at her desk, she walked by her boss' office, looking for the money. Not there.

She quickly turned back and went to her desk. She regrouped and tried to calm herself down.

Thoughts came rushing into Abby's head like a broken dam. Nervously, she popped her head over her cubicle and saw Jeannine. "Hey, Jeannine,



artwork by Xavier Williams

do you know when Mr. Wilson will be in?" Jeannine shook her head no.

Just then, Mr. Wilson walked in. He went into his office and took a handful of bills out of his bag and put them on the table. He came out talking on his phone several minutes

later.

Abby's eyes lit up like the Fourth of July. This was her chance. She cautiously crept over to his office. Looking both ways before entering, she ever so slowly turned the door handle. Her heart was beating out of her chest. The sweat that dripped down her forehead was drowning her.

She was in. She gave a quick look around the room, and back at the door before moving closer to the table. On the table was a nice stack of \$100 bills. Probably 100 of them.

She moved her trembling hand under the heaviest stack of money of \$100 bills she had ever lifted. She looked over her shoulder again as she slid the money into her purse. She let out a mute sigh. She sprang out of the room and landed back at her desk. Several minutes later her boss returned to his office, only to come running out moments later.

"Where did I put that damn money? Has anyone seen it?" His face was red with frustration and embarrassment.

Abby looked around at her coworkers who had the same confused look she was trying to play.

"That was money for the Salvation Army." He looked at each pair of eyes, staring into their souls, trying to get someone to break. "They usually don't come until later in the day, but I guess they came early. Did anyone see them come in?"

Everyone looked around at each other with clueless faces. Abby raised her hand, and said, "I saw them. They just left while you were gone."

"Alright. Thank god. I was afraid I misplaced it."

She was off the hook, well never really on the hook, but still. A free woman. Abby just barely got through the work day, scared her boss would come up behind her with a squadron of police, waiting to arrest her.

When she pulled into her garage, she fled inside to count the money.

"147, 148, 149, 150. \$15,000." Abby fell back on the couch in shock.

She had to find a good hiding place to put this. She looked around, and finally found the perfect hiding place. She would wait a week or two before cashing the money, in case it turned up missing on the news or something.

Her train of thought was broken by the loud banging on the door. She wiped the sweat off her brow and fixed her hair before answering the door. Her boss walked in without saying a word.

"Oh, Mr. Wilson. What a surprise! Come in, come in." She glanced at the vase he didn't even bother to notice. "What a jerk." she thought to herself.

"Hello, Abby. Sorry to come over, but I just talked with the guys from Salvation Army. They came at 1:30 p.m. Not 9:15 a.m. like you said."

"What? Why goodness!" Abby tried to play the surprised role as best she could. It was Oscar worthy; however, her boss was that one critic who hated the performance.

"Abby, I don't want the police to get involved. We can't afford that on our company's name. If you took the money, or know who took it, then just tell me. You'll be in some trouble, but even more if I have to get the police involved. So, just hand it over, no questions asked."

"I didn't take the money, Frank."

He raised an eyebrow at Abby. "Abby, I won't tell anyone if you did. It will be our little secret.

Abby raised an eyebrow at Frank. She wasn't going to give up so easily. Abby promiscuously flicked her long blond hair over her shoulder, trying to drop a hint to Frank. She rolled her tongue around her cherry red lips, pausing to see if he noticed.

He noticed all right.

Abby fell on Frank and started kissing him and he started to kiss back. Just as quickly

as the kiss started, he ended it. Frank pushed Abby back and wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve.

"Come on, Abby. I can't be doing this. This is wrong. I have a wife at home." He looked at his wrist watch, trying to speed up time. "I've got to get going, so... I guess I'll see you tomorrow. We can talk about the money then."

And with that he started towards the door. He stopped and said, "That's a nice vase." Picking it up, he swiveled it around with his hands. He placed it back down on the table and left.

She let out a big sigh of relief as she plopped down on her nice leather couch. She flipped through the endless channels as the night continued on.

The next morning at work, Abby tried her best to keep out of sight of her boss. She got to 1:45 p.m. before he interacted with her. She could tell he still wanted to talk about the money. She sensed it in his footsteps approaching her.

"Abby, can I see you in my office."

Abby saw her boss say this in tunnel vision. She knew she couldn't keep this act up much longer. The guilt was getting to her. She had started to lose her appetite.

"Sure thing Mr. Wilson."

Abby looked around at the beady eyes following her to his office. She gave a quick look back at the hungry hyenas desperately wanting new gossip to tear to shreds.

Mr. Wilson shut the door behind her as she scooted in. He ushered her to a chair. "Take a seat, please."

Abby glanced around the office and took a seat. He had hoards of baseball memorabilia hanging on the walls and pictures of his wife and kids on his desk, who had recently graduated high school.

"Okay, Abby. Here's the deal. I know you took the money. I have video surveillance of it and several witnesses have told me they saw you leave with the money."

"But I—"

"Don't start. I can either get the police involved or you can give me back the money. I will have to fire you, but at least you won't have a police record. It's your call. Either way you won't be working here next week."

Abby took a couple minutes to think about it. She thought long and hard, looking at each piece of memorabilia as she thought. The pennant banners, autographed baseballs, cleats, bats and autographed cereal boxes.

"Mr. Wilson. I have the money. It's at home. Let me go get it and I'll bring it back here."

"Okay, Abby. I'll be waiting."

Abby walked out, grabbed her purse, and went to her car. Mr. Wilson picked up the phone and dialed the number.

Abby got into her beat up Civic and raced home. She raced inside and ran to her room, found her suitcase and started throwing clothes into it. She went to the front door, but just as she was reaching down to grab the —

The thunderous boom of a fist knocking on the door interrupted her. She opened the door to find Mr. Wilson and two cops. She backed up as they walked inside without a word. The two cops grabbed her arms and held her still.

"Okay, Abby. Where is it? Where is the money?"

Abby's eyes looked down at the vase and quickly back at Frank.

Frank saw her eyes give it away. He reached and turned the vase upside down, causing the money to skydive out. The cash littered the floor, as the cops placed Abby in handcuffs. They escorted her to their car and put her in the back. She looked back at her house, watching Mr. Wilson pick up the money and a second police car pull up to her house. A free woman no more.

# Foundation 3.0

by Mackenzie Smith

Every morning I'm able to wake with a fresh clear face  
No powder, no eyeliner, no mascara, no eye shadow, no blush, no concealer, no foundation  
Nothing but a pure face  
It's the time of the day where the air flows freely across my face without resistance from my guard  
whatsoever  
A guard that conceals my imperfections from the world because they're not considered beautiful  
This guard has become more than just a tool of beauty  
It's more than that  
It's who I am  
It's what I am  
It's my identity  
It just makes everything seem so perfect.....no not perfect  
It makes everything just right  
But despite how beautiful I may appear on the outside  
I'm nothing more than a broken soul on the inside  
A miserable soul that is force to walk this lonely, God-forsaken planet  
Hiding and dodging from individuals with prying eyes who want to see me fall, who want to see me  
break  
But I've had enough  
I just want to be free from its bind  
I don't want to be ashamed of the person who's underneath all that foundation  
Being choked by the presses into believing what beauty is  
But I've managed to be a fly and get trap into their spider webs of lies  
I've managed to believe what they preach is true  
That beauty is nothing more than what you see on the outside and what's not on the inside  
But only if all thought that old cliché was true  
Yet I can't even believe that cliché because I've lain in the spider webs for too long  
I don't even have the courage to believe what my heart is telling me  
God knows I want to break free  
I'm ready to break free of this foundation that I've lived in for too long  
But I've lived in it for so long I can't image life without it  
But today's the day where it ends  
Today's the day where I'm going to break free  
I'm going to free myself from this constricting force  
I'm going to step out of the shadows that I've lived in for so long  
I'm freeing myself from the webs where I've done nothing but sit there and collect dust  
Just waiting to make my move  
But I can tell this is my moment  
I've wait all my life and I can tell it's time  
It arrived just on time  
Not a moment too late or too soon  
I turned on the water and splashed it over my face  
Watching that crème, liquid wash into the basins of my sink  
Representing the time wasted  
The times I cried myself to sleep  
The times I spent living in silence  
The time I spent living in fear  
That morning I stepped out the door  
I felt the cool breeze run across my face without any resistances whatsoever  
Nothing but my true and pure skin



sculpture by Nate Andrews

## The Parable of the Forgiving Businessman

by Jacob Linomaz

A large business was in the process of promoting its employees. Out of the whole department, it was down to Joe Champion and Roger O'Brien, who was Joe's best friend from high school. One night when Joe was working over-time, he heard Roger talking to his boss about Joe.

Roger said, "Joe does not deserve the job. He has cheated his way this far, and in the long run, he would fail you and send the company into the ground."

When Roger walked out, Joe asked him, "Why would you do that to me just for a job?" Roger replied, "I deserve the job, not you!"

Joe responded saying, "There were once these two graduates from accounting school who were studying for their test to get their CPA license. One of them studied for a whole day developing strategies, while the other one went out drinking. The day of the test, the one who studied was ready, while the partier was not. After the test, the partier took the other one's test and switched their names. The partier passed with a 98%, but the one who studied, received a 45%. He was devastated and had to pay for another test. The guy who cheated felt ashamed for what he did. He eventually confessed and apologized. The one who studied said, 'I forgive you for your fault as my Lord has exemplified while his crucifixion for us to gain entrance to the glorious Kingdom of God.'"

Roger realized how selfish he was and caught a glimpse of a golden crucifix in the corner of his eye. He was overwhelmed with sorrow and immediately apologized. Joe said, "I forgive you in the same way our Lord has forgiven us for our sins so we could all enter into the realms of God's Kingdom."



artwork by Michael Andrus

# The Memory of a People - The Dying Cry of Chief Nmbamba

(A Poem About British Imperialism in Africa)

by J.H. Heidger

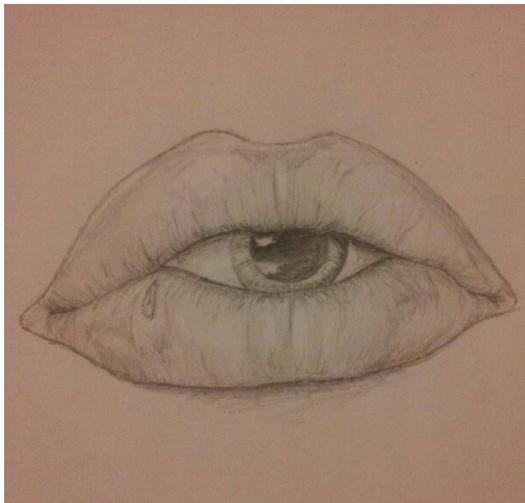
Alas! Here come the white men,  
They dress in ornate fashions,  
With their fine hair and pale skin.  
They bring us new food and give us our "rations."

What right have they to do what they do?  
I have not asked them to come.  
My people revoke this world of new.  
Steady, every morning with the beating of their drum.

They bring us silver-plated oddities.  
They drink our hot red tea and with cider they do cheer.  
They scoff at our lack of "basic commodities."  
Every moon without fail, evil churches do appear.

My wives, the white men gaze upon.  
They speak of things called hours, and naught we count by moons.  
They are a burden upon us, I want them gone.  
I wish them death at the hands of the ancestors—out upon the dunes.

Alas! Here come the white men.  
They speak to my people as if we are beasts.  
With their fine hair and pale skin,  
They beat us and we suffer at the hands of their priests.



artwork by Xavier Williams

My people, with each rising of the sun,  
I see the future of my Ashanti.  
I fear this silent battle will never be won.  
A white officer asked me what what my plans were—  
I told him, "Ye din! Go drink your tea."

I say, let them destroy my culture,  
For they shall not destroy me!  
He waits to prey—the white vulture,  
Like the last leaf we shall fall, from the sacred Nkinga tree.

The white men with their hats and boots,  
What! What do they owe us?  
Strangle they my culture like an axe against our roots,  
In their strange accents they do say,  
"Progress, dear friend, Progress"

Alas! Here come the white men.  
They take my people to distant lands,  
With their fine hair and pale skin.  
Worked are my people, slaves at their hands.

Once, when I was young and brave,  
I thought that I could defeat them, I thought I could protect my people.  
Now, the ravages of time have laid us in the grave.  
I walk outside my «home» and towering over my Ashanti—a steeple.

Now, I am old and I am wise.  
Soon I will pass on and return to my ground.  
Mistake I not my peoples' cries,  
For the sound of «Progress, my dear friend»—  
My people will never bow to the crown!

The white men do sometimes leave,  
But their burden to «help us» never ceases, it brings them back.  
Oh! For my beloved people Ashanti I do grieve.  
So unlike the days of old, there is no use plotting a plan of attack.

Alas! Here come the white men.  
My people are gone, our culture has died.  
With their fair hair and pale skin,  
They have smothered Ashanti and we are now "civilized."

Oh! My poor soul does weep as a lie here,  
looking back on a life so burdened be.  
My hour, as it does draw near,  
Reminds one of a great people and, oh, how it saddens me.

What burden have the white men?  
Their «Progress, dear friend, and their cups of tea,»  
There is no hope for my beloved Ashanti, the vulture will win.  
A people's soul is crushed, never again will there be—  
the Ashanti.

They came to teach us how to pray.  
We are their prey.

# The Parable of the True Sportsman

by Jonathon Spray

In the small town of Brugenville Heights, a fierce high school rivalry between Harver Academy and Brugenville Springs has existed since the two schools were founded in the same year, 1945. From year to year, the Harver Bobcats have consistently proven athletic superiority on just about every field and every court; however, the most revered competition is unquestionably football. Once a year, this sleepy New England town comes together to watch Harver Academy take on Brugenville Springs in the annual conference championship. For the past sixteen years, Harver Academy has won this all-important game, and, for the past four years, they have been both undefeated and un-scored upon leading up to the conference championship. Harver Academy's enthusiastic and highly respected head football coach, Douglas Carper, has coached at Harver for nineteen years and has had the opportunity to set the state record for an un-scored upon season for four years in a row. The claiming of such a large record in such a small town would be a claim of honor for Harver Academy and a permanent wound to Brugenville Springs.

Coach Carper has had four chances to glorify his own career and put his rival to shame, but each time has purposely failed to do so. At the fourth quarter of each of the last four conference championship games against Brugenville Springs, instead of punishing his opponents with a humiliating unanswered loss, he pulls his third string men from the bench, allowing the opposing team to score three points from a field goal. Coach Carper knew that it would be cruel and unsportsmanlike to humiliate them in front of the whole town. Despite the criticism he receives from his own fans and players, he always insists that sportsmanship should prevail over the desire for victory.

Head football Coach Harrison Barr of the Brugenville Springs Bears, however, has a much different attitude towards the game. After sixteen years of defeat after defeat, he has become bitter and developed a deep, inner loathing for Coach Carper and his Bobcats. With the end of the regular season approaching, Coach Barr has another opportunity to gain retribution and destroy Harver's reputation. Exactly seven days before the big game, Coach Carper visits his doctor with complaints of unusual migraines and ringing in his right ear. A day later, Coach Carper is sent to a specialist and diagnosed with terminal cancer of the brain. He is given a life expectancy of less than a month and soon loses the use of his legs. This untimely tragedy deeply shook Harver Academy and Brugenville Heights. The bright and optimistic Coach Carper quickly overcame his fear, accepting that death as another part of life. The rest of the Harver Academy football program, however, didn't overcome this deep disturbance as quickly as their coach.

On the night of the conference championship, the poorly-coached, unprepared, and discouraged Bobcats were left to face the vengeful Bears. With five minutes left in the fourth quarter, for the first time in sixteen years, the Bears led the Bobcats 7-0 with the ball on their own 45 yard line. Coach Carper, disobeying the doctor's recommendations, was standing on the sideline next to his players, congratulating them on a good season and wishing them luck at their graduation, which he would never live to see. Coach Barr, on the opposite sideline, waited in bloodthirsty anticipation as his dreams of defeating the Harver Academy Bobcats with an unanswered win were about to become true. He began to feel sure that he would finally have revenge for his painful sixteen years of defeat and continued to bark orders to his team. What Coach Barr didn't know was that his own players had no intention of punishing the Bobcats. The players remembered how Coach Carper would, against all temptation, refuse to humiliate them in the face of the town. They remembered

how he showed them mercy and chose to protect their dignity over a glorious victory and setting a state record. When running back James Richard received the handoff he, and the rest of his team, knew what must be done. When he was dragged down at the 50 yard line, he purposely let the ball fall out from underneath his elbow, giving the struggling Bobcats a fumble that they easily recovered for a turnover. Through a series of half-hearted defense, the Bears allowed the Bobcats to score a field goal and end the game 7-3.

Infuriated with his team's lack of effort in such a close game, Coach Barr followed his team toward the locker room and was intercepted by the now wheelchair-bound Coach Carper. Offering a friendly handshake to him, Coach Carper congratulated him and thanked him for a good game. Suddenly, it all became clear to Harrison Barr. He finally realized the motives of his team's lazy victory. He became aware of his own selfishness and was stung with the harsh reality that if it wasn't for Coach Carper's mercy towards him over the last sixteen years, it would be likely that he would have been fired a long time ago. With a sudden, drastic change of heart, Coach Barr said, "No, no. Thank you for showing our town, our schools, and our boys, what it means to have the spirit of a true sportsman."

*Amen I say to you, if your enemy is capable of showing compassion towards you, how are you any less capable of showing compassion in return?*

# The Parable of the Two Musicians

by Michael Adams

Amen, Amen I say to you, the Kingdom of God is like two talented musicians. The two musicians were a father and son. The father was a very talented composer that never sought public adulation or approval; the father was content with his work and didn't ask for anything more. The son was also a very good composer but struggled to have his work recognized and accepted by the people. The only thing the son wanted was acceptance and approval from the people. One day the son was tired of his hard work not being recognized, so he took one of his father's works and played it in the streets as his own. People finally stopped and listened to the music that he was playing. The son took all the credit for the song as his own. The father soon heard of this and said nothing, though, he was severely disappointed. The son took credit for this song for many years, never revealing the true identity of the composer. This lie that he had told himself as well as others distanced him from his father. His whole life the son struggled with a guilt-ridden conscience but was scared that his father would not forgive him. After much thought and consideration, the son summoned the courage to meet his father and reveal the truth that the father already knew. After the son broke down in front of his father and acknowledged his wrongdoing, the father immediately accepted his son's apology without hesitation. Brothers and sisters, we are the son and God is the Father. God has no intention of being the most popular among you but wants us to know that we can always come to him in our hearts for forgiveness if we are truly sorry. We often seek to be acknowledged for our talents and efforts sometimes to the point we take credit for what is not ours. Know in your heart, God, OUR Father will never turn us away if we apologize for our sins.

# The Forgotten Boy

by Alex LaBarge

As I watch other people and the cars go whizzing by,  
I sit in the alley-way and cry.  
For I have nowhere to stay or go,  
So I sit here, in my new home.

Having not bathed or eaten in age drinking at the bar,  
I often look up and pray to the stars.  
I ask God for shelter and water,  
Praying so that tomorrow I won't have to go out and barter.

It has been a week since my father left,  
I know that he tried to do what's best.  
With my mother being dead for two years,  
My father went and focused more on his smokes and beers.

Bystanders have been nice and kind,  
They often give me their nickels and dimes.  
With the odor that haunts me and follows me around,  
People look at me as if I'm no better than the dirty ground.

It has been a month since I have been alone,  
My hearts beat with the saddest metronome.  
As I lay down to go to sleep,  
I find myself starting to weep.

As my spirit and hope fads and dies,  
I place upon you my final good-byes.



artwork by Xavier Williams

# Sweetheart in Afghanistan

by Robert Hutchison

When she first arrived in Afghanistan, she was assigned to a small medical detachment near the mountains west of Kandahar in the southern region of Afghanistan near the Pakistani border. She worked with a task force of Navy medical staff as one of two physical therapists. The group also contained eight doctors, fourteen nurses, five corpsmen, and a handful of physician assistants. They were the mid-line of defense against death. She likened it to the unit on "M\*A\*S\*H". To hear her version of the story, Dr. Peters was the ladies-man and joker Hawkeye, Dr. Eversall was the family man BJ, and Lt. Sizemore, one of the PAs, was the uptight, neurotic Major Winchester. In my mind, Mary was "Hot Lips", but according to her she was the naïve, innocent Radar. Every day offered a high volume of patients as they were one of the most accessible outposts in that desolate section of Afghanistan. Mary admitted her training stateside in San Diego had barely prepared her for what she witnessed in Kandahar. She acclimated to the lack of limbs and appendages when patients showed up; but, it was the stare – that blank, unfocusing gaze never acquiring a target – that she never got used to. She counted herself lucky, though; and, that's part of the craziness. It was exciting! Whenever she told me she missed me or her family she quickly followed up those words saying this was what she always wanted or it was her calling to help these soldiers.

If not for the rocket attacks once a week and the almost constant influx of broken soldiers in various stages of healing or death, the compound that housed her sounded like a resort. At one end was a medium-sized helipad that threw up a haze of sand every time a chopper landed. She said she was constantly digging flecks of sand out of her eyes and knocking it out of her ears. At the other end, in the shape of an oval and running from left to right, were the mess hall, houses for the medical staff (behind these in a long, straight line were the houses for those military personnel stationed at Camp Freedom), and the medical facility. Overlooking all of this was the Hindu Kush mountain range. She said it looked like a biblical movie set if it weren't for the rolls of concertina wire, reinforced sandbag bunkers with firing positions at staggered intervals, and a minefield outside the compound walls. Originally, the base had been set up as an outpost for special forces units. A squad of Rangers and a team of SEALs rotated in and out when Mary came in country. Initially Mary didn't pay them much attention – she was still getting used to the new lifestyle.

While state-side, Jennifer, a fellow PT who had recently returned from completing her orders in Iraq gave Mary the following advice:

1. Always have your sidearm with you. Always. This is non-negotiable.
2. Always walk in a group.

I remember when Mary first showed me the e-mail with Jennifer's tips. It seemed like normal advice and I was grateful that Jennifer was going to keep my girlfriend safe from the enemy. Then I read her third piece of advice.

3. Never associate with the same guy two days in a row. Don't eat meals with him at the same time. Don't go to the same places at the same time.

I quickly realized that Mary's enemy wasn't only some militant extremist, but the very people she was trying to rehabilitate.

Maybe it was a need for protection. Maybe she was just trying to be friendly with a group that no one else seemed to care about. Maybe it was the secretive, suspicious, classified nature of their actions that lulled Mary into hanging out with a few members of the SEAL team. While they would normally enter and exit the base without anyone knowing, one of the members, Evan, rolled his ankle during what was otherwise a routine operation involving a quick repel insertion from a Blackhawk. In one of our weekly talks on Skype she told me how he had these "wonderfully deep blue eyes".

"Sounds like I should be jealous," I teased her.

"Oh, Matt," she said with a smirk, "You've got nothing to fear. You know it's interesting, I mean, I know he's one of the Navy's finest and a trained killing machine, but I think he's a little scared. Maybe not as much as me, but I've seen that look in too many of these boys to not know any better."

Boys. That always cracked me up. Mary was the same age or younger than a lot of these "boys". It was in her caring nature to view them as her children that she had to care for. As such, I didn't think anything more of her comment for the longest time. I often teased Mary that she would find some hot-shot Navy pilot while in Afghanistan who would serenade her to "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" and I'd be out of the picture forever. She'd jocularly concede that many guys were turned on by the fact that her uniform covered her entire body from the neck down in a most unflattering way; that she tried to sashay through the desert sand like it was some fashion runway in Paris or New York just to see what men she could lure to her bunk; that there was a seven-course dinner the mess was serving later that week and would I mind mailing her the sexy, black cocktail dress she had worn the last night we spent together.

At some point over the next few weeks Mary started hanging around with Evan. At first he would escort her to the mess hall when they were finished with his physical therapy session. Then they began to take strolls throughout the compound. Mary seemed quite at home, comfortable, and excited to have someone to talk with. Evan seemed to appreciate her company as well. Mary said he was excited to have some sort of normalcy in the hostile environment of Afghanistan, something that reminded him of home. She would go on and on about her life back in the states, how she had met me, the plans she had for when she returned home. He remained quiet for the most part, occasionally offering her a glimpse of his life or a nugget of a story there about some of the missions he had been on. Eventually she kept probing him for more. One day they were walking around the compound and talking as had become their custom. They realized that their travels had taken them to his side. It's not that there was any physical demarcation isolating the Special Forces section from the rest of the compound. Nor was there any rule that made that section off-limits. There was an unspoken acknowledgement, though, like not sifting through a friend's suitcase or knowing that a guy shouldn't enter the women's bathroom.

Evan showed her his storage locker and some of the cool toys he got to play with. Mary had her own sidearm and we had even been to the range a few times together to fire some rounds, but it wasn't something she obsessed over. Something began to change, though. Maybe it was the hostility surrounding the compound. Maybe it was Mary's desire to know Evan better, to try and help him. Maybe it was Evan's demeanor towards these tools of death. Whatever it was, she became fascinated by this part of the

compound. At first she started making excuses, saying, "Oh, I need this or that item", which she could have gotten from any of four different locations, but chose the location closest to the Special Forces area. Once there, her logic told her to check in

on Evan, see how he was doing. It evolved into a desire to use the Special Forces end of the firing range and use it more frequently than she used to.

Other things changed too. Mary had always kept her nails short, but now they were bitten to the quick. While cosmetic makeup was allowed, Mary only used it sparingly. I noticed that she was wearing it less and less. The cross that she had always worn and attached to her dog tags no longer hung around her neck. The most notable difference was her hair. One day her gorgeous, lush, dirt-blond hair no longer framed her face. Granted, Mary had always had to keep it in a tight bun and was careful of fly-aways, but she would at least let it down when we talked. Now her hair was cut like a man's – not even a pixie cut, but a traditional military crew cut. I discovered that Evan had instructed her how to disassemble and reassemble an AR-15. She had been practicing for a week and could accomplish the task in less than eight minutes. Her language changed too. She no longer spoke of working with torn muscles and ligaments and tendons, but of working with the innards of weapons, of how to work within a group to tactically attack a suspected enemy compound, of how to attach C4 properly to a reinforced hideout to eviscerate it and all those inside of it. She started referring to Afghans as Dune Rats, Hadjis, and Camel Jockeys. A change in tone accompanied this new language. It was the tone of one who was confident in knowing herself better. It reflected a woman no longer naïve about who she was and who she would become. She had already discovered that part of her that most of us spend our entire lives searching for.

"Are you still excited about returning home?" I asked her hoping she would see the true question hidden underneath it.

"I don't know." Her voice wavered in this response. It wasn't like her voice wavered between telling me the truth about how she felt, but which truth she wanted to reveal to herself – or better – which part of her self was most true. "I feel like I'm learning more now than I ever could stateside. I feel like I'm doing more here." I couldn't say it then, but I know now she really meant "I feel like I'm learning more about myself now than I ever could stateside. I feel like I'm doing more for myself here." Trying to be supportive, I didn't mention that I would be happy to help her accomplish her goals here in the U.S., that



artwork by Logan Mueller

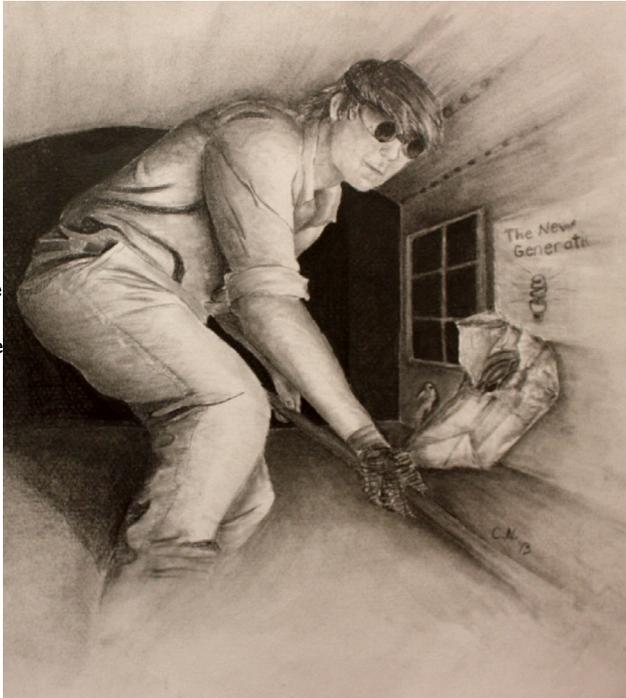
I was questioning the changes taking place.

To a certain degree, things stayed the same between us. We still talked multiple times throughout the week. Sometimes I would wake up early and talk to her before heading into work as she prepared for bed. Other times she would wake up and talk to me as I went to bed. But there was a change clearly evident in what we talked about, and, more so, what we didn't talk about. At some point, she stopped saying, "I miss you" and "I love you."

Obviously this made me uncomfortable. I couldn't say exactly what it was, but there was something different, something alien about this girl I once knew. Her eyes, which used to fluctuate between soft green and blue, like a diamond glittering when it catches a ray of sunlight in the right position, had become an ominous dark blue and hardened like flint. The lulls in conversation she used to fill with "well" or "I don't know" now became terrifyingly deep gaps threatening of a never-ending abyss. Even her voice had evolved. What was once a husky siren-song, like Anne Bancroft in *The Graduate*, enchanting me to fall asleep while on the phone with her late in the evening, had become a disembodied guttural croak – that is, when she spoke.

In one of our conversations, which were growing rarer and rarer, I asked her, "Do you still think you can get leave so I can visit you?" Six months ago, we talked about trying to visit each other in Italy. I thought that I might be able to convince my boss to let me leave work for a week, even though those sorts of absences were never granted. I had correctly figured that having a fiancé in Afghanistan for nine months was an extenuating set of circumstances that would gain his concession. At the time, she said she was sure she would have figured out the system and worked out a way where she could leave, even for a few days, so that we could reconnect. I hadn't pursued this question for a while, incredulous that I could withstand the Army's red-tape telling me I had to wait three more months to see her. Now I worried about whom I would find waiting for me if I could visit her.

"The orders are negative," she said. When I pressed her on the issue, wondering if her commander couldn't pull some strings, she laughed like a person would laugh at a boxer being pummeled in the last rounds of a match that had gone the distance, who clearly had nothing left to offer in this pugilistic spectacle. "Don't be silly. I'm so close to coming home, I have to stay here." I tried as best as I could to search her eyes on the computer



artwork by Chris Nowak



artwork by Johnathon Strickland

screen. It was then that I noticed something different about her. It wasn't the eyes themselves; rather, it was around her eyes. They were black. Not like she had been beaten, but rather like she had eye-shadow on. It had faded, but I hadn't noticed it because there was something different about her skin as well. It was dark. Although she didn't readily burn, Mary's skin represented her Irish heritage. The graininess of the webcam had concealed the faded oily greens, browns, and blacks that lingered like a grease stain on an old pot that you wonder if it will forever remain stuck on the pot or one you could erase with a little more effort. Once I identified these new hues to her skin, I recognized that she applied these shades to her face and neck with great adeptness.

Usually when I tell this story, everyone asks "Why didn't you do something?" The obvious answer is there wasn't much I could do. I couldn't buy a ticket to Afghanistan – the government tends to frown on people traveling to war zones unless they're a reporter, some D.C. higher-up, or they're in fatigues with a weapon they're trained to fire at the enemy. I couldn't physically force her to change her course of action. I heard some outrageous, far-fetched suggestions from people who watched too many conspiracy theory TV shows and movies. One guy suggested I hire his buddy who was about to deploy to a province 200 miles from Mary who was willing to threaten her like in *The Godfather*. Even if I had the appropriate horse's head, the world isn't *Wag the Dog*. Once I convinced people that their suggestions were fruitless, they would pause and say, "Man, I feel for you. I don't know what I would do if my girlfriend was over in Afghanistan hooking up with some Rambo Navy Seal." There wasn't anything I could do but wait for her to return home – if she ever did.

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Most say I was lucky when the freedom bird touched down in San Diego after we had spent 271 days apart. Even as I waited on the tarmac for the silhouette of her body to appear at the back of the C-130 as she descended the ramp, I believed in the fairy tale. In retrospect, I realize I was the only one running – her gait never changed – but I never realized that until I had her tightly in my arms and felt the unfamiliar coldness of her body. The flesh underneath her fatigues that had once been supple and responsive was disproportionate and hardened. I took a step back to look at her face. Mary forced a smile.

"I missed you," I said.

"Yeah," she said her eyes looking beyond me towards some new interest.

We struggled to put our lives back together. It was like trying to pick up the eviscerated remnants from a war-torn city. We tried to stay positive throughout the rebuilding process. Usually this meant staying out of each other's way. I used to enjoy waking up early to make coffee for Mary. Now when I got out of bed to make coffee, she would slip into the guest bathroom and wouldn't come out until sometime after I left for work. Initially, I thought this was her way of acclimating; not realizing it was her way of enduring the pain of separation from the thing she truly loved. For some time, we tried to ignore all the problems we both knew were palpable. I'm sure it's a scene played out in many various forms amongst other families: the white picket fence and a cheery disposition protecting any outsider from seeing that the perfect teenager in the perfect family has a drug problem until the levels become so toxic that it erupts in their face and the faces of their neighbors with such force that not even the deftest strokes of Norman Rockwell could recreate the pristine image that once existed.

The bomb exploded for us when the letter arrived with the details of her new set of orders sending her back to Afghanistan.

"You can't go back! You said you wouldn't go back! You made a promise to me."

"You don't understand. You have this innocent view of me. You still think I'm this naïve, blonde-haired girl who loved to hang out at the beach, laugh, smile, and enjoy life. That girl stopped existing."

"When?"

"I don't know exactly."

I grabbed Mary's hand and stroked it, tracing the various lines along her palm as if this would reveal her inner secrets, the reason this was happening, our fate together.

"How could this happen to you? You were so sweet. I mean, I always knew you might change, but not like this. I thought that I could protect you and help you re-acclimate when you returned."

Mary guffawed at me. "When will men ever learn? Everyone worries about women being able to serve in active combat. It's like women are these demure, pristine tea cakes with delicate frosting that will dislodge and fall to the floor with the slightest whisper of a disturbance. Women don't fall apart in combat. Combat is a new experience – it's a new freedom you never granted us before. This is what men need to worry about."

I sat there with Mary, a deafening quiet engulfing us. I began to recognize my own quiet susurrations. With each breath it was as if I was calculating whether this would be the last breath I would ever take with her in my life. I had hoped for this moment so long. For nine months, I had agonized without her. I filled my life with work and other activities. I trained and ran my first marathon, so I wouldn't have to think about how the woman I loved wasn't with me and all the atrocities that she had to witness or endure. I couldn't believe that the moment I dreamt about would now betray me. I grabbed her in my arms and held her tightly, grasping desperately to keep her with me forever; but, I already knew she was gone.

We went to bed together for the last time that night. When I woke up the next morning, she was gone. The following note was on my nightstand:

*Dear Matt,*

*I know this must be tough for you. I wish you could understand what happened like I do. It's funny. I still remember telling you my dream of coming over to Afghanistan to help so many brave young men get back to duty so that they could do their job protecting us, protecting our freedom. I see now how foolish I was.*

*It's true what they say, you know? The more open you are with yourself, the more you offer yourself to others, the more they change you. It sounds like something trite you would read in one of the essays your students would have to write for you, but it's true. Initially I was only helping others; but, now I'm helping myself. I've discovered a part of myself that I never knew. Afghanistan helped me brush aside the barriers between myself and who I wanted to be. I almost feel like out in the desert, I've sloughed off my skin like a snake and found a new identity. There's so much I have yet to learn here. Do you remember that documentary we watched about the people who free dive to extreme depths? Do you remember how they spoke about finding themselves in those extreme places? Afghanistan lets me do the same thing. My heart beats differently when I'm there.*

*I don't know if this makes any sense. It probably doesn't. I'm sorry, but I have to go.*

*Mary*

The truth is Mary's story is just one of many. She went to Afghanistan with the best of intentions. She believed in the righteousness of a cause. She went over with the can-do attitude that made America strong. But a place like Afghanistan isn't a place for someone as pure as Mary O'Connell. I guess everyone is affected by a place like Afghanistan – a place devastated by war and inhumanity. A place like that never breeds victories in moral or ethical terms that inspire. In a place like that, man can only measure gains by the assertion of power, by the trampling of the innocent. I guess it's a manner of degree; this sort of environment inverts us all. But for Mary, the incarnation was dark and dangerous. Some of us seek out those "dare-to-be-great" moments. We all wonder how we will respond when faced with those situations. Will we remain true to our selves, or will we be consumed by some unknown, deep desire and strength that had always been a part of us, but were too scared to acknowledge? I guess that's why many taboos become addictions. All taboos offer us some alternate form of reality, some way to examine our own view of the world and determine the accuracy of our stories. Sometimes we dig too deep; the inversion is too great and we can't get back. Sometimes, the alternative is too seductive a drug and we don't want to return.

That's what happened to Mary. She didn't want to return. There's no doubt in my mind that she still loved me, even at the end. Had she stayed here, I know we would have carried on with our original plan: marriage, a house, kids, dying together some day. The problem, though, was Mary found something that she loved more. She loved the grit of sand in her teeth, the violence, the barren landscape she could mold and conform to. She loved the secrecy both of the mission and of doing something so dangerous that only a few ever take it upon themselves to perform this mission. She was at the extreme edge between humanity and primitive malevolence. She was going out on the riskiest of missions, testing her limits with her own survival on the line and loving every minute of it.