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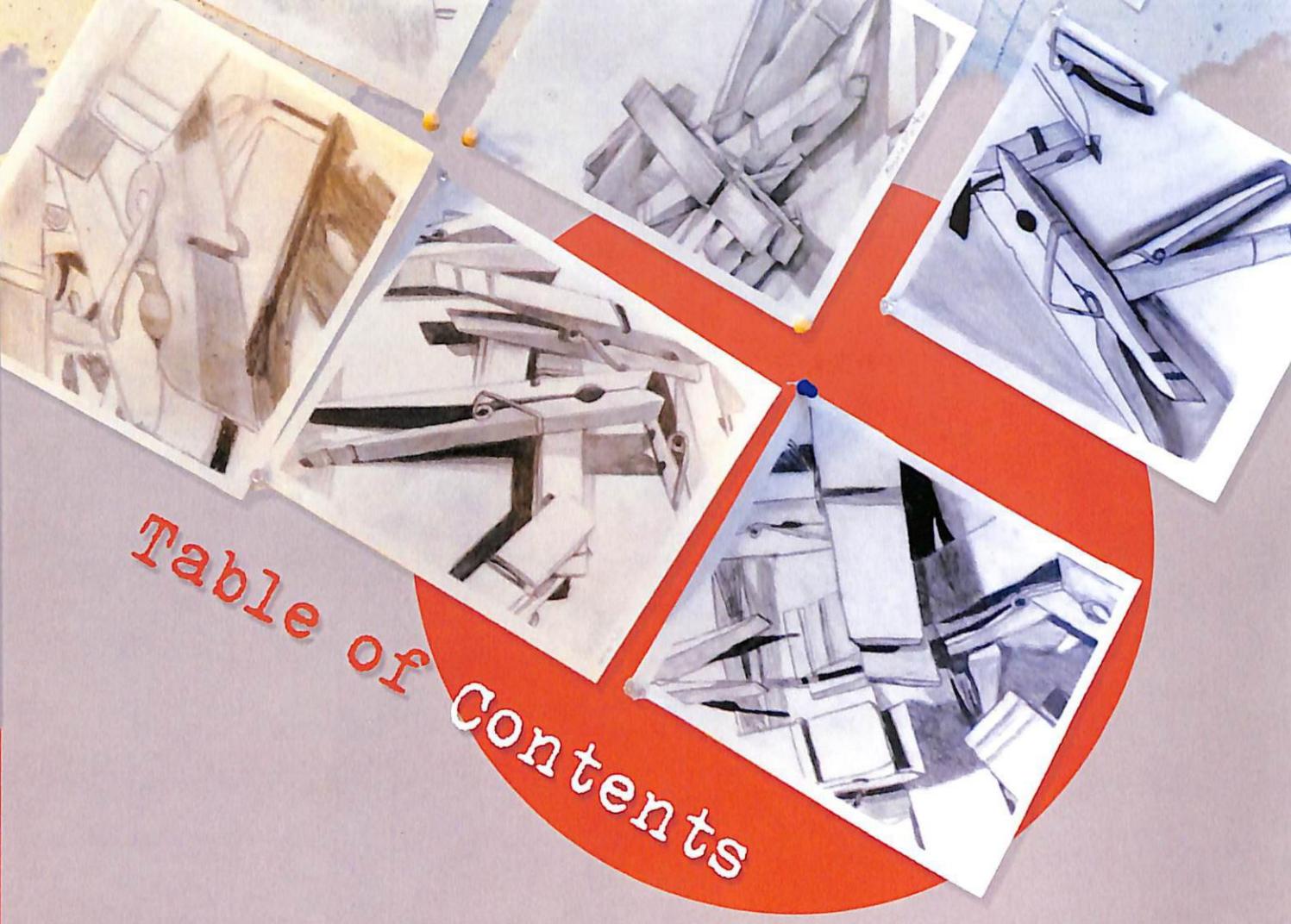


Table of Contents

- 2 I Miss the Forest by Steven Giles
- 3 I'm Not a Bad Guy by Ariel Elliott
- 9 Speechless by Tanisha Hill
- 11 Leaving Emily Hollis by Joshua Barker
- 17 Tick Tick Tick by Christian Miller
- 19 Fading by Vaughn Brown
- 23 Tweeting America's Unsure Future by Jonathon Collins
- 25 Guiterman in 2007 by Barry McMullan
- 27 Invisible by Will Prince
- 29 Dying While I'm Dancing by Oriona Walker

I MISS THE FOREST

BY: STEVEN GILES

I miss the forest, with its cool shady breeze
With its cricks and its creeks and the ease of its ways.
The sound of leaves chiming in chorus with the crickets humming daze
Green moss growing on its highest beacons with ease.

The Earth, beneath its quilt of brown needles and leaves
Giving life to its crown, towering mightily above.
While a silent hind creeps beneath the eves
Of an ancient branch, upon which is perched one solitary dove.

The Oak is king here
Older, stronger, and the master above all.
Nothing but humble submission, only but mere
Allegiance is given here, by all.

King to all, the oak doth reign
Except to the one who bridles fire and articulates the axe.
They shall conquer and they do contain
The empire of oaks, which within its own kingdom does wax.

And the oak who once ruled and whose kingdom did stand
With towering greatness and magnificent green,
It shall only be remembered and revered in our land
By the warmth and the light of its majesty, that shines from the hearth's glowing
gleam.

I'm Not a Bad Guy

"Where are you taking me?" Her wails had turned to cries. "I want to go home!"

I couldn't clearly see from the rearview mirror, but I was sure that her long blonde hair had tangled itself into a nest, and her face was going to be caked with tears and snot. I never understood why she always clung to the hope that I cared about her pleas. She wasn't going home; she was too perfect!

"Not telling you how to live your life, but I'd save your breath if I were you." I guffawed from the front seat. "No one can hear you, Lucy."

I hate kids. Everything about them drives me insane from their high-pitched crying to their incapability to sense danger. I especially hate Lucy though; she's what...six, maybe seven? No doubt, she's probably been told a hundred times not to talk to strangers, yet here she is in the back of my van! No matter how many times adults warn children, they always fall for the "have some candies" trick, and Lucy was the worst! She never learned her lesson, and then she would have the nerve to scream to be let go every time after she woke up. She deserves what she gets; besides, I'm just making a living.

I could actually hear Lucy

sniffling and coughing behind me right now.

"You finally wear yourself out?"

She didn't answer me, but all of her screaming from earlier had left me with the beginning pains of a headache. I popped the glove box and suddenly realized I'd forgotten my aspirin. My knuckles turned white as I gripped the steering wheel; that's just my luck...and then her surprise earsplitting sob made the steering wheel bend.

"Lucy!" I screamed as I released the bent steering wheel. "I swear if you don't shut it, I will come back there and beat the living Hell out of you!"

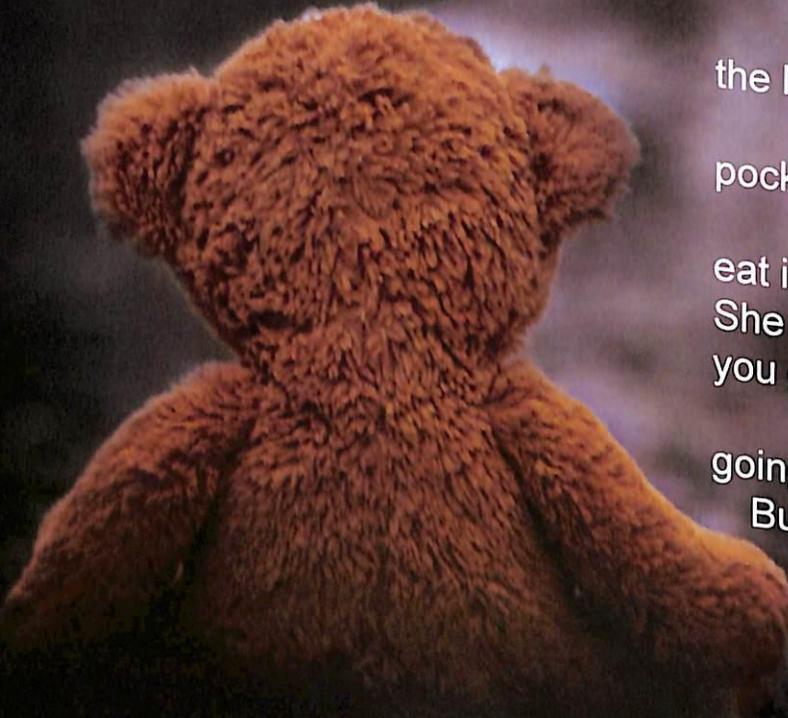
Her choking sobs suddenly became less noticeable, and I couldn't help sighing. As much as I hated her, I never wanted to be mean to Lucy.

"Look, Lucy," I apologetically muttered, "I'm not a bad guy, but you're making my job a lot harder with your screaming. Now, I have to come back there, and I have to make you presentable for Bunny. If I have to beat you unconscious to do that, I will, but I'd rather not. He's looking forward to meeting you, and I'd like you to be awake."

I grabbed a hairbrush from the passenger seat and climbed into the



by Ariel Elliott



back of the van. I'd taken out the seats, so aside from being tied up, she had plenty of room to stretch. The windows were tinted so people couldn't gawk at her while she was in distress. I'd even sound proofed the inside so no one would bother her while she was crying. Clearly, she didn't appreciate any of my gestures judging by how she had let herself turn into a complete mess. Her eyes swarmed with fear and hatred as I propped her in front of me and began brushing her hair.

"Lucy, I'll never understand why you insist on looking this way every single time."

She sat quietly as I worked the brush through her hair. I always start from the bottom of her hair and gradually work towards the root just in case the knots get too rough.

"My name," she whimpered,

"isn't Lucy."

Puzzled, I stopped brushing her hair. "What else could your name be?"

"It's Macy."

"Well, last time you told me your name was Lucy."

For some reason, she started choking on fresh new sobs. I couldn't take it anymore!

"Quit that, Lucy!" I demanded slamming the brush onto the van's floor. "No more tears!" I grabbed her hair and started brushing it again. "No more!!!"

She sat quietly wincing, and I realized how roughly I was ripping the brush through her hair. I set the brush down and smoothed her hair trying to fix what I'd done. I didn't want to her Lucy; I wasn't a bad guy.

"You want a piece of candy?" I asked.

"No... I don't."

"But it's the blue kind. You like the blue kind."

I removed some candy from my pocket and gave it to her. "Here."

She took the candy but didn't eat it. "You said this was your job?" She suddenly asked. "So that means you get paid?"

"Yes, it is, and, yes, I do. You're going to meet a very nice man named Bunny."

"Daddy will pay you more for me!" She declared in a panicky excitement. "Whatever Bunny has offered,

Daddy'll give you more! Lots more!!!"
"Lucy, I already promised Bunny that he could have you. You wouldn't want me to break a promise; now would you?"

"I don't know."

"Well, people should never break promises, and you're being rude by not eating that candy."

She slowly ate the candy, and we sat in peaceful silence as I finished brushing her hair. Brushing her hair always calmed me, and it showed Lucy that I wasn't a bad guy. My headache was even starting to fade from the calmness of it.

I considered braiding Lucy's hair while we waited. Bunny should be here by now, but if he doesn't show up soon, he can kiss his prize goodbye.

I turned her around and realized that I'd been right. Her face was filthy! I grabbed some baby wipes and started wiping some dirt off her cheek.

"What's your name?" She asked softly.

"You've never asked me that before." A smudge on her face didn't seem to want to leave.

"Well...I am now."

"My name is...Onion."

"Why are you called that?"

I finally got that stubborn smudge off her face and wiped away the last of the snot, tears, and dirt.
"Because I just am."

A bright, blinking light flooded my car. "Bunny is here!" I cheered.

"I don't want to go!" She suddenly wailed as I stood up to leave. With all of her thrashing and shrieking, she was going to mess up all of my hard work! She never appreciates anything I do for her!

"Lucy!" I screamed, grabbing her hair and pulling her face to me. "Do not embarrass me in front of Bunny!" I unwrapped another candy and made her eat it. "Calm down!"

I let go of her hair and watched her slump to the ground in defeat. "Get up and smile!" I made her sit up and smoothed her hair. She wasn't making a sound, but her tears were louder than any scream. "And quit crying...please," I told her, wiping away the tears from her face.

She didn't move or speak, so I left her there and climbed out of the van from the front seat. I wish she wouldn't cry. I'm not a bad guy.

The night air hit my face, but it was cool and felt nice compared to the heat of the van. I straightened my tie and fixed my collar as I approached Bunny's car window; it was already open.

"You got the kid?"

He was a scrawny fellow, needed to shave, and no doubt had had his fair share of toilet swirlies in high school.

"We wouldn't be here if I didn't. Now, where's my cash?"

"I want to make sure you didn't hurt her," he said, eyeing me warily as he stepped out of the car. "Her perfection is essential."

"Show me my cash, and I'll show you your kid."

His gray eyes flickered uneasily as he stumbled from the car and popped the trunk.

"It's in this briefcase," he stammered as he pulled out a black leather briefcase and handed it to me. "All a hundred grand!"

I sighed as I popped the lid. He'd brought a briefcase...how cliché. He'd brought the case though, and no man dared trick me with counterfeit. The last guy who tried that learned never to do that again. I'm not a bad guy; he deserved it.

"Where's my girl?"

I slammed the lid and grabbed him by the collar. "The girl's name is Lucy!" His eyes turned to saucers. "Got it?!"

"Yes! Yes, of course! I'm sorry; I'm just excited to meet her!" He apologized as he squirmed to get free. I didn't like Bunny, and I didn't like Lucy, but I didn't like Bunny more.

I let him go and sauntered over to the van. Sliding the door open, I noticed Lucy hadn't moved from where I had placed her. New tears stained her cheeks, but her hair was still smooth, and she looked much calmer. She was perfect, and Bunny undeniably thought so too. What

did he want with Lucy? Did his eyes contain admiration, greed, lust, awe, or something else for her entirely?

"Once she gets in your car, don't contact me. If something goes wrong, that's not my problem anymore."

"We won't have a problem. Will we, my sweet," Bunny cooed as his clammy, sweaty hand brushed Lucy's cheek, "precious angel?"

Lucy jerked to life with his touch and snapped into hysterical shrieking. "I want Onion! Oni-!!!"

Her cries were cut short by Bunny's backhand. "Good girls are seen and not heard!" Her face flushed red and new tears sprung from her eyes. He'd made her cry....Lucy shouldn't be crying.

I didn't know what to do....I had to get her to stop crying. I'm not a bad guy! I just grabbed the closest thing I could: Bunny's collar. He flew back a few feet, and I watched him cowardly back away as I climbed into the van with Lucy.

"Lucy," I whispered, wiping away her tears, "didn't I tell you not to cry?"

"I want to go home, Onion," she pleaded. "Please!"

"Don't worry, Lucy," I reassured her. "You will."

I pulled out the last three pieces of my candy and made her eat it. "When you wake up, you'll be where you belong."

"Promise?"

"I promise, and good guys never

break promises."

Lucy smiled as her eyes began to flutter; then, suddenly, she slumped over unconscious.

"What the Hell do you mean she gets to go home?!" Bunny screamed, climbing to his feet in a furious rage. "I paid for her!" I climbed out of the van and scowled at the fool. "Her *name* is LUCY!"

"Well, I still paid for Lucy! You can't take her back home!"

"She's going where she belongs!"

"But she's mine!!!" He screeched.

"So isn't that where she belongs?!" I howled.

Bunny went silent as confusion filled his face.

"You want me to put her in your car?" I could feel my headache coming back.

Bunny nodded, and I gently lifted Lucy, cradled her in my arms as I walked to Bunny's car, and placed her in the backseat safely. A strand of hair had fallen into her face, and I moved it away. "I promised Bunny that he could have you, and I promised you that you'll be ~~where you belong~~ when you wake up." I smiled. "I'm not a bad guy....I've kept all my promises."

I shut the car door, grabbed my briefcase, and stormed over to Bunny. "You've got exactly one hour and thirty-four minutes before she wakes

up. I kept my promise to you, but if she wakes up in the back of your car and *not* where you two are going, I swear I will kill you for making me break my promise to her."

He looked more lost than a penguin at the North Pole.

"What are you waiting for?" I screamed. "Get the Hell out of here!"

He muttered a thank you, clamored his way into his car, and drove off.

Strolling over to my car and sliding into the front seat, I hugged my reward for being a good guy: the briefcase of cash. I'd kept my promises; I wasn't a bad guy. I set the briefcase down and started the van; time to go find Lucy again.



S P E E C H



LESS

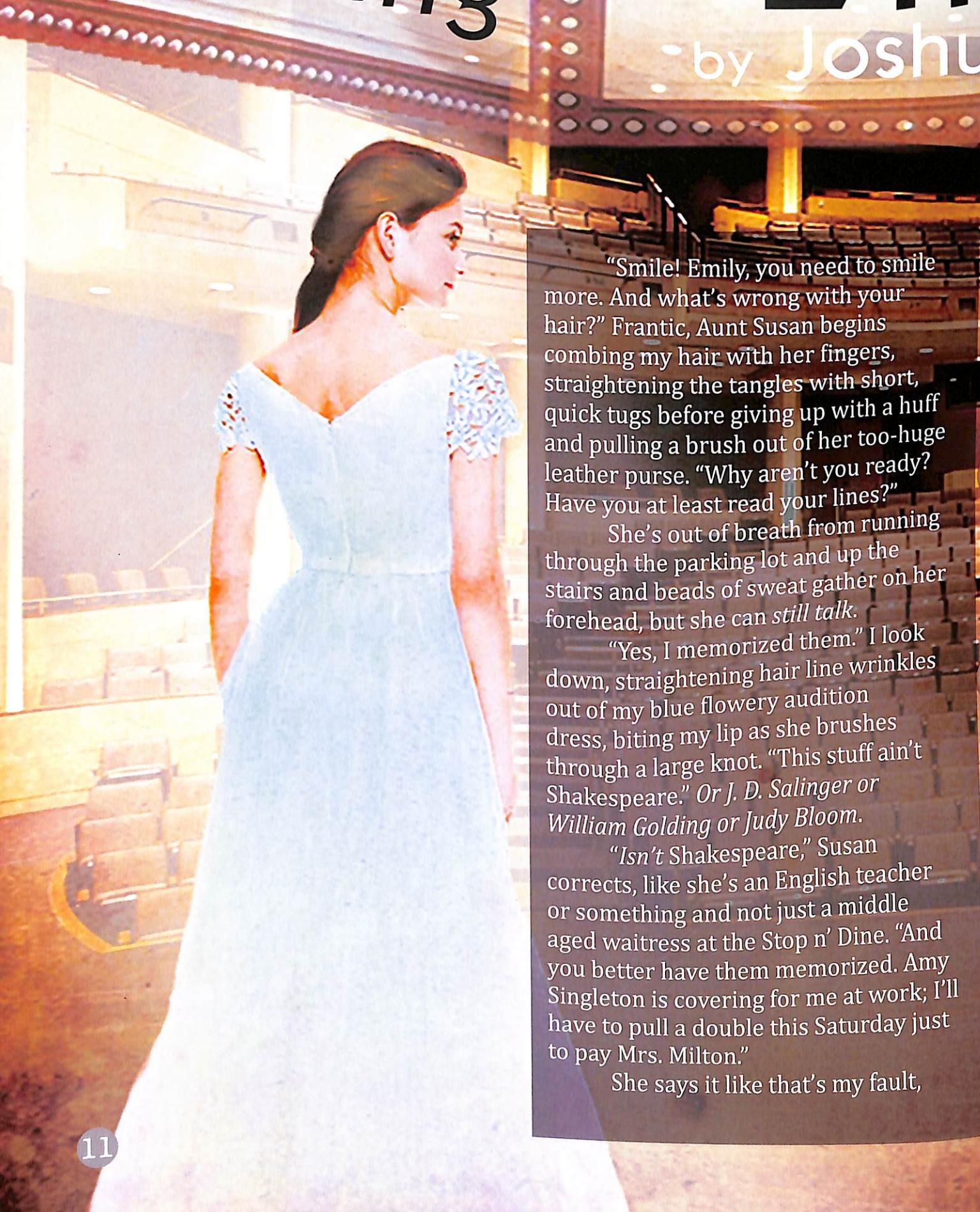
trying to make perfect speech
but my heart won't let me
sinking deep into depression
I search for words to say
I lost my heart trying to find my soul
but still I'm speechless

losing the moon while trying to count stars
I race back into your arms
a hug or a kiss a wave goodbye
and I'm speechless

wanting to speak to you get things off my chest
so that my heart can breathe
but I'm still speechless
trying to make perfect speech
but my heart won't let me
I'm speechless

by Tanisha Hill





"Smile! Emily, you need to smile more. And what's wrong with your hair?" Frantic, Aunt Susan begins combing my hair with her fingers, straightening the tangles with short, quick tugs before giving up with a huff and pulling a brush out of her too-huge leather purse. "Why aren't you ready? Have you at least read your lines?"

She's out of breath from running through the parking lot and up the stairs and beads of sweat gather on her forehead, but she can *still talk*.

"Yes, I memorized them." I look down, straightening hair line wrinkles out of my blue flowery audition dress, biting my lip as she brushes through a large knot. "This stuff ain't Shakespeare." *Or J. D. Salinger or William Golding or Judy Bloom.*

"Isn't Shakespeare," Susan corrects, like she's an English teacher or something and not just a middle aged waitress at the Stop n' Dine. "And you better have them memorized. Amy Singleton is covering for me at work; I'll have to pull a double this Saturday just to pay Mrs. Milton."

She says it like that's my fault,

illy Barker

Hollis

and I tell her that I never wanted dance lessons to begin with, that Mutton Milton only complains about my fat calves and two left feet.

She shrugs it off, "Tara Moore's daughter, Tammy, got the spot in that orange juice commercial because of how graceful she was, and that's ten-thousand dollars for a national spot. I'm sure with just a little effort..."

I want to ask what's graceful about orange juice, but don't bother, instead gripping the side of my chair tight as she rips through another tangle. Sometimes I think she is rough on purpose, to get back at me. Who'd blame her?

"It's just luck we got here before they called our name," she says, trying to be quaint, positive, the way her B.S. New-Age books tell her to be. She looks at me with a crow's feet, nicotine stained smile. I don't smile back.

I turn and study the waiting room. Any idiot can tell it's a fire-hazard, with two-dozen girls and stage mothers crammed tightly between four windowless walls. There's hardly room to breathe even if you wanted

to inhale the thick strawberry and Hawaiian Mango scented hairspray cloud hovering just above our heads. One struck match and we'd be on the nightly news from New York to L.A. I'm sure that's not the fame there people are looking for.

"I think I'm too old for this one." I point out many of the girls who are younger than me, seven or eight, some playing with Barbies or working in coloring books, with one bright little Miss. reading *James and the Giant Peach* by Dahl.

"Well, they want a range of girls," Susan says, pulling two pink rubber bands out of her purse and working them around her fingers. "Turn around."

I shift in the chair, and she begins pulling my hair into tight pig tails. "Just be sure she's in pig tails," Mr. Timothy said. And you couldn't even help me with that."

"Sorry," I say, imagining the overweight and balding Mr. Timothy Gould, Susan's agent, sitting in his air-conditioned trailer by the I-62 off ramp just outside of Jackson. He's

straightening his vanilla colored suit as he reassures another mother or father that stardom takes time, years even, but that little Sally or Ronda has what it takes, real spunk, that gleam in her eye. Then he'll walk her to the door. *Excuse me*, he'll say, *but I have a lunch date with a producer from Paramount*. At this, and with a firm handshake, Sally's mom will feel a wave of reassurance. After she leaves he'll pull out a brown bagged tuna-on-white and a warm can of root beer from his desk drawer.

"I don't think I trust him," I say.

That look comes over her face, hard and tight. "He's helped a lot of the girls we know get good parts, the orange juice commercial, Julie's daughter with a spot on that soap opera, and us with our pizza bit. We've been over this, Emily."

"I guess we have been over this."

The Antonio's Pizza commercial two years ago was only regional, but it paid off Aunt Susan's Honda junker, and got me a Mongoose Trickster bike, which seemed like hot stuff back then. I remember on the one day of shooting I tried telling the director about the chrome handlebars and street lamp, but he was Chinese and just looked at me. Guess he didn't speak English. It didn't matter much because Susan wouldn't let me ride the damn thing anyhow, afraid I'd go "ass over tea kettle" and get scarred up. A few months later she pawned it to help pay the gas bill.

The casting lady opens her office

door, and a little brown haired girl, seven maybe, steps out. She's followed by her mother, all smiles. "You should expect a call within a few days," the casting lady tells them before looking down at her clip board. "Emily Hollis."

"That's us," Susan says, giving my hair one last look over before slipping the brush back into her purse. "Remember, you're twelve. And smile."

The casting lady, *Ms. Kathy* she tells us to call her, is older, middle aged, with short, curly red hair and a sun baked face. She has massive breasts and a pair of heavy thighs, which she carries like two overstuffed suitcases.

We follow her to a desk crowded with hula dancer figurines and post-it notes. Beside a cup of cocktail umbrellas is a placard saying *Havana or Bust*. There are no photos of children but several with Ms. Kathy holding a Mai Tai with a lei around her neck and a grin across her face.

"So, how are you today?" Ms. Kathy asks reclining in a large leather chair.

"Fine," Susan and I say in unison. We shift in our plastic bucket seats, the kind high schools and hospitals buy in bulk and store in large stacks in dark basements stinking of mildew and cigarette smoke.

"I see that Mr. Gould sent you," Ms. Kathy says looking again at her all-important clip board. "We've used some of his talent before." She looks up with a grin. "So, first off, do you use Clover

Brand products?"

"Clover Brand?" I ask.

"Yes," Susan interjects, "well, sometimes."

"That's good," Ms. Kathy says. "Our client insists that anyone in their commercials be actual users of their products. It's an annoying new trend with the industry. *Honesty.*" She rolls her eyes as she begins riffling through one of her desk drawers, pulling out a small sample size tube of something and hands it to Susan. "Well, if you don't use anything of theirs, here's some of their hand lotion." She looks at me and winks, "Now you're members of the Clover Brand family."

"So, this commercial is for window cleaner?" I ask.

"It's for a new line of cleaning products, well, a new scent for the old products: Summer Glen. And you're to audition for the part of Little Girl/Daughter."

Susan tells her that I've already memorized my lines, learned them the day Timothy, excuse me, *Mr. Gould*, she says, told her about the audition and e-mailed her a copy of the script, all five sentences, twenty-eight words, sixty-eight syllables of it. That was the night Jeanette and I avenged Elmo by slashing Mr. Aderholt's tires. He can shove his D-.

"She can recite a few right now if you want." Susan nudges me.

"Yes, I can," I say, sitting

Labradoodle. I hate myself instantly.

"In a moment. I really like to get to know the candidates first before any auditions take place." She pulls out a small note pad from her top drawer. "So, Emily, may I call you Emily or is there something else?"

"Em."

"Em? Is that what they call you at school?"

"That's what my friends call me. Jean and Elmo call me that." I wonder if their ears are itching with me talking about them like this. It's about four-thirty, and they're probably getting baked behind the Fifth St. Tasty Freeze.

"So, Em, how are your grades?"

"Good. Dad's been helping me with math, and Mom has been helping me with English."

We look over at Susan who wears a smile like too much perfume, her brown teeth showing and cheeks straining. It's all about points, good points, Mr. Gould told us, and two happy parents and good grades are like hitting the jackpot.

"That's great, just great. Parental involvement is so important nowadays." Ms. Kathy smiles and makes a few happy marks on her notepad. "And what school do you go to?"

"West Moore," Susan says quickly, cutting me off, thinking I might slip up, drop the ball. She stares me down as Ms. Kathy scribbles something down. Our scores might be in the negative if

"Jean and Elmo go to Freeman though," I say, more wanting to screw with Susan than represent the fighting Freeman Wombats.

"They go to the same church, Mount Olive Presbyterian," Susan says, pinching me under the table. "Jeanette and Emily have even been in the same Girl Scout troop since second grade. Troop Seventy-Five under Mrs. Jolene, a wonderful woman; it's a shame about her husband, Donald. Cancer last winter."

I have to give her props. Mr. Gould says that lying, good lying, is all about the details, the little things, like the fake flowers and moss on a plastic ficus tree. You don't notice anything is amiss until you got to water the damn thing.

"That's a shame," Ms. Kathy says, her oven-baked crow's feet made enormous with a frown. "So how do you have any other activities?"

"If you can call them that," I mutter.

Susan looks at me, her cheeks red, eyes pleading, even a little threatening. So I lean in close laying my elbows on Ms. Kathy's desk. "I'm taking dance and acting classes as well as some other things. I have a full schedule. Sometimes it feels like a career already." Giving a little giggle at the end brings a grin to Ms. Kathy's face.

"Well, just remember that education is what is most important,"

She taps the script on her desk, "and nothing should get in the way of that."

I recite the lines three or maybe four times, enunciating here, flaunting a vowel there, mimicking every TV commercial ever made, smiling like there was no tomorrow. The floor and walls seem to fall away leaving Ms. Kathy and myself behind, mother and little girl/daughter, praising Clover Brand's new invigorating scents. A perfect pair.

"I think you may be just what we're looking for," Ms. Kathy says. She guides us to the door. "A little tall but you seem to capture the character. You should expect a call within a few days."

She shakes Susan's hand then mine before looking down at her clipboard and singing out the next name. A young girl, seven maybe, with her long liquorish black hair held back with a pink headband, walks up with an outstretched hand.

"I'm Jolene Moore, nice to meet ya!" she says. She's followed by her perfect milf mother and too tall father, both beaming. I've never been such white teeth.

Aunt Susan cracks the car window and lights up a Newport menthol.

"Pink headband..." she breathes, exhaling smoke, "*how cute is that?*"

She's undone the top two or three buttons of her blouse and a frayed bra strap peeks out at me. The

junker's FM radio whispers out a bubblegum classic, "Take a Chance on Me," as the sun sets behind a *Jesus Saves* billboard at the far end of the nearly empty parking lot. We've become our own afterschool special.

"I mean you thing we did alright, didn't we?" she asks. Her jaw goes slack showing small stained teeth like unwashed pebbles.

I nod a perfect nod, head tilted forward, lips slightly curled into an encouraging grin. I almost fool myself.

"Yeah, we did good," she says taking another long drag from her Newport. The Honda's ashtray is empty, but she flicks the butt out the window anyway. "A small problem is someone else's problem," she tells me.

"Can I go out with Jean and Elmo tonight?" I ask.

"You're going to do what you want anyways. Just make sure your homework is done."

Like it matters. She never checks my homework, never goes to parent-teacher conferences, hardly smiles when I make the honor roll every semester. She takes care of the bills and the Honda, I take care of me; that's become the arrangement. It's probably best that way.

Lighting another cigarette, Susan turns the radio to something country, Kenny Chesney crooning over the beach life, and begins tapping the Yin-Yang medallion hanging from the rearview mirror. It's been about three months,

and the luckless charm will soon join the heap of self-help booklets, prayer beads, and focus crystals crammed into the glove compartment. The I Ching hexagram tattoo on her ankle won't be so easy to get rid of.

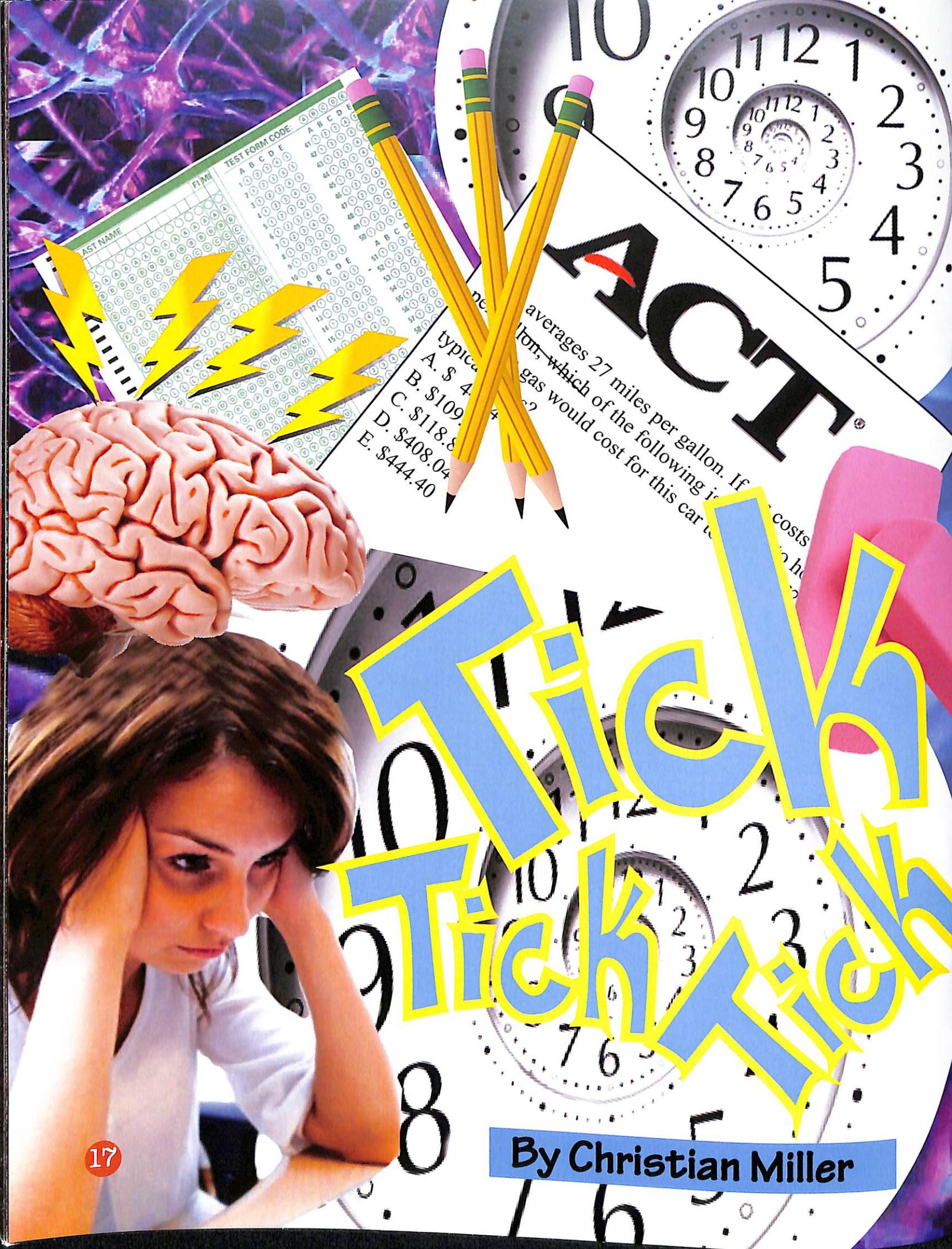
People began emptying out of the talent agency building, creeping over the parking lot like a crowd of calm Japanese fleeing a slow moving Godzilla.

"There she is," Susan says. "There she is."

The girl with the pink headband walk walks past us with her parents in tow, all still smiling, laughing even as they climbed into a shining blue SUV. I hate her pink headband, her perfect white teeth, her absolute certainty of being loved.

After a moment Susan reaches forward and yanks the medallion from the mirror and throws it out the window. She cranked the engine with a heave turn of the key, almost flooding the carburetor.

"A pink headband," Susan says, slipping on her seat belt. "God, I hope that bitch doesn't get it."



averages 27 miles per gallon. If it costs 12 cents to fill up with gas, which of the following is closest to the cost for this car to travel 100 miles?

- A. \$ 4.00
- B. \$109.00
- C. \$118.80
- D. \$408.04
- E. \$444.40

By Christian Miller

Being the typical teenager I am, you'll be lucky to get me out of bed before noon. If it were not for my lack of interest in becoming a government leach for the rest of my life, I would never be up at the crack of dawn to take the dreaded ACT. One would think that my apprehension would come from the pressure of having my entire future rest in the results of a standardize test, but no. To be honest, that part doesn't even faze me. Some of you may be thinking, "Well, what in the dickens could you possibly have to complain about?!" Allow me to explain.

"You may now begin," the proctor says as I wiggle down in my desk to prepare for the brain drain that is about to ensue. I'm showing this test who is boss when all of a sudden—*Tick. Tick. Tick.* I try my best to ignore it, but I just can't! *Tick. Tick. Tick.* It's all encompassing and nothing, I repeat nothing, can tune it out. Eventually, my pencil hits the desk and I flip my booklet over with a silent rage. Looking around I take note of who are still working and who already have their heads down. Not a single student looks bothered by the incessant *Tick. Tick. Tick.* of the clock.

A nuclear meltdown, one to rival that of Chernobyl, is developing within me, and just as I feel it about to erupt, I hear, "Pencils down," from the proctor. Words cannot describe the immense joy I feel as I hand in my test and peel out of the classroom. I'm walking down the hall like everybody else, but I swear if my life were a sitcom, there would have been a cut scene of me doing flips and running up the walls like Thing 1 and Thing 2.

Many of you probably think I'm crazy for feeling this way, but when Edgar Allan Poe wrote a poem about a raven repeating the phrase "nevermore" until it eventually drove him insane, nobody seemed to question that! In fact, we celebrate his brilliant works! I'm not saying I have a lot in common with one of the greatest gothic authors of all time; I'm just saying that if Poe came back from the dead to enjoy a cold brewsky, I'd be completely down for it. We can talk about all the repetitive noises that make us crazy, and if I'm lucky, he might even write a depressing poem about me. A girl can dream, but in the meantime, I'll just keep track of all the repetitive tortures I endure.

Fading

by Vaughn Brown

"Laura, over here," Michelle said and waved at her friend. Laura threaded her way through the restaurant to the table where Michelle sat alone.

"Sorry, didn't see you," Laura said.

"You're not the only one."

"What?" Laura said.

"Never mind. Thanks for coming."

"No problem. I love the lunch menu here. Where are the menus, by the way?"

"I haven't been able to get the waiter's attention."

"That's odd; the service here is always excellent. Oh, here comes one now."

The waiter, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, tie and black vest, handed leather bound menus to the two women and took their drink orders. A second waiter filled their water glasses.

"You look upset, Michelle. Is yesterday's accident at the lab bothering you?"

Michelle looked around before

speaking.

"We're not supposed to talk about it, but a lot of what they are saying in the media is just wrong. Since you are in Personnel, I thought you might have heard something."

"Just that there was a fire and explosion at the particle accelerator and two people were injured."

"Yeah, there was a small fire and two guys got burned, but two other people...."

Michelle paused as a waiter passed by.

"There was a blue flash and Doctor Yan and Doctor Makarov just... faded away."

"Are you sure? I mean, how can someone just disappear like that? You're the scientist, not me, but I still don't see how that could happen," Laura said.

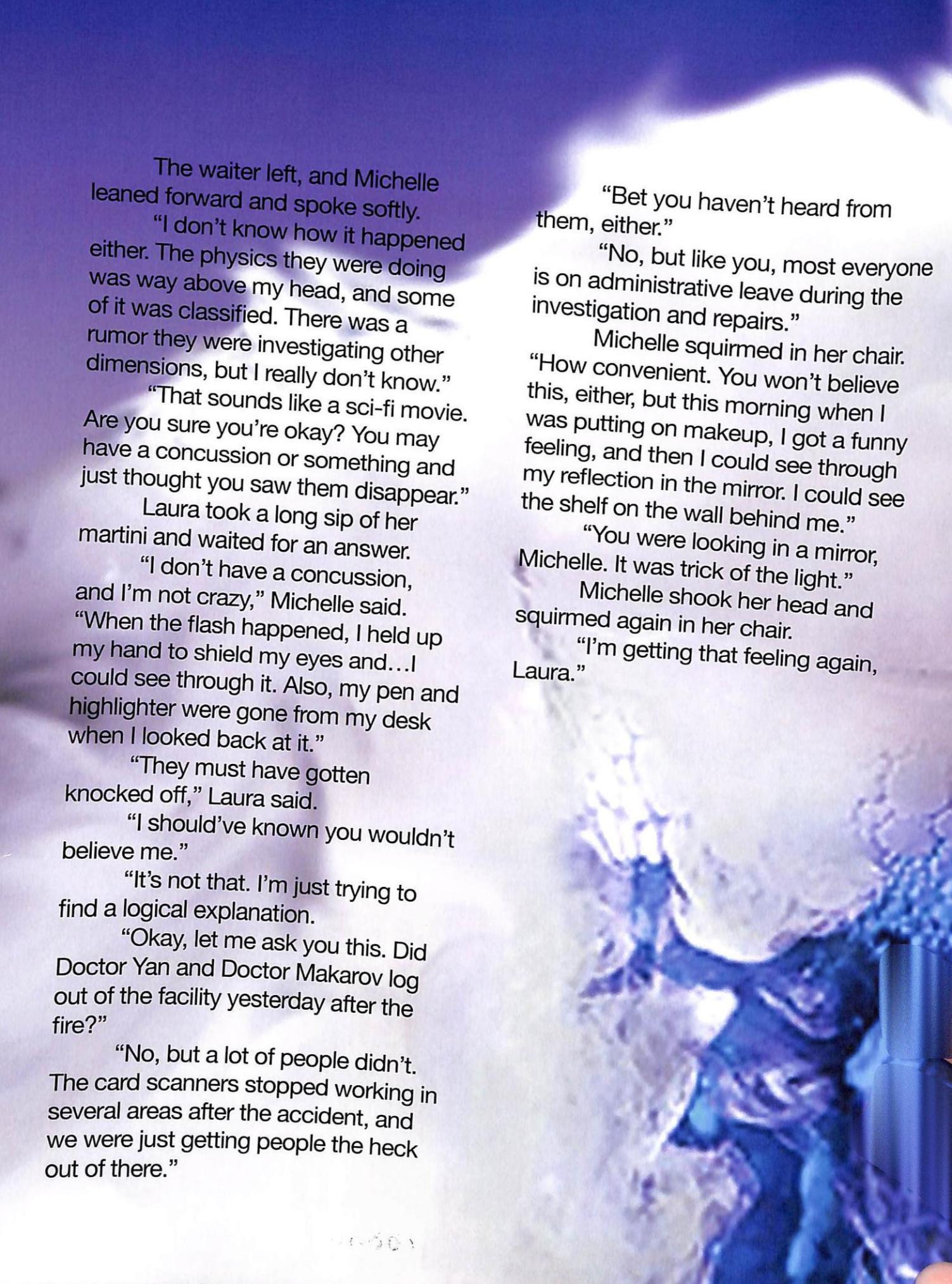
The waiter arrived with two lemon-drop martinis.

"Would you like to order now, ladies?"

"Yes, I'll have the crab cakes," Laura said.

"Same for me," Michelle said.





The waiter left, and Michelle leaned forward and spoke softly.

"I don't know how it happened either. The physics they were doing was way above my head, and some of it was classified. There was a rumor they were investigating other dimensions, but I really don't know."

"That sounds like a sci-fi movie. Are you sure you're okay? You may have a concussion or something and just thought you saw them disappear."

Laura took a long sip of her martini and waited for an answer.

"I don't have a concussion, and I'm not crazy," Michelle said. "When the flash happened, I held up my hand to shield my eyes and... I could see through it. Also, my pen and highlighter were gone from my desk when I looked back at it."

"They must have gotten knocked off," Laura said.

"I should've known you wouldn't believe me."

"It's not that. I'm just trying to find a logical explanation."

"Okay, let me ask you this. Did Doctor Yan and Doctor Makarov log out of the facility yesterday after the fire?"

"No, but a lot of people didn't. The card scanners stopped working in several areas after the accident, and we were just getting people the heck out of there."

"Bet you haven't heard from them, either."

"No, but like you, most everyone is on administrative leave during the investigation and repairs."

Michelle squirmed in her chair. "How convenient. You won't believe this, either, but this morning when I was putting on makeup, I got a funny feeling, and then I could see through my reflection in the mirror. I could see the shelf on the wall behind me."

"You were looking in a mirror, Michelle. It was trick of the light."

Michelle shook her head and squirmed again in her chair.

"I'm getting that feeling again, Laura."

Laura watched as the painting on the wall behind Michelle became visible through the woman's body.

"Laura, help me." Michelle's voice was as weak as her image.

Michelle disappeared.

Laura waited a few minutes and then used her cell phone.

"Elvis has left the building."

A blond woman in her fifties, wearing a business suit entered the restaurant, strutted to Laura's table and took Michelle's seat.

"Some problems just solve themselves," the blond said.

"Hello to you, too, Anne," Laura said.

The waiter arrived with the crab

cakes and gave Anne a puzzled glance.

"The other lady had to leave, but we'll still take the crab cakes," Laura said.

"Very good, Madame, will there be anything else?"

Laura shook her head, and the waiter left.

Anne drained half her martini in one gulp.

"A little weak, but not bad," Anne said. "You need to start recruiting a new team today."

"It may take a while. It's awfully difficult to find that level of talent with no relatives or close friends."

"And I thought scientists were loners and nerds," Anne said.

"I wish. Have you found out if it was sabotage, yet?"

"Nope and probably won't. The investigators don't understand the science well enough to tell for sure. If it's not obvious, they won't find it."

"Great. Sabotage would make recruiting even harder."

"Yeah, but I'm serious. Start recruiting today. It's imperative to get a team back up."

"The fate of the world depends on it?" Laura said with a smile.

"Our world anyway. We can't let the other side get it first. Now, let's eat. Saving the free world makes me ravenous."



Tweeting America's Unsure Future

by *Jonathon Collins*



GUITERMAN IN 2007

BY BARRY McMULLAN

The cannons that fired on KheSanh's steep hills,
Are now children's parks in small jungle vills.
Dien Ben Phu is now just a trace,
Of colonial France's fall from grace.
The former residents of Angkor Watt,
Are not now known from doodley squat.
The jets that bombed Hanoi's harbor,
Are now scissors at the corner barber's.
The Battleship Princeton fires no more,
From the mothball fleet floating at LaMoor.
Bill Westmoreland is up in heaven,
Ho Chi Minh is down there cooking leaven.
Old Indochina is dead and gone,
But Vietnam is still rolling on.
Agent Orange that denuded great forests,
Can't hurt me cause my toes are porridge.

MONDOVILLE

By Will Prince



Sometimes it makes me wonder
If I am just invisible
Always ignored and forgotten
It's as if I blend in
To the backburner of society
Never to be seen again
It infuriates me without end
All the time I spend
Trying to have my voice heard
To no avail in the end

Sometimes I tell myself
It is best to leave
Yet it almost depresses me
When nobody realizes I am gone
I feel isolated and forgotten
An island no man should be
Perhaps I should accept it
The loss of my identity
Perhaps this is a test
That God knows me best
Only when I see myself
Is my mind given rest
For only then I realize
That I am not invisible

Sometimes I reassure myself
This hellish cage in which I'm confined
Will leave soon and I
Can put it behind

That's my drive to succeed
To leave this ridiculous prison
And become a man of importance
So that all can see
Invisible I am not
For I am me

Dying While I'm Dancing

by Oriona Walker

Time runs, it doesn't stop for you or me, as I do my dance.

I do a dance that no one else can do.
To music which no one else can hear.

As my selfish steps are made, you are caught up in agony. But I still dance...

As the music tickles my ears, life is issuing you deathblows, one after another.
But I still dance...

I ever so gently move with the beat, but all the while the waves of trouble are pulling you under. I still dance...

I enjoy the music, love to dance, but I love you even more. I don't want to dance any more, don't want you dying slow
I don't want to hurt any more.

I want to be there for you, so I cut the music off and step away from the dance floor. Please, lean on me and I'll do my best to love you.

Editorial Statement by Joshua Maeda

This issue is a rebirth. For a number of years, the literary journal of Meridian Community College has labored under the clinical, quasi-scientific name of *The Literary Review*. One can imagine a group of fastidious men and women in white coats, disconnected from life by the lure of scientific abstraction, analyzing a poem before inserting it into a formaldehyde-filled jar for safe keeping for semesters to come, for bored students to come. The nefarious implication: the humanities receive their validation to the degree that they approximate the hard sciences. To appropriate a fitting Anglo-Saxon word: *bollocks*. All species participate in processes they will never understand or seem to care to know. However, only the humanities teach that one unique species to rise above the strictly biological, the animalistic, the servile, the mechanical and to look for meaning that transcends its mere material circumstances—our mere material circumstances.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, one of the definitions for “apocalypse” is “[a]ny revelation or disclosure.” We tend to think of apocalypses as necessarily involving the anger of God, pandemic viruses, zombie hordes, and Wi-Fi free zones. Taking a more traditional approach to the word, let us revisit an older understanding of “apocalypse” as a revelation or disclosure. This, however, should provoke the following question: a revealing or disclosing of what? Picking up on the clues already dropped, we know that this is a literary journal. We traffic and trade in words. Our aim is twofold: to enlighten and to delight. We believe that words contain particular meanings, and how well we commune and communicate with others depend on how well we choose the words that we use. Therefore, it follows that this small journal is a quiet apocalypse of sorts; in writing short stories, poems, and essays, we reveal that which makes us truly human: namely, not simply responding to environmental stimuli, we use audible and written and signed symbols in a manner that demonstrates self-awareness and a desire to know, to understand. Each one of us, then, is an apocalypse.

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