

2011

Legacy 2011

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The Legacy

2011

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Editor:

Ashley C. Miller

Assistant Editor:

Leah R. Barnes

Designer:

Curtis Prevo

Copywriter:

Tyler K. Barrows

Editorial Board:

Leah R. Barnes, Prof. Kathy Goddard, Ashley C. Miller

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Contents:

Poetry & Verse

Packing Up Past Lives.....	7
<i>J. L. Barron, a biochemistry major from Chattanooga, Tennessee</i>	
untitled.....	8
Psalm 45:1, or Declaration.....	10
<i>Ashlee Chism, an English major from Michigan City, Indiana</i>	
Streetlight.....	12
<i>Alyssa Nicole Erskine, a biology major from the southeastern mountains of West Virginia</i>	
(poem#1).....	13
(poem#2).....	14
<i>Ashley C. Miller, an English major from Nashville, Tennessee</i>	
Death by Testosterone Poisoning.....	15
<i>Tamara Naja, a nursing major from Bowling Green, Kentucky</i>	
Crushing Futility.....	16
My Jeans.....	17
<i>Olivia Nieb, an English education major from Centerville, Ohio</i>	
Gone.....	18
<i>Chloë A. Perez, an English and international studies major with an emphasis in Spanish from Orlando, Florida</i>	
Experience the unknown.....	19
<i>Kimberly JoElla Solis, a business and engineering major from Phoenix, Arizona</i>	
I miss the sun rising as I wake up.....	20
<i>Brooke Wade, an English education major from Asheville, North Carolina</i>	

Contents:

Short Stories

Carl's Hierarchy of Needs.....	25
<i>Tyler K. Barrows, an English education major from the foothills of North Carolina</i>	
Too Busy for a Heart.....	27
<i>K. R. Boursiquot, a theology and pre-med major from Florida</i>	
Elevator.....	30
<i>Alyssa Nicole Erskine, a biology major from the southeastern mountains of West Virginia</i>	
untitled.....	33
<i>Caitlin Foster, an English major from Chattanooga, Tennessee</i>	
A Son's Goodbye.....	35
<i>Katherine Huddleston, a liberal arts major from Tulsa, Oklahoma</i>	
Brick by Brick.....	37
<i>Janelle Rose Jensena Sundin, an English major from Durham, Maine</i>	
untitled.....	42
<i>Robby Van Arsdale, an English education major from central Missouri</i>	

Part I:
Poetry & Verse

Packing Up Past Lives

J. L. Barrow

She files away the seemingly
Random black-and-white, dusty
Photographs of a past life
Into boxes filled with desperate
Towels.

Gazing at built-in shelves like
She's looking for some lost
Jewel, heirloom; longing for something
To be there to remind her of how great life
Once Was.

She looks through the kitchen,
Tile cold to her bare and wondering
Feet, eyes scavenging horridly for a former
Face to appear and grant her a mere
Smile.

But none are here, and nor
There. She cries herself to
Sleep that night, lying with a plain blanket on
The hard wooden floor, now bare from
Color.

She leaves her experience all packaged up
In what once she called home; her Former
One, she says quietly. She throws the keys, so
Jagged, into the bushes, going go God knows not
Where.

untitled

Asblee Chism

I stare in disbelief; You're kneeled on the floor in front of me,
 Hands ready to take my feet and wash off the dust—
 Oh, why didn't I volunteer? You're too good for this—
 I loudly protest; I'd prefer dirty feet than a dirty Lord.
 Your fingernails caked with the filth from my feet.
 You rebuke me kindly, like You usually do—
 I want to be wholly Yours, so wash more than just my feet!

I close my sleepy eyes; You've kneeled a little ways from me,
 Hands clasped in prayer, and a worried look on Your face—
 Oh, I can't seem to stay awake; You'll do good without me—
 I don't even protest; I'd prefer sleep to supplication,
 For I'm troubled by what You told me, and I just want to forget it.
 You wake me and plead, and it's so unlike You—
 And when I'm awakened by a mob, I flee because I'm afraid.

I glance past the dancing flames; You stand across from me,
 Hands tied; people denounce You, and yet You're as patient as always—
 Oh, can't You calm this storm? You're too good for this—
 I barely protest; I'd prefer living a lie than dying for truth,
 And so I mutter, and curse, and swear that I don't know You.
 Your loving look, Your lack of anger at me at what I've just done, is just like You—
 It breaks my heart, and I go out and weep.

I see the hill; You're on a cross, dying, despite my foolish boasts,
 Hands outstretched, nailed to a tree; but You're as calm as always—
 Oh, why don't You come down? You're too good for this—
 I silently protest; I'd prefer a victor to a victim,
 And I don't understand why You're doing what You're doing.
 You hang there, and die, and it's all by Your choice—
 And I mourn the fact that I've lost my Lord.

I peer into an empty tomb; You're nowhere to be seen; Your
Hands folded the cloths they wrapped You in on Friday, I can tell—
Oh, where can You be? I don't think I'm good enough to know—
I can't protest; I'd prefer to despair than to hope,
Because I know I don't deserve any forgiveness from You—but
Your messengers appear, and send us to You, and You've asked for me by name!
Perhaps I have a reason to hope, for maybe You still love me, after all.

I gaze at You in wonderment; You're standing on the shore,
Hands ready to fix breakfast, and You're ready to fix me—
Oh, why do You ask the hard questions? I'm not good enough to follow You—
I slightly protest; I'd prefer You remember my love than my cowardice.
You rebuke me kindly, like You always have—
And bid me to feed sheep and catch men.

I watch in disbelief; You're rising into the sky,
Hands lifted in benediction, reminding us that You'll send Another—
Oh, I want to go home! But You're good enough to commission me, so
I don't protest; I'd prefer to do Your will than my will—
You will one day look at me, smile, and say
“Well done, My good and faithful servant.”

Psalm 45:1, or Declaration

Ashlee Chism

I know that He's my Savior,
That He's saved me through His blood.
And if He hadn't saved me,
I'd definitely be one with the mud.

I know that He's my Father,
Who died to set me free.
And I'm His beloved daughter
And His love lets me be me.

I know that He is with me
Wherever I shall go—
And He is there to guide me
Through my life's ebb and flow.

I know that He has sent me
To tell about His love,
To be wise just like a serpent
But as harmless as a dove.

I know that He protects me
Though deep vales and stormy seas;
He leads me by still waters
And He feeds me in green leas.

I know that I must tell of Him,
And nothing else will do—
For He's made me whole again
And changed my point of view.

I know that He is coming
To take His people home.
And when we're finally with Him,
We never more shall roam.

Jesus is the best.

Jesus is the best.

I know that I can trust Him,

And that in His arms I rest.

Streetlight

Alysa Nicole Erskine

A passing shadow on an alley wall
Silent tread of barefoot feet
Midnight wanderer skirts the fall
Of a pool of light on a lonely street

No memory lingers to show the way
To whisper the tale of this passerby
Who left no trace but a shadow to play
Beneath the quiet seething sky

(poem#1)

Ashley Miller

and I cant explain why I feel so low,
but me and the ground,
we both know
everything is expansion.
my thoughts root me.
they spread and grow.
I cant lift my heavy head;
the earth is my bed.

(poem#2)

Ashley Miller

Im sick
and forced to stay in bed.
Im going to wilt away—
like a flower;
the sheets are my petals.

Death by Testosterone Poisoning

Tamara Naja

Beneath the primitive moon
they dance around their BMWs
beating their silk tie chests with manicured
fists. They let out a grunting
gurgling howl to the skyscrapers,
proving their worth as men.
With dagger-like ball-point pens
and neanderthalic drool dripping
on their Armani suits, they charge into
the wilderness, hunting for their prey.

Crushing Futility

Olivia Nieb

“He’s so cute and oh, how sweet”
Your mind may whisper with deceit,
But what you tell yourself you feel
You’ll someday know was never real.
Giggling now, you tell your friends
Till intrigue finally, slowly ends.
What you liked, you’ll wish you knew
And why you do the things you do.
You tie straw wrappers up in knots
To guess the contents of his thoughts
And walk to class the longest way
To see his smiling face each day,
But if you knew him, you would see
This was never meant to be.
He doesn’t care if you exist.
Your “subtle” clues have all been missed.
Right now you listen when he talks
And laugh about the way he walks,
But later you won’t really care.
Nothing real was ever there.
You dream and hope and plot and scheme.
You smile, you sigh, you float, you beam.
But who is he, or do you know?
There’s no excuse for acting so.
Just let him be, and by and by,
You’ll realize he was just a guy.

My Jeans

Olivia Nieb

If my jeans have stretch marks on the thighs, it's because I've been eating too much ice cream, not because somebody bleached them to give a stretchy effect.

If my jeans have holes in the knees, it's because I kneel on the carpet to play with toddlers in the nursery, not because someone took scissors to them in an attempt to show more skin.

If my jeans have dirty stains on the legs, it's because I worked construction with my dad this summer and the sawdust soaked in with the sweat, not because an upcoming designer decided that brown dye was "in."

If my jeans have paint on them, it's because I helped to paint a workshop the other week and didn't have any paper towels nearby, not because a factory machine smeared it on strategically.

If my jeans have snags down the leg, it's because I got them caught on some nails when I was working in the trusses of a barn, not because creating a snag is the first step in creating a hole.

If my jeans are faded, distressed, worn out, dirty, and frayed, it's because I have a life, not because I'm cool.

Gone

Chloë A. Perez

Faith. I don't have it.
Is it wrong to cry?
I don't know how.
Oh how I wish I could, I want to—
Can't.
Why? You took all my tears away.

Where did you go?
How can she be so at peace?
No tears fall from her eyes when she speaks of you.
I fight back tears for you,
and I don't even know you.
Who are you? Who *were* you?

Just a little longer...
I would wait,
I could stay, I *want* to stay, this will be my patience.
For you.
For us.
Come back my love.
Please.
Come back to me.

I'll be here.

Experience the unknown

Kimberly JoElla Solis

One

Moment

In our lives

Waiting, hoping

Trying to overcome life's obstacles

Never knowing when the moment may come

We should step up

Take a chance

Change the

World

I miss the sun rising as I wake up

Brooke Wade

I miss the sun rising as I wake up,
Color splashed and sprayed,
Arrayed,
Against a golden sky.

I miss the sun setting late at night,
Color laced and laid,
Portrayed,
Going and coming all at once.

But I know the sun will rise again,
Silence shouted and sounded,
Grounded,
Light bringing forth the day.

And I know the sun will set,
Echos hooted and haunted,
Flaunted,
Becoming memory.

These things all will come again,
Antiques practiced and perfected,
Recollected,
And make the world seem new.

Part II:
Short Stories

Carl's Hierarchy of Needs

Tyler K. Barrows

"Fifteen minutes," Carl thought, "I can make it that long, but I'm certainly not going to be thinking about the lecture."

Carl Maslow was in his Intro to Philosophy class, and Dr. Robins was going over something about post-modernism. . Multiple realities, multiple points of view—Carl understood it from watching movies. But Carl was not thinking about post-modernism. He had stayed up late the night before studying for an exam, the one that he had directly after Intro to Philosophy. Carl had not slept well because he had drunk a lot of coffee so that he would have enough stamina to resist sleep and study. But after he had studied all he had cared to, he could not get to sleep.

The next morning, Carl was very tired, sleeping in a little later than he had planned. When finally he did get out of bed, Carl made a big pot of coffee—bigger than his usual pot. The coffee only made him thirsty, so he drank two glasses of water and some orange juice.

After some last-minute cramming for a quiz in English Literature and plotting some essay points for his test after Intro to Philosophy, Carl was off to class.

The morning passed as it normally did on Mondays. He had to walk briskly across campus from British Literature to Intro to Philosophy, enjoying a conversation about Mary Shelley with a fellow student who happened to be in his Intro to Philosophy class as well.

Ordinarily, Carl liked his philosophy class as well as his professor, but today Carl could only think of one thing.

"There are several realities that begin at the point of departure. Suppose if Carl got up and walked out of class right at this minute," Dr. Robins said.

Carl perked up. Everyone was looking at him. All he wanted to do was run out of the room.

"Of course, he wouldn't do that," Dr. Robins said lightly.

"But I really, really want to," Carl screamed inside.

"Hypothetically, Carl could stand up, walk out of class, and bump into a girl in a red dress, and Carl might ends up eventually marrying her. Would that have ever happened if he hadn't walked out of class?" Dr. Robins asked.

"You should do it," the guy in front of him said.

“WHY DON’T I?” Carl screamed inside.

Dr. Robins unscrewed her water bottle and took a long sip. Some of the water caressed her face as it dripped to the floor. After wiping her face, she said, “We can never know.”

Carl began thinking about the two realities in a caffeinated stupor, tapping his left leg quickly, nervously. Ten minutes, then five minutes—he watched the clock waiting for his opportunity to get out of that classroom. Why didn’t he take that opportunity? That’s all he had been thinking about since the beginning of class. It would only take five minutes, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. It would be rude.

Finally, the class ended, and Carl darted for the door.

“Go and find her!” a classmate yelled. Carl heard him in retrospect. He heard the voices of classmates and Dr. Robins lecture played over and over in his mind after he got out of the restroom and saw some guy holding a psychology textbook in his arms as he was talking to a brunette in a red dress.

Too Busy for a Heart

K. R. Boursiquot

My name is Gee Owe Dee. Call me Gee Owe for short. I make hearts for a living—brand new ones. Heart-making and heart-planting is amazing. It never seems to get old, but the hearts themselves tend to if not taken care of properly. But honestly, I sometimes wish I didn't have to ask. To make a heart, I ask no one, but when it comes time to plant it, I have to. Still, I ask while not asking, and it works—sometimes.

Skipping with exuberance, I went right out to meet my first friend. Arriving punctually, I saw that he, along with his family, was moving big rocks round their homes; the property seemed hurricane-stricken. The family's joy was as void as my shadow. Then as one of the rocks fell from his back, the rest of his load collapsed, and he yelled out in frustration.

"Need a heart, Mr. Ant?" I said rushing to reassemble the rocks.

"Gee Owe!" he said as a smile conquered that face of destitute. "I think a hand would be better; it's been so long!"

"Not too long." I smiled as I had already placed all the rocks in their places around the house, and before they all knew what happened I snapped my fingers and their house was repaired. I then placed my right arm around his neck as we entered his home. "Mr. Ant a good hand is strong sometimes, but a good heart is stronger, always." I spent the rest of the day at his home having enjoyed lunch and dinner with them. He enjoyed the heart and accepted all the complications that would follow. In a week, the Ant family would have come up with a plan to fight world hunger. The complications were as expected—that was on Sunday.

My next appointment was on Friday. When I arrived I couldn't see much because a cloud of dust covered me completely. The dust was accompanied with the ground rumbling. Then, I fell straight to the ground as a massive form ran me over. The figure remained over me for a second and then disappeared. I got up and brushed myself off, wondering where Lion was.

The dust cloud began to settle, and I could see the form stomping towards me. "Don't you know you're not supposed to be here around this time?!" It was Lion. "Noon is always my time to hunt. I am Lion! Who then, must you be?" I couldn't help smiling.

"No need to hunt grass, if you run on it wherever you go, or the trees that stand out everywhere."

"What are you saying? I hunt animals. I need . . ."

“A heart?”

“No, I need meat of deer, antelope, and the like.” He couldn’t remove that puzzled look on his face. “What’s a heart? Does it taste good?” I said no and explained the mechanics of a heart and its universal need. Interestingly, he was interested and deeply moved by it.

“How soon can I have one?”

“Well, it can take as short as a second to as long as years.” I was testing his pulse.

“Alright! Well then, I will be waiting Mr . . .” he started as he realized he didn’t know my name.

“Just call me Gee Owe.”

When I left Africa, I went to Europe to spend a sabbatical. I saw this man in Opportunity Restaurant whose coat’s lapel was quite reminiscent of a lion’s mane; our tables were parallel. He then got up and left.

“Excuse me, sir.” I said, catching up with him outside. He stopped walking and looked back.

“Well,” I said, “you forgot your heart.” The philosopher came out of him, questioning what a heart is. Then, he was a politician fighting for the freedom of choice. Before I knew it, he was sounding like a doctor explaining how hearts work.

“Do you have one?” I asked.

“My heart is inferior to my brain.” Man! My heart was shaken deeply as I felt the absence of his—I wanted to give him mine. Such a man was everything—an intellectual, a philosopher, physician, scientist, you name it—, but he was not a man with a heart.

“Love to chat some more, sir, but I’ve got a particular obstacle,” he said as he looked at his watch. “Trying to close a deal with Mother Nature.” With that, a car pulled up, and as he was entering I had to beg.

“The strength one needs to conquer that which is outside, flows from inside. A heart of stone is hard, not strong. But a heart of flesh is strong yet soft. Such a heart I have for you. Please take it!” He was already in the car, and as he drove off he lowered the night tinted window and shook his head with a smirk. Besides his heart, he really did leave something—a black-stripped, white handkerchief with initials KZ.

A week later I came back home to America. A day before I had to deliver Lion’s heart, and all the news channels were talking of one thing—an activist named Lion. Lion pushed for vegetarianism, equality, feeding the hungry, and

against extinction in the animal kingdom. It was said that every day at noon he would go sit upon a rock alone. When asked why, he said he was waiting for a heart. The lines of a smile marked my tear-stained face as I walked out to the porch to read the paper. Surely they would have something on Lion also. It read, "An Obituary Headline". A picture of Lion sitting on a rock was there. I quickly tore the article with eager eyes.

"Lion died of heart failure from a poison-tipped bullet," the necropsy showed. Sadly they found Lion without his mane. But beside his head was a black-striped, white handkerchief with the initials KZ on it.

I wept.

Elevator

Alysa Nicole Erskine

The girl blinks, walking in from the sunlight to a dark lobby. There are starburst aftereffects, clouding her vision—even so, she deftly slides around the corner half blinded and strides rapidly towards the elevators. Both doors stand open.

A man—perhaps young, perhaps not—stands in front of the elevators a dozen feet away, facing in the opposite direction. His body angles away from her; it indicates his disinterest even more than his lack of movement. She doesn't really look at him, only registers that he is not in her way and is not heading for the open doors that are her destination.

Her shoulder curves, her foot takes the step to lead her towards the elevator, and he turns to look at her, sending her sudden waves of attention and intention.

—cold sweat—

she doesn't look back, but she feels it in a shudder down her spine—and her heart sinks. She's on the elevator now and pushes the button, wills the doors to close, wills him not to appear, watches the "4" light up on the bank of lights

—he'll see it—

apprehensively watches the doors pause an eternity, slowly slide almost shut until a shoulder shoves between them, almost too late to make it, but he does and he's on, and she asks him what floor; can't stop being polite, but now she feels irrational panic

—always knew the doors would open if you were caught between them—

silently curses the lit button that tells him where she's going. He looks at the bank of lights, the telltale bright circle, and replies "four" but she barely registers it except as affirmation she doesn't want, already caught up in furious rationalizing. And yet, her rational shudders under the heavy scrutiny from the corner of the elevator, insisting that his intentions are screaming a warning

—I don't know how I know I'm right, but I do—

elevator rises and she keeps a tight rein on the panic that still blooms where it began the second he looked at her, and she sees his subtle intent body language, she knows what happens next and there is rage with the fear

—hellfire and damnation—

slides her hand down in her bag, fits her few keys through her fingers, clenches her fist to test the grip. Already she is nerving herself for the impact of bone on bone, the smooth quick motions she knows so well. The shoulder bag is the first thing that will go, to free her arms—if time permits, straight at his face. Silently she reviews the training—how to put your body into a swing to get maximum impact, how to defend if attacked from behind

—thank you Max—

and the elevator stops

—it has only been ten seconds—

and the doors open. She hesitates; she knows he won't move first, doesn't want to force the issue, walks out, takes the third hall. Behind her, perhaps ten feet, he follows. She curses the silent carpet, checks his position with the mirrored surface of her phone as they move. He maintains the distance and she maintains her pace, stifles the urge to run. She passes doors—so does he. Only ten more feet left

—only my door and the fire escape left—

and no more doubt now about the danger, only fear she'll screw this up. Her hand hangs down, forgotten, keys extended, as she plans her response

—Father don't let me forget what to do—

the adrenaline begins to flow down her fingers; she stops planning stops thinking stops everything but movement and just listens

—red and silver hell, he's still moving—

and her key is in the door, it's turning, and she's tense because this is the most dangerous part; the door cracks open and she sings out "Hey, Mary!", praying that Mary is actually there

—please somebody please be here—

and the door is closing behind her with a crash, because all doors here open and close like the crack of doom but she's safe, and has to shake out the adrenaline, or maybe she just shakes, and rubs out the key prints on her palms.

Much later, she will wonder why it never occurred to her to scream.

As her heartbeat dies to a steady rhythm, she stares at the closed door in the stillness. There is one more door across the hall that he could have taken, one reason to be on fourth that didn't include her; this reason didn't warrant the

sweat chilling on her neck or her anger or the fear of what she had to do. And so she waits, half expecting the crash of the other door and the assurance that her panic was unnecessary, that she was actually safe in that eternity of fear.

She listens for the next few minutes, but nothing disturbs the quiet of the hall. Far away, an elevator hums.

untitled

Caitlin Foster

I don't know that I had a terribly vivid imagination as a kid, but I was both suspicious and paranoid. I liked knowing exactly what to expect and having explanations for things I didn't understand. That being said, I was shy of adults and didn't particularly like to ask questions that I thought might be obvious. This left me with little else to do when I discovered a mystery during recess but investigate for myself.

There were two major mysteries that existed on my grade-school playground: The Mystery of the Red Colored Wood in the Mulch Pile on the upper playground and The Mystery of the Missing Fence on the lower. My two best friends served as my sidekicks in these operations that I was obviously the leader of. Jake liked to think of himself as an intellectual, but one who liked NASCAR and pro-wrestling. He got all A's, and the teachers were always fond of him, except for when he constantly interrupted their questions with the answers. Caden made me laugh and let me boss him around. The teachers were less fond of him, as he was the class clown.

After weighing the danger of each, I decided that the mulch pile mystery was definitely the inferior one. Caden's conclusion of MURDER, because of the presence of reddish wood chips, just seemed too obvious. And frankly, his later addition of the escaped zoo gorilla seemed silly.

"There is no wood that is red! Look around! All the trees are brown! THERE HASTO BE A BODY SOMEWHERE," and then he furiously dug into the huge mountain of wood and dirt. Jake scoffed.

"What about REDWOOD trees?" he asked. Caden shook his head, still digging.

"This wood is TOO red. Too red for anything but MURDER." He gave up digging soon, however, and we bounced around on top of the pile until the teachers told us to get down before we hurt ourselves.

The fence mystery captured my imagination for almost two years. It was perhaps more intriguing because of its lack of evidence of foul play, unlike the red wood chips in the mulch pile. One day a panel of the chain-link fence surrounding the lower playground and separating it from the patch of woods at the back of the school was there, and the next it wasn't. The panel beside it appeared twisted, the pole half out of the ground and the wire poking out the sides. It was all very suspicious.

“Maybe it was a wild boar. My dad read about a wild boar in North Georgia that got up to like 100 pounds,” Jake informed us as we examined the gate. This was Caden’s turn to scoff.

“ONE HUNDRED pounds? Have you seen pigs? They are definitely not that big,” he informed Jake. None of us had very much perspective on the weights of boars or pigs.

Eventually interest in the gate died down, but I would glance at it every so often, with its strange gaping entrance into the woods, and wonder. Finally I decided that I would never know. A few weeks before summer after third grade, I saw the school janitor replacing the panel and concluded that it must have been a routine maintenance thing.

OR WAS IT?

A Son's Goodbye

Katherine Huddleston

The rusted lock groans in protest as I pull the old damaged barn door open. Instantly, my heart feels swollen with bittersweet moments I had shared with him here amongst the power tools and heavy machinery. I am baffled how the farm can still exist without him here. To him, these acres of Texas dirt and grass were a more glorious paradise than Eden. The cattle that moseyed clumsily across his fields were more magnificent than the Archangel himself. And yet, a dark year has stolen by since his passing, and this well-weathered barn still stands with sagging window panes creating a sorrowful brow, as if she waits for her beloved farmer to return home on a pair of rugged Dodge wings.

I was his son. The old farmer was my rock, my dictator, and my boss. I was his son, and he was my father. *Can I still call myself a son now that he is a year buried under his cold gravestone; or is that title lost along with his looming presence over my shoulder?*

My melancholy reflections come to a pause as I watch the dust specks waltz in the slanting yellow sunlight. I glance towards the far left corner where his sweat-blackened Stetson still hangs, forsaken on the corner of his corroded workbench.

His cherished John Deere tractor sits patiently among the ruins. The tractor's threadbare driver's seat squeaks as the springs give to my weight, reminding me of the blistering southern sun that tanned his arms and shoulders as he and I would toss heavy hay bales into the storeroom. A spider's web loops around the gearshift, guarding the memories that threaten to roar to life if I were to start the engine. I dare not turn the key, choosing instead to shield myself against the agony of my childhood nostalgia and remember him as he was after the disease took on the offensive—when he realized that his time was quickly running out. I choose to remember him as the repentant man he became as the cancer poisoned his organs and not as the tyrant of my younger years.

I decide to forget the whippings and the cutting remarks.

Instead I choose to remember him as the loving grandfather to my own two children. I will remember the sound of his deep laugh as he held his four-year-old granddaughter and taught her how to drive his tractor without hitting the fence posts. I will remember his sun-spotted hands that held my son as they cheered the Dallas Cowboys on to yet another well-deserved victory.

My slow and heavy movements stir the air, making the smells of oil, rust, manure, and the faintest hint of tobacco surround me in the embrace I never

received from my father's strong battle-scarred arms. The smell was a characteristic of him that brings on the most potent onslaught of memories. It would permeate his work shirts. His boots were forever tarred in Lone Star dirt that never could be knocked off.

The past fades into a black and white fog as the present and my own son call out to me. I utter a farewell to my father's cattle-trodden world as I walk towards the ominous doorframe.

The weathered barn door groans as I shut it one last time, and approach my son who leans casually against the bed of my pickup truck. As my steps make a sweet harmony, I send up a small prayer that I have been a better father to my own son. I pray that the love for my own precious child is enough to save the both of us from history repeating itself.

Brick by Brick

Janelle Rose Jensena Sundin

He was born on April 20, 1889. That was the year the earthquake came, but the earthquake was the only remarkable thing that happened that year. There was nothing particularly remarkable about him, either. Like many babies, he had downy dark hair and that innocent look of wonder and surprise that makes them endearing. He wasn't even the first in his family—in fact, he was the fourth of six—and, like many middle children, he usually kept to the shadows. Life was simply easier that way.

As he grew, his innocence disappeared bit by bit—beaten out of him by his father. More than ever, the boy learned to hide, wrapping the shadows around him like a blanket. Before long, his eyes lost both their surprise and their wonder—except when he stopped to wonder how life could be so cruel.

Because he was so quiet and shy, he had great difficulty making friends, which was probably for the best because his family moved too often to form long-lasting bonds, anyway. Wherever they went, he was soon hated, and soon he learned to carry his darkness with him. Children can be unspeakably cruel to those who are different.

He would have given up on everything were it not for the priest. One of his family's many moves planted him right across from a Benedictine monastery, and in that place, the boy saw a small glimmer of hope. His mother made him attend the school the monastery ran, and some days, after school, he went to the courtyard and sat with the old priest who tended to the garden. The tradition had begun one day when the boy had heard his father come home and knew he had just a few minutes to hide.

He had rushed outside and across the street without thinking, taking cover behind the great wall around the monastery's courtyard. He could hear his father yelling at first, but eventually that terror was silenced by the sound of a raspy old voice humming the tune of some half-forgotten melody. Years of watching from the sidelines kept him glued to the wall, but he summoned enough courage to reach up on his toes and peek over it. The priest noticed him after a while and, twisting his wrinkles into a tired smile, invited him over the wall.

“Hello, young lad,” the priest said. “Would you like to help?”

And so the boy did. He began to relish the moments he spent with the kind old man who liked to sing no matter how off-key his voice was and who never had much to say. Having a little patch of garden to tend to made him want to tend to even more things, and soon he was doing well in school. In time,

he joined the boys' choir and began to make friends his own age. It was an exhilarating experience—one he had never had before. For the first time in his life, the boy felt like he belonged.

He had a fine singing voice, so he was told, and he loved to sing the mass. He felt uplifted in church, as though nothing—not even his father—could touch him there. The boy dreamed of becoming a man of God—a priest like his teachers. Most of all, he wanted to be the Abbott: stern but kind. For two years, he practiced long sermons and marching around attending to business like the Abbott did.

Then on the day he turned nine, everything changed. Some of his new friends had begun to take up smoking and getting into mischief, doing things the boy would never dream of doing, just for the thrill of being naughty. They always asked him to come along, and each time, the boy found it a much harder task of saying “No.” As much as he wanted to please God in his future, he needed to please his friends now. When Karl and the others pulled him outside after class, he knew what was coming and resolved to try it—whatever it was—just once.

Karl pulled out a pack of cigarettes, probably stolen from his father. The boy gulped and swallowed hard as he passed the box around. When it came to him, he took one. Someone produced a match, and the boy held his cigarette out to be lit, mimicking the others. He held it away from him for a few moments, watching everyone else and trying not to cough from the smoke. Finally, he closed his eyes, counted to ten, and lifted it to his mouth. He breathed in and tried to ignore the searing, raw pain that burned his chest. He gagged and choked and coughed. When he had recovered, he tried again with similar results. He tried again. And again. And again. He *had* to master this. Slowly, he began to breathe easier. His chest still ached, but it was far less painful than before. He was just drawing on his cigarette again when the Abbott stomped up to him.

“Take that abominable thing out of your mouth!” The Abbott screamed at him, flinging the cigarette to the ground and grinding it with his heel. “You should be ashamed of yourself!”

Yet the boy was not ashamed. He was angry. All his life, he had tried to become like everyone else, and all his life, it had failed. Now, just when he had finally mastered the solution, it was ripped from him and ground into the dirt. He stood quietly as the Abbott rebuked him, but in his heart, he summoned the rage and frustration he had felt all his life and used it to begin a wall that would be high and thick and impossible to climb.

He never preached a sermon again.

In time, he became the ringleader, daring the others to new feats of mischief that even Karl had been too scared to try. He learned to fight and used it

to his advantage. His temper grew quick and sharp as the months went by. Soon he had developed a bit of a gang. The wall went up brick by brick.

His family moved again, but this time, he took his new attitude with him—this new form of darkness that was thicker and better at hiding things than his shadows had been. This time, making friends was easier, and soon he was in charge again.

School was easy, and it bored him, but instead of trying to impress his teachers as he once had, he turned his mind to finding new things to do with his gang. Higher and higher the wall rose. Darker and darker the shadows fell.

One day, one of his friends gave the boy a book about the great old American West. He read it, and when he had finished, he read another. He loved the drama and the fight of it, and soon he had the gang playing war games. He always fought the Redskins. When the West grew old, he turned his attention to the Boer War. He loved the determination of the underdogs and refused to be anything but one of the Boers. Yet unlike the Boers, he always won.

The rest of the gang grew tired of the war games eventually, but the boy refused to cave to their demands. *He* never grew tired of the battles, so he simply got new boys. The system worked beautifully until the day his six-year-old brother Edmund got sick. They said it was measles. Of course, this new enemy was not a problem to the boy. He battled each new stage of the disease, refusing to accept defeat. Unlike the deaths in his war games, however, one day Edmund would not wake up, no matter how much the boy insisted. The boy had to watch as his brother crept over the wall and into the darkness.

Edmund was buried in the cemetery next to the family house, and the boy often found himself staring out there, remembering his brother and hearing the blast of the guns in his daydreams. Those were some of the few times he felt as small and afraid as he had been before and wished for his cold, comforting blanket of the shadows. His heart-wall crumbled a little sometimes, when he remembered, but he knew better than to let it fall. In time, he rebuilt it bigger and stronger than ever. The shadows lengthened.

The light and the open were not yet finished with the boy, however. The lamps had not *quite* gone out.

Sometimes, when the boy was bored in class, he drew. He was very good at it. In fact, he could draw just about anything exactly as it looked, even from memory. He especially liked drawing architecture. Even as he gloried war and violence, some small part of him dreamed of becoming an artist—someone good, someone who could capture the beauty he saw around him on paper and preserve it.

His father had different ideas. “An artist? Bah!” His father had said when the boy shared his dream. “You should be so lucky! Only fools and sluggards refuse to work an honest day for an honest day’s living.”

Still, the boy dreamed.

He went to technical school as his father wished, but he still refused to bow to another person’s will. He did poorly—deliberately. He thought his father would see the error of his ways, but instead he was just kept back a year and forced to live the nightmare again. Up and up the brick wall rose, shutting out the light.

And then his father died, and the boy needed to become a man almost overnight. Yet he refused to grow up. He became even more domineering over his gang, talked back to teachers, and gloried in the chaos he could create. His teachers hated him.

When he was sixteen, he left school for good. For some reason, though, he decided not to be ignorant. As the boy became a man against his will, he read many strange and interesting things. He used them to create his own reality separate from the one people had tried to force on him over the years. His heart-wall grew higher still.

The boy-man became the hero of his own imaginary world, a world where right always triumphed and where people were free to dream. He kept his hope of being an artist alive, and one day he decided to fulfill that dream. He applied to art school.

He was rejected. And for the first time in his life, that rejection was not something he could pretend away. His wall was almost complete. The light was quickly waning.

Then his mother died. She had had cancer, and nothing the boy-man or her doctors did or dreamed could stop it. He could only watch her growing pain in horror. His heart-wall just needed a few more bricks to block out the dreadful light.

He took to the streets of Vienna, refusing to get one of those demeaning jobs his father had tried to force on him. Occasionally he sold a painting, but he did not bother to work at it. He dreamed great dreams, building an even more fantastic world than he had before—a world where no one he loved would die of cancer or disease or deformity.

Then the war started. It was, of course, the “War to End all Wars,” and the boy-man decided to be at the center of it. He volunteered for the most dangerous missions, documented the war in his art, and bore his wounds without complaint. When the war ended and all was lost, his wall was complete, and there

was no more light.

“There followed terrible days and even worse nights,” he wrote in his book. “I knew that all was lost. In these nights hatred grew in me, hatred for those responsible for this deed.”

The world around him was nothing but defeat and pain, and he could no longer live with it. He decided to be the change he wanted to see in the world—he dedicated his entire life to it. His dream was no longer his escape. It was his life. His name was Adolf Hitler, and he would rock the world.

*Born crippled in body and spirit,
He changed the face of the world.
Among all the hearts he broke
And lives he ended far too young
Were his own heart
And his own life.
May he find peace.*

-Orson Scott Card, *Shadow Puppets*

untitled

Robby Van Arsdale

He took his happiness and pulled it out of himself. It felt like a sneeze coming out his middle. He rolled it up in his hands, just as tight as could be. It glowed with a gentle pulse that beat in time with his heart. He handed it to her. It was hers to keep.

She ate it to keep it close forever. It dissolved into her until her veins pulsed with the light and the joy that he gave her. Their pulses alternated so that there was never a moment when either was still.

She took her sadness and pulled it out of herself. It felt like a band aid getting ripped off. She wadded it up and shoved it at him. He caught it and carefully rolled it out and smoothed it. He wrapped it around himself until it covered him and absorbed into his skin. Whenever he bumped into something, whenever someone touched him, whenever he fell down, flakes of sadness rolled off of him like snow. They were black to see and purple to touch, and they got onto everything and wouldn't come off.

She was happy. He was sad.

They both wanted it that way.

