

Adoxography

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2. fine writing on a trivial or base subject.
3. beautiful writing with little or no importance.

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A collection of writings by students in Carol Spindel's
Spring 2013 Campus Honors Program RHET 243 course.

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Foreword

Adoxography is the practice of writing skillfully on trivial subjects.

As we started to put together this anthology, we felt that this was exactly what we were doing: writing about things that were significant to us but seemed to be trivial on a larger scale.

As we organized them, we started to recognize some commonalities between our works: the strong association between our lives and work or place, the importance of relationships, and the need for a little humor.

We hope you enjoy the meaning we have found amongst all these trivial subjects.

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Rejection

by Matt Yang

Dear Matthew C. Yang,

It is with apathy that I send this automatically generated message to inform you that we are unable to offer you admission to the freshman class at ____ University. Please know that we are obligated to say that this decision does not reflect on you any deficiency or weakness as a person, even though we both know that this result is the direct product of your own incompetence. We will continue to use this facade of moderate admiration for your academic ability throughout the remainder of this letter.

We appreciate the amateur writing skills demonstrated in your application and want to assure you that your candidacy received thorough and serious consideration. This decision should in no way detract from your almost non-existent self-esteem; due to an exponentially growing application pool for a comparatively small incoming class, we must inevitably disappoint a vast majority of our applicants each year while simul-

taneously bolstering the ego of your more competent classmates who considered this school a safety pick.

You should know that we arrive at all admission decisions by way of an exhaustive committee review process. As a result, all application decisions are final, and we are unable to consider appeals of any kind, including the aggressive inquisition of your parents. For the outraged or desperate, answers to some of the most commonly asked questions regarding our admission process may be found here. I know these will be unable to address the emotional distress you may have. I would also like to remind you that you had the opportunity to cheat on the Standardized Achievement Tests or lie about your credentials in the essays and Common Application like your now more successful peers.

We understand that this letter may cause emotional trauma for some and, for that reason, we will not send a duplicate notification of this decision by mail to disintegrate under your tears.

Matthew, out of courteous obligation, I wish you the very best.

Sincerely,

Don T. Carey
Dean of Admission and Financial Aid

Topophilia

1. great love or affection for a particular place.
2. a strong sense of cultural identity attached to a place.

Places

On Stage

by Erik Elmgren

Standing behind the door waiting to go on stage is the worst part of performing. These doors are heavy and impressive constructs, built to block the sound outside the auditorium from leaking in. For minutes, which feel like hours, I stand behind the door and wait with only my nerves to keep me company. It opens silently on greased hinges and by the time I walk through it, the worst of the experience is over.

In the moments that immediately precede the entrance onto the stage, emotions shift rapidly as I try in vain to keep my nerves in check. This mess of nervous feelings always rears its ugly head no matter how much preparation I have put into the concert. One of the most unique mixes of emotions I feel before a performance is nervous energy doing cartwheels in my stomach, and yet at the same time, wanting nothing more than to take a nap. I have learned from teachers different methods of how to deal with nervousness, from breathing exercises to yoga and from drinking apple juice to eating a banana. Although, every musician

swears by his or her own method, I realized quickly that what matters is having a routine. Sitting backstage before any concert I witness a wide variety of these routines: some sit quietly, others talk themselves up, some exercise to raise their energy level, and others pace endlessly. Despite all the different practices, the end goal is always the same: to be ready for the walk out onto the stage and the pressure that comes with it.

On stage, the pressure does not let up. The audience hears every nervous step, sees every sweaty palm wiped on the leg of my pants. Any way I try to hold my instrument feels awkward even if it is not any different from how I hold it normally. However, once I start playing, all the nerves disappear. My stomach's gymnastics cease and my need for a nap goes away. In some inexplicable way, the music distracts my body and mind from the nerves that made the last few minutes a roller coaster of emotions. Performing on stage is not the difficult part of being a musician. The difficult part is the wait before walking through the door. That long silence backstage is a lonely proceeding, accompanied only by my own expectations of the impending performance and the nerves they generate. A musician's art entails sharing stories and emotions with other people. Therefore, I am not surprised that most musicians, myself included, cannot walk through that door fast enough. We are most comfortable sharing our music, not keeping it to ourselves.

Dune

by Ryan Thier

The July morning was already hot as we set out for the Indiana Dunes. Driving from the southwest side to the West Beach involves little more than hopping on 80-94 and riding it east, over the state line, through Gary, and finally taking an exit and hooking a left on a two-lane county highway. That stretch of 80 showcases the south side's gritty industrial background; it vaults over a quarry and meanders through the industrial parks, with a forest of billboards along the way advertising used car dealerships, discount legal advice, and "gentlemen's" clubs. From Lansing to Gary, the whole world is concrete and asphalt. Exiting was a relief. As we drove north, the flatland of the highway turned into gently rolling hills.

The parking lot was crowded at West Beach. We weren't the only ones trying to escape the heat by means of the lake. Burdened with coolers, towels, and backpacks, we set out on a short trek to find an isolated stretch of beach, a secluded place to be loud without being a bother. The shore curved visibly northwards

as we looked to the west, where the smoke stacks of Gary's steel mills were visible, stout and blocky against the horizon. Having walked and settled in, we promptly went to the lake. We spent most of the afternoon swimming and snacking.

Shortly after dinner, we decided to explore the dunes proper. In trunks and sandals, we crested the small ridge next to the beach and looked for an objective. Our next destination was immediately apparent: a giant lone dune, standing like a champion amongst his lesser brothers. While making our way to the base, the Marram grass scratched and pulled at our legs. The climb to the top was long and steep, and we felt the sand-grit work its way in between our toes. Once on the summit, we had a magnificent view of Lake Michigan, blue and vast under the sky. On the other side, we had a great view of the parking lot. That reminder of the rest of the world made us value our momentary isolation; we felt like the only inhabitants of a pristine, shining world. As we sat, two dot-people appeared far away on top of another, smaller dune. For some reason, they started hallooing and cheering at us. One of our number started whooping and cheering back. Suddenly we all were, all of us roaring from the summit of the dune, roaring with joy that came from nowhere, or else from the sand and sky themselves. One of us started running, and in a moment we all were, all of us flying down the dune.

In one shot we were over the ridge and on the

beach. The sun was setting, and the lake and sky were all blue and gold, with the reflections of the ripples nearly blinding us. The world dripped with light. We waded out into the lake. Josh and I started laughing, unable to explain why, but knowing everyone felt the same. Even the smoke stacks of Gary looked beautiful, backlit by the swollen sun. We tried hard to describe the feelings we experienced, but the closest we came was, “We were ecstatic.” We all still remember that sprint down the dune. I haven’t experienced that feeling so strongly before and haven’t since, but I hope it comes again. When it does, I know I’ll remember the highway, the lake, and the dune.

Flailing

by Richard Vachula

The steady breeze made me shiver. I didn't want to get in that damned lake any more than they did, but I had to act like it was an ordinary summer day. I had to wear my mask of enthusiasm or they'd never swim, so I yelled, "Instructional swim, get changed and meet on the dock!" like it was 85 degrees with a baking sun. Their groans and whines made that group of ten-year-olds sound like a retirement home lounge.

After fifteen minutes of shepherding, the whole class of eighteen was seated on the dock with their toes arched away from the seemingly arctic lake below. My co-counselors and I looked at each other with searching eyes. We always kind of hoped one of us would buckle on cold days like those. We started the warm-ups: twenty jumping jacks, ten pushups, ten arm circles, forward and backward, left and right. The routine was like clockwork.

As the suspense of the impending plunge mounted, little Bryan Wilson, with his big bug eyes, presented his daily objection; "I'm not getting in that

water.”

As usual, the others became infected with rebellion:

“I’m sick!”

“There’s an ice cube in the lake!”

“I think I have hypothermia!”

While it sounds like malicious abuse to make children swim in such weather, it was warm enough. The thermometer hanging off the edge of the dock told us, and so had our boss. Even if we didn’t want to admit it ourselves we’d all be swimming soon enough. We started the countdown.

“Five!”

Nobody budged.

“Four!”

They exchanged querying looks.

“Three!”

The weakest five buckled and flailed themselves in.

“Two!”

Another twelve followed.

“One!”

Only Bryan Wilson remained. He was always the last one into the water; he shivered and sobbed himself into a gyrating froth on the dock. We told him what we told him every day; that the air was colder than the water, that it would only be for a few minutes, and that his grandparents had sent him to camp to learn how to swim. After a few seconds he finally decided to

jump in.

We looked at each other in disbelief; it was the first time in three weeks that Bryan had jumped into the lake! Every day, the other campers would hop in while Bryan would curl up in a ball on the dock and refuse. In moments of frustration, we had all dreamed of rolling him right in, but that would have been just the reason his Oppositional Disorder needed to make us tyrants in his eyes. What had changed? We had spent days trying to persuade that kid to stand in water up to his ankles, and now he was bobbing up and down with all of the others! After the initial shock faded, we had a tremendous feeling of triumph. Finally, in a low paying job that dragged on with each day, a ten-year-old struggling to stay afloat made it all worthwhile.

Nameless

by Matt Yang

To survive the war zone of IMSA, a selective mathematics and science boarding school, we students need sanctuaries. Perhaps yours was Buffalo Wild Wings, where you witnessed Phil Ivy's defeat at the World Series of Poker with your buddies, or the Fountain of Youth, the suite where you pulled all-nighters with four mischievous game addicts. As for me, I fell in love with the nameless hill obscured by the tall grass of No Pond.

In the aftermath of the notorious 2011 blizzard that piled on snow so deep that the school prohibited unaccompanied excursions out of our dormitory, sledding was inevitable. One windy evening, my friends and I raced to the top, bearing our clumsy vehicles that were more like large plastic Frisbees. Snow pelted our faces as we tore downward, two to a sled. One pair got stuck in the snow immediately after starting. Some drifted too far, shattering branches as No Pond's trees brought them to a noisy halt. Somebody proposed the brilliant idea of bringing the whole group down simultaneously, linking the sleds together with a few people lying across the laps of the riders. Seconds after we began our synchronized descent, the chain broke at two points, launching three

guys unceremoniously down the hill. An unmanned sled drifted towards my own, causing me to veer off at an awkward angle. My grip failed and I tumbled down the hill like a log. Laughter exploded from our chilly faces. We gathered up our stuff and trekked back, only to be intercepted by Kirby, the strict Resident Counselor of 1503. She ranted on about how we were too loud and how we were disturbing our peers, before escorting us back to our respective dormitories so that our own RC could administer the appropriate punishment. When we returned to 1507, our RC simply smiled and reminded us to be quieter next time. In an institution that seems to do everything it can to spiritually constrict you, it was refreshing to have somebody empathize with a bunch of kids trying to have some fun. It made it all the more disappointing to hear that at the end of the year, he would leave IMSA.

A year and two months later, dozens of seniors walked over the hill, bearing unbroken glow sticks. It was 8:30 PM. The absolute darkness of the fields surrounding the campus intimidated me. We quickly shuffled into formation, with me sitting at the bottom of a "P". Persistent shushing gradually silenced our murmuring and giggling. We cracked the glow sticks and hid them in our pockets, waiting for the signal, eyes fixed on the top of the hill. Minutes later, we could make out the silhouettes of a couple at the top, facing each other. Suddenly, the boy raised his arms, and we lifted our glowing hands in response. She stood in awe for a moment, then embraced him. Though I wished I could have seen the spectacle from where they stood, his proud smile and her overjoyed reaction were satisfaction enough. As the crowd dissipated, I kept imag-

ining how it looked: hundreds of modest glow sticks fending off the darkness, reminiscent of the rebellious, sparkling electronic rock of Coldplay's Mylo Xyloto.

As the year began to wind down, I grew restless. Trapped between the student body flailing their egos around in the wake of college admissions results, the overwhelming documentation required for my research project, and the onset of senioritis, I needed a retreat. IMSA describes itself as a learning laboratory, and like any lab rat, I wanted to break free from the windowless classrooms. I started to ditch classes to return to my sanctuary, so I could stand upon it, arms extended, pretending the wind could carry me aloft as I yearned to escape to the carefree clouds above.

Elmo

by Ryan Thier

The lobby of Great Clips was cool and dim after walking across the asphalt parking lot in the August afternoon sunlight. Application in hand, I asked for the manager and shook her hand. I was excited, alert, and a bit nervous; I had just started my first real job interview. It didn't have to be more than two questions: Can you handle standing for three hours in a hot synthetic suit? Do you have the bodily capability of flailing about in some semblance of dancing? If YES to both, congratulations! Welcome, new Elmo-suit-wearing, sandwich-board-brandishing employee of Great Clips. But my soon-to-be-boss wanted to be proper, so she listened dutifully as I answered my way through her questions about my qualifications and skills. Having secured the position, I strode out to the busiest corner in our average suburban city, bedecked in full-body Elmo suit, complete with giant red head (They didn't actually have the rights to use Elmo. Nonetheless, everyone called it the Elmo suit, nobody mistook it for anything but Elmo, and the little slips of receipt paper

that accompanied my \$24 cash for each shift all said RYAN—ELMO across the top.)

This job seemed perfect at the outset. All cash, flexible hours, and I got to listen to music the whole time. After a week, I hated it. Three hours outside in the afternoon in August in the Midwest wearing essentially a big carpet makes you SWEAT. I was drenched every day. The boredom was worse. Twenty minutes of dancing is fun. Keeping it up alone for three hours is not. To top it off, Elmo's head didn't sit right on my head, so by the middle of my first week I had a patch of nose skin rubbed raw. I took to wearing a precautionary Band-Aid.

I ended up quitting that job after two months. Lacrosse had started, and I decided the extra money on top of mowing lawns wasn't worth the time sink. I was fine with living frugally, working most of Saturday mowing lawns, and enjoying my newly freed-up time in the evenings. Was my life as a Great Clips Elmo a lesson learned about the value of time and money and how to avoid jobs you wouldn't do for free, or just an example of a kid flaking out? I mean, working a crummy job because you could use the money is something most people DO, right? I don't know, but I do know that I never once thought, "Man, I should have stayed Elmo for a bit longer."

Stages

by Rachel Williamson

It is 3:23 and all the girls in Advanced Ballet are crowded onto counter tops. They jabber with bobby pins sticking through their teeth and yank back their hair into perfect top-knot buns. A girl hurries in and throws her backpack down. Someone notices the time and they jump away from the mirrors before she can explain. They push in their last bobby pins, stuff their shoes into cubbies, and shedding their sweatpants, they run out of the room in their pink tights and black leotards. Sitting cross-legged on the ground they cram their blistered toes into the satin covered wood-like boxes. With trained hands they tie the pink ribbons without even looking down. As they stand up, molding their feet into their elegant cages, they can't remember the days they would have given anything to be in these shoes. Their instructor waltzes into class and their gossiping dissipates into murmurs. One girl reaches out in front of her, arching her feet over as far as they allow, then lays her palms against the cold dance floor. The clock ticks to 3:30. Silently, they come to the middle of

the floor and begin in first position, feet together turned out. The last girl rushes in. The instructor glares but no one says a word. They stand frozen, stomachs sucked in, waiting for the music to begin. Finally accompaniment fills the studio, inflating their delicate ribs and pulling their slender arms out, just to fall slowly to the side in one gentle breath. With a lift of their chins towards the right, ballet class begins.

She is thirteen feet tall, the color of green winter mint, mighty, with sweeping limbs. She is not a tree but a woman frozen in time, never changing but always welcoming. The rain makes her glisten and the snow in her hair makes her look older. When the sun beats down it eats away her once bronze robes to her weathered core. She stands behind the orange and blue flowers and beneath the ringing bell tower. Although the Alma Mater is a mute statue her immovable presence invites you to the University of Illinois, her home.

“Tombé, pas de bourrée, glissade, jeté.” The girls line up in pairs. “Tombé pas de bourrée glissade jeté!” the instructor yells as they glide across the floor. Tombé-pas-de-bourrée-glissade-jeté. The phrase ingrained in their minds flashes again, making sure they don’t forget. Big step, small steps back-side-front, little leap, step, big leap straight legs pointed toes. The last two girls breathe in deeply the whole class watching, “Tombé, pas de bourrée, glissade, JETE! Perfect.” The

instructor says, “Do it again.”

“Next!” Someone yells at the herd of graduates staggering towards the Alma Mater.

“We need five people to plank on the Alma Mater!” shouts the leader of a freshman scavenger hunt.

A man gets down on one knee beside Alma’s long robes, “Kaitlin, will you marry me?”

“This is taking so long,” the graduates moan under their oven-like robes. Their hair and pressed clothes are damp.

“Dad, will you put me in the chair?”

“No sweetie, you’ll have plenty of time to do that when you’re a student here.”

“Pleeeeeease. That’s so far away.” Her father gives in and lifts her into the Alma Mater’s throne.

“Your time will come a lot sooner than you think, Rachel.”

“Aw, we should totally take a pic with the Alma Mater,” a girl says on the last day of classes.

“Oh my gosh that is such a good idea! I can’t believe we are halfway through college.”

“Graduates, PLEASE keep moving.”

“I heard that they are tearing down the Alma Mater.”

“Hey, where did the Alma Mater go?”

“What do you mean I can’t take graduation pictures with the Alma Mater?”

“Is she coming back?”

“I can’t believe she’s gone.”

Her jungle-gym frame has disappeared. When I walk by her spot I still think I see her out of the corner of my eye. I turn to see her familiar serene face; all I see is a large gap between the swaying trees. Everyone had hustled around her elegantly chiseled frame from commencement to convocation. Without her there the people still hustle by but there is no one to witness their everyday strides. She left as silently as she reigned over the passing students and adoring alumni. I don’t know when she will return but my eyes, searching for a clue, drift down to where she should be standing.

It is dark in the wings. Even darker than when they convinced their instructor to turn off half the lights in the studio so they could be reminded of what it is like to perform on a stage. Their hair, slicker than usual, shines like perfect little halos at the backs of their heads. No one is late today. Strapped into their costumes, tutus running into each other, they line up behind the curtain. Finally they scuttle onto the stage. Even though they can’t see beyond the pulled curtain they can hear the buzz of an anticipating audience filling up the silent theatre. In the center they gather, frozen in first position, chins lifted. The lights beam, making their pupils shrink but their adrenaline heighten. The music swells, pulling them onto their toes, the soles of their shoes stretch like rubber bands holding up their delicate bodies as they whirl around each other.

The dust on the stage stirs like glitter at their feet as they prep for the combination. Tombé, pas de bourrée, glissade, and they jet into the air. Their front feet strike the air surging higher. Just as their toes reach the highest they can, their back legs straighten to meet their height, and for a moment nothing moves and no one breathes. The audience takes them in, floating brilliantly in the middle of the stage. They land softly and melt to a close. The music and lights fade out but the girls' heart beats rush. They try to hold onto that feeling until they go on the next stage.

I read the inscription on the blue-grey granite, "To thy happy children of the future, those of the past send greetings." I continue walking to class wondering what stage of life I will be dancing off to when she returns home.

War and Pieces

by Dan Bonistalli

Juan turns to me, nods briefly at the cards dealt before me, and speaks. Without understanding, I react. I pick up the cards, counting the stars printed on the back. Uno... Dos... Tres Cuatro... Cinco. Juan and the others stare intently. I am going about this correctly; I watched all three of them count the stars, but they stare regardless, as if at any moment I might burst into pieces. They had hoped that I would count in English. They hope for any evidence that this deaf and dumb stranger before them has a life beyond our apartment, and my language is that proof. Once again, they are all staring, but I have already counted the final star. Diez. Juan chuckles in exasperation, grabs my cards, and counts out small yellow arrows. Treinta ejércitos. Thirty armies. In Risk, the objective is to conquer the world, but I only hope to get through the game. I tentatively place my capital in Washington DC. I last a dozen turns before capitulating easily to Miguelin's empire in the Americas.

In 1899, the Treaty of Paris became effective,

and the last remnants of the mighty Spanish colonial empire fell under the jurisdiction of Washington DC. Although battle casualties were light in the Spanish-American war, disease decimated both sides, and deaths numbered in the tens of thousands. Political strife in the United States at war's end focused on the role of imperialism in American politics. Senator George Frisbie Hoar claimed, "This Treaty will make us a vulgar, commonplace empire, controlling subject races and vassal states." Spain meanwhile suffered turmoil at the loss of her empire. The Generation of '98 artistic movements embodied frustration with Spanish society and politics. Spanish Regionalism, and especially Catalanism, claim their roots in the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris. On September 11, 2012, 1.5 million people, one fourth the population of Catalonia, gathered in the Barcelona streets, rallying for independence. Madrid responded that any separation attempt would be met with force.

Juan has made us 'mission cards' to make the game progress faster. Twenty in all, we draw them from a hat and receive goals – conquer specific landmasses, hold them for a certain number of turns, or knock out a specific player. Unbeknownst to Aljosa, there are several more 'knock out Aljosa' cards than for the rest of us. My mission is to control both Asia and Australia, and already, nearly all of Asia is administered by my capital in Tokyo. The only person in my way is Aljosa, who has built his capital at Perth. He is weak but Australia is all he has, and he will fight to the last piece.

My only real rival is Miguelín. He holds most of the Americas, Europe, and Africa, and I've begun referring to him as Miguel Cortez. He laughs and calls me a *fil de put*; I know all their Spanish insults and have forced them back into Catalan. I have to take Oceania before Miguel overwhelms Asia, so I march southward to Australia. I am beyond unlucky as a rule, and I waste all my troops against a disheartened die. Miguelín cruises through Asia by way of Alaska. By holding Asia, I was preventing Miguelín from achieving his own mission, to knock out Aljosa.

Economic investment and Western technology during the thirty years after 1890 turned Japan into the first Asian industrialized nation, and suddenly, the balance of power in East Asia shifted from China. Korea, which had before existed within China's sphere of influence, found herself caught in a tug of war that would last over a century, as Japan, starting with the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, ended Korea's tributary position to the Qing dynasty and asserted Japan's own influence upon Korea. This fight climaxed with the 1937 Japanese invasion of China, in which twenty million Chinese were killed in the following war, mostly civilians. Today, Sino-Japanese relations are strained as a result of what Chinese perceive to be inadequate acknowledgement of war crimes. Postwar Korea found itself torn between two new powers, the Soviet Union, and the United States of America. China has since replaced the Soviet Union, but the tug over Korea continues. On

January 24th, 2013, North Korea announced its intention to target the United States with a nuclear strike.

This is our tenth time playing Risk, and it is our last time. We are at a picnic table in a park of a small town called L'Olleria, a short car ride through hilly countryside from the larger town of Xátiva. Xátiva is famous for its castle, which withstood both the conquest of Spain by the Moors, and the crusade by King James of Aragon in 1244, as part of the re-conquest of Spain. King James of Aragon repopulated the town and the Valencian countryside with Catalan settlers, and thus, most people from L'Olleria today, like Juan and Miguelín, grew up speaking Catalan. Many of their friends are sitting around us, talking. Several do not speak Spanish. One speaks English, but my American accent is indecipherable. It is a warm April afternoon during Easter Weekend, and the people of the village are out cooking, talking, socializing; it is no time to be playing a board game. We end as a draw and for the first time in my life, I do not lose at Risk.

A Thousand Copies

by Kaleigh Niccum

Sixty sets of the PowerPoint on white—double-sided with one staple, sixty “Parenting Your Preschooler” flyers on canary yellow, sixty salmon of “The Importance of Time-In,” and sixty more white listing “98 Ways to Say ‘Very Good!’ to Your Child.” It’s 8:43 A.M., and I’m already knee-deep in stacks upon stacks of fresh copies.

I’m the youngest person in my office, but especially so in the wee hours of the morning, when the other student workers are either sound asleep in their beds or slowly making their way to class. As I fight the copier for another set (a calendar of activities for children on white), the last of my coworkers arrives. They’re a rather homogenous group: twenty or so mostly middle-aged women, some with kids in high school, some with kids all grown up, each with a desk fan cranked year-round to combat the impending hot flashes.

I start stapling the PowerPoints, counting with each ka-clunk of the stapler, letting the copier take a

breath before starting up again. Everyone in the office is taking the same long, slow breaths—enjoying the last few moments of peace before the worries of the day and caffeine jitters set in.

Only four men work in the office. The men are different than the women—each of them has a new baby at home (one has three), and not a single desk fan between them. Their little cubicles are covered in sports posters and other “manly” paraphernalia, but I suspect that if you happen to have a shiny new child to show off and chatter on about, an office full of women would be a good place to work.

White, white, blue, yellow, salmon, pink, gold, white, ka-clunk, stack. White, white, blue, yellow, salmon, pink, gold, white, staple and stack.

I used to be afraid of coming here. I hated walking in the front door and past the childproof gate to my cubicle in the center of the room. I’m not quite like any of them. I’m not a Human Development/Family Studies or Social Work major, I don’t have children or a major coffee addiction, and I’m far too young to need a desk fan. For almost a year, I sat on the edge of conversations. No one was speaking directly to me, and I was not quite confident enough to join in. At the beginning, three-hour shifts lasted an eternity.

But then I found the joy. Too often in college, I go non-stop all day: class, study groups, homework, office hours, extracurriculars, little conversations with everyone I meet, dawn until dusk. The office was a

gift—three hours of golden solitude, a chance to breathe. My little office job became a respite from the chaos of my day—three hours to focus on nothing but the thoughts in my own head and the sounds of a thousand copies.

Happy Stranger

by Timothy Stilling

As you set foot on the premises, your energy was sapped, enthusiasm diminished. The smell wasn't offensive, but it was depressing and sickly, like stale potpourri and a distinct lack of anything thriving. That might've just been an extension of the general attitude of the place. No one was happy. Except one guy.

My dad and I were fixing up and painting an apartment in an old folks' home. Each morning at six a.m. we were greeted outside on the patio by an old man with shaky hands smoking a cigarette. I assumed he was the director of the place. But he just lived there. He was cheerful, unlike any other resident, in his Hawaiian shirt and khakis. He wore a straw fedora hat to shade his lively eyes, never sunglasses.

The apartment we worked in was in awful shape. The walls had a thick layer of grease that I needed to wash off before applying new paint. My dad did what he could with the kitchen and bathroom cabinets. Windows and carpet were beyond repair and were replaced. It was the summertime and the apart-

ment hadn't had working AC for a while so it was stiflingly hot. I brought extra shirts to change into each day. They say there are two types of jobs: those for which you shower before and those you shower after. This was both.

My dad and I ate lunch with the old man, took breaks out on the patio. He would tell stories. He had been living there for six years. A bad car accident led to a decision by the State that he wasn't fit to live on his own any longer. He had no living friends or relatives. Somehow he kept this positive attitude—like he hadn't had his freedom taken away from him. I looked at all the other residents there and thought about how poorly we treat the elderly nowadays. So many parents and grandparents forced to move to an assisted living facility because we can't be bothered. I wondered who all these people were before they were cast out by society. Where did they work? Who did they love?

The apartment was beginning to come together when a new resident moved in. She was escorted by her son. We were touching up door and window frames, adding another fresh coat of paint to the walls to eradicate the odor, the very presence of the previous resident. The new tenant had sparse belongings and begged her son not to leave her. My dad made sure the AC circulated correctly to each and every vent.

The old man on the patio told us he was in the Korean War. He said that when he got back, his girlfriend had left him, and he was heartbroken, but he

was still so happy to be home that he quickly got over it. He found a new woman, or several, as he put it, and lived the rest of his life as a physical education teacher until retirement. He never married. I told him that he should quit smoking. He said he was too old to change.

Cosmo: Nine Bioengineering Lab Tips You Didn't Know

by Dan Bonistalli

Looking to score a 10/10? We got our trusted Kin-Aces and Bacteria-sages to spill their favorite secrets to wow your lab partner with a mind blowing report-gasm.

9. Foreplay is Essential

Nothing gets a lab started on the right track faster than making sure all the equipment is turned on and ready to go first. There is nothing worse than beginning the lab only for your equipment to not work as it should.

8. Alcohol is your Friend

Nobody wants to get to work in a dirty envi-

ronment. Keep your general area free of pathogens, parasites and bacteria with frequent application of 70 percent rubbing alcohol. With alcohol, your chances of a successful lab are much greater.

7. Use Protection

Keep your cells where they belong, out of other people's dishes! He-La cells are Biosafety Level 2, and thus, as part of precaution, you do not want your cell line to end up reproducing with that of your lab partner, or becoming infected in any way.

6. Take Advantage of Toys

There are plenty of fun tools to experiment with, from electric shocking devices to many kinds of pressure simulators. Remember; only use shocking devices if your partner is comfortable with them, and only at safe currents. Let the sparks fly!

5. Know Your Anatomy

When your lab partner asks you to press her Antecubital Fossa, you do not want to be caught off guard and let the moment pass! Her blood pressure will rapidly decrease, and you might as well start again from the beginning.

4. Keep Well Shaven

Too much body hair is a no-no! Not only will it present problems with electrode signal to noise ratio, but when you pull the electrode off it will give your ankles and arms Brazilian waxes anyway. Better to be safe than sorry, as you can't go wrong with hairless.

3. Keep Your Figures in Check

Be mindful of your ‘Trapz’, and its function in performing integrals. In MATLAB, keep your figures slim but make sure that you can fit enough digits in them to be satisfactory. As always, keep an eye on your units and significant figures.

2. Practice by Yourself

You will be absolutely useless in lab if you don’t have a solid grasp of the Engineer’s toolbox. The right hand rule is something most Engineers use in their daily lives, and is readily applied in almost every sub-discipline.

1. Clean up Afterwards

After the lab is over, clean up all substances left over on the lab table to prevent cross contamination. Other people will have to use the table too, so be courteous!

About the Author:

Dan Bonistalli is the author of several lab reports, and has collaborated on several published projects at the University of Illinois.

Gongoozler

1. an idle spectator.
2. a person who stares at something for a long time.

People

Lullabies

by Evan Rogers

Perhaps it's the universe spiting me. Years of dreaming about sex and wondering why I wasn't having more sex culminated in sex being unavoidable. But not in any cool porn plot way -- the unavoidable sex was not sex I was having. Rather, it was the people across from me having sex and doing it – loudly – every single night.

Early in the second semester of my freshman year of college I committed to a real health kick. I decided to go to bed earlier on week nights rather than aimlessly staying on Facebook chatting with friends and acquaintances I never talked to face to face. At the same time, Angelo, the man living across from me, decided to get a girlfriend and he chose this cute short chick named Eden.

A week into my self-improvement project, I finally went to bed early. My pretentious art postcards cluttered the wall next to my bed, with Van Gogh looking down at me from his self-portrait as if to tell me he was proud and I was making the right decision.

At 11:14, Angelo and Eden began their nightly routine, one I observed for months to come. I didn't notice it back when I stayed up late – perhaps I always had my headphones on and my music too loud. But lying in bed, bonding with Van Gogh, I heard everything, all the rises and falls of their very vocal sexual escapades.

I have to wonder if Eden's faking it – her sex sounds seem too exaggerated. She calls “oh baby” and “right there” and “yes” and “oh god” with the same passionate conviction each time, louder and louder. Angelo grunts every now and then but in a more sensible understated way, I conclude in my dark listening chamber.

I buried myself in my tan and maroon sheets. They finish, and I hear Angelo's door open. He'll always do this – after they have sex, he goes to the communal bathroom down the hall, returning minutes later.

I fell asleep quickly that first night, internally giggling about the novelty of my first experience of overheard sex in college. By the fourth or fifth night, the whole experience seemed far less charming and I realized that I'd likely spend most school nights falling asleep with secondhand sex calling to me through the thin drywall.

-

My health kick hit a snag when all my professors started giving me tests at the same time. On some Tuesday in March, I stayed up till four writing an essay, earbuds in and loud so I wouldn't be distracted.

Once I was done, I went to the men's bathroom, mostly because I wanted a victory lap and I needed to walk; I had been sitting for hours. The whole hall was silent – it was four on Tuesday, and even the most active weekday partiers have their bed times.

The men's bathroom is U-shaped. The left prong of the bathroom is toilets and a row of sinks with a mirror hung over them – that's where I was. The right prong of the U is a line of individually boxed-off showers – it was empty there now. In the center, at the bottom of the U, stood Angelo and Eden looking at themselves in the largest mirror.

It wasn't anything deep, they weren't looking closely, they were just fixing up their hair and mumbling in ways I couldn't make out. They were a good looking couple, they seemed like they belonged together and they were comfortable, at least with each other.

Part of me wanted to turn to them like an uptight, strict Catholic school teacher and call out in my most stark rule-keeper way “no girls allowed!” Part of me wanted to look at them, shrug it off, smile, and say “don't worry, I'm one of the cool ones, I don't care.” But in the end that part of me that mattered was just quiet. I briefly made eye contact through the mirror reflection and then washed my hands in cold water and walked away.

In that glance, I could see Eden looking at me, slightly unnerved by my discovery of her in the men's bathroom. I questioned why she cared when she

so clearly didn't care as she was moaning in the room across from me so loudly that it had become something of an inside joke in the hall. She must know how much noise she makes, but in that moment she wanted forgiveness of some kind for being in a bathroom she shouldn't be in, or perhaps just reassurance that she shouldn't need to ask for it.

She was dressed casually, covered in something of a pull-over V-neck T-shirt and not much after that. Angelo was less eventful in his basic undershirt and gym shorts. He was fixing his hair; one of his dreads had fallen out of place.

It was endearing, seeing them together. I didn't want them to feel uncomfortable, I wanted them to be happy.

-

By the end of April, my sleep health kick was mostly over. I'd given up on going to bed early. I did commit to a new hearing health kick, though, so I kept my earbud music soft and in turn I still heard the moaning of their sexual adventures. I had settled down, accepted my lovers for who they were and the sounds they made.

I was taken aback, then, when the sounds changed. Their voices were closer – they must have been right outside my door. They were in the hallway, fighting.

Eden cheated, or at least Angelo thought so. He heard from a friend whose name I didn't recognize that

Eden had been dancing with someone at a party the night before.

I could hear Eden crying through my closed door as she defended herself against his accusations. Her voice was even more intense now, more passionate than even her most exaggerated sex screams.

Now, she called “oh baby” in desperation, hoping to endear him to her again. She yelled “right there” and motioned to his doorway when he asked her where she’s been shacking up, and “yes” when he asks if she’s calling his best friend, a man he’s known since grade school, a liar. She cried “oh god” when it became clear he had already decided to leave her.

Their fight ended and Eden left. The next few nights were quiet. I recommitted to my original bed-time health kick. It felt odd, though, to try to sleep early without their strange lullaby. Just as quickly as they came, their moans subsided and disappeared from the night.

Quaffing Cupfuls of the Cure

by Samantha George

Running downstairs, I swing around the banister and into the hallway. My sock bedecked feet help me slide from hardwood to linoleum, into the kitchen. My mom turns away from the stove when she hears my skittering steps. Then the ritualized question is put forth. “Would you like some chai?” Although sick, I manage to grin, knowing she knows that the answer to that question will always be yes.

I drag a stool over to the stove, wanting a first row seat for the potion’s creation. Milk rests in the pot, waiting for the energy to begin its frothing performance. Cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, ginger: all go into the pot to mingle with milk. Minutes later we hear hissing as the milk boils and rises, reaching up to meet the lip of the pot. Before it has the chance to escape, my mom turns off the heat, and the dairy-derived beast settles down. Loose tea leaves are thrown into the mix and

the colors swirl and eddy, pushed about by the heat. When an even tint has reached all the edges of the pot, the cure is poured into cups for each of us.

I take a tentative sip, and the warm taste of spices and milk and sugar soothes the ragged edges of my throat. Tendrils of steam open up my airways. Coughing subsides, and I thank my wizard of a mother for healing me. I'm determined to learn her magical ways of chai making, and eventually, I do.

Years later, chai would help me with a different affliction, stress. During the wee hours, when a paper was due the next day or a test was looming in the near future, I'd turn to tea for comfort. Taking my stool over to the stove, I'd sit with my homework, my book or calculator, and keep an eye on that impish milk that had the habit of rising out of the pot and onto the stovetop, sometimes even dousing the flame. The rhythm of creation always worked to calm me. It reminded me that it was all right to breathe every once in a while, to inhale the scent of familiar spices and watch steam writhe in midair. With my liquid courage, I was able to bypass most mental turmoil. Papers would be finished; nerves, calmed. My magical friend had done it again.

These days, I don't make chai as often as I used to. There's no fresh ginger, and the kitchenette is always cluttered with someone else's cooking. When I do get the chance to make tea, it's a happy occasion. Joined in my venture by a friend or two, we'll make the trek down to the kitchenette. There aren't any stools, but

we'll drag a few chairs to the stove, throw our ingredients into the pot and begin our vigil. A contemplative companionship is present during the process, spawning conversations that wouldn't happen elsewhere.

During one of these chai sessions, a friend turned to me and asked, "How is your soul?"

Only around chai would she dare talk about such things as souls. I reflected for a moment. "My soul is well." Content with my answer my friend resumed the watch, waiting once again for milk to perform and steam to spiral and healing to be delivered to body, mind and soul.

Pieces of Memory

by Erik Elmgren

After the large meal of Christmas 2012, I, along with family and friends, spread out across the house to find places in which to slip into a short food-induced coma. Roaming the house of a close family friend, I stumbled into a room with a comfortable looking chair and a floor strewn with a rainbow of small plastic bricks. Years ago when I stopped playing with LEGOS, my parents gave away my collection to the young son of this family friend, but now they surrounded me once more. I promptly forgot my nap and slowly started to pick through the pieces, putting them together, rebuilding stories of my childhood.

The first time I saw LEGOS, I remember thinking they resembled oddly shaped pieces of candy. However, the minute I realized the flexibility with which these pieces fit together, I lost interest in how the bricks tasted. Unfortunately I frequently had to chase my younger sister as she ran away with the piece that looked the most appetizing. They came in sets with specific instructions, detailing how to build a spaceship or

a firetruck, which I would destroy after only a few days. I dumped all of these loose pieces into a large bucket, a primordial soup from which the elements of creation would later spring up in the form of multicolored constructions. In my imagination, these told stories like those of my favorite books and movies.

As the years passed, LEGOS became the primary toy of my childhood and also that of my friends. Scarcely a day went by where we did not meet at someone's house and exchange sets and compete to see who could build the best fort or vehicle. Boxed collections of pieces with instructions to make specific models became much more complex, often taking hours to build. Furthermore, I did not take apart the sets instantly after building them, instead, I built around them and they remained assembled as monuments to hard work and accomplishment. My parents bought me a set of plastic drawers in which to organize my LEGOS by size, shape, and function, and my mother even spent an afternoon with me sorting them out of that big bucket I had used since childhood. For some reason, when the bricks were "organized" I could not find the ones I needed as easily. Within a week all the pieces were back in the big bucket.

As I sat amongst the piles of memories, years after the last time I had touched one of those plastic bricks, I felt more than a little lost. What had once come so easily to me--building something out of scattered pieces--no longer seemed feasible. I yearned for

directions and to sort these bits of plastic so that I could find the ones I was looking for. However the memory of the boy who had once built so naturally motivated me to start building using the pieces that were in reach. As my miniature space ship began to take shape I rediscovered the magic of LEGOS.

Thelma

by Rachel Williamson

My strongest memories of Thelma Turner begin when I was thirteen-years-old. I remember having a bonfire between our two yards with them one summer night. Thelma sat next to me and explained how she met Keith when she was thirteen, then married him three years latter. They were retired award-winning cattle farmers who loved to spend time in their garden and house, which sat next to mine. I never understood why they called it their “dream house.” It was a plain gray, one-level home with a yellow door and gravel driveway. However, now when I come home from college, I look out of my kitchen window and dream about the countless days I ran barefoot across our joint yards into their home to talk to Thelma Turner.

“Where’s the rest of it?” Thelma spat, stretching the waistband of my teensy-pre-teen bikini.

“Thelma, this is the style, it’s how everyone else wears it,” I say. “I think it’s cute!”

Thelma shakes her perfectly coiffed white hair

at me. When I was born Thelma Primmer Turner was seventy-five years old. If I didn't know her tanned-leather skin, lined with sunspots and wrinkles, I'd think she was mad at me. But I do know her; I've known her my entire life. I know that in the corner of her laugh lines is a slight smile. I sit in one of her yellow dining chairs and unwrap a piece of candy; she always fills the bowl for me.

"I mean I know you won't, but please don't tell anyone this."

"I won't," Thelma says in her melodic yet hoarse voice, like an out-of-tune organ in church still trying to play at the same pitch it used to.

"My friend, well she tried to commit suicide. She called me last night and told me she swallowed twenty-two Tylenols."

I don't remember what she said after that, but I think she was quiet. She was always quietly listening.

I whip out my seafoam green prom dress. It sparkles from neckline to hem, splashing the cream walls with sparks of light. Thelma squints through her beady eyes, then her eyebrows rise and her pink lips make a perfect "o." She clicks her tongue, her signature expression of delight. Her face puckers as if she just bit into a sugary-sour sweet. I smile, then ask, "Was your prom dress like this?"

She shakes her head furiously, her silver sea-shell pendant sliding up, then down, “No, it was not like that. Oh, I believe it was a pink, a dark pink, with cap sleeves. Yes.” She shuts her eyes and folds her long fingers in her lap. Her wedding ring is always turned around with the diamonds facing in.

When I was a freshman in high school Keith passed away. She lived in her gray dream house until the cream walls, which were once so joyful, began to remind her that it was their dream house, not her own, and she moved to an assisted living on the other side of town. From the week I got my license until graduation, there wasn't a week that passed without me stopping by her new little room. I would knock on her sliding glass door after school and if she wasn't sleeping she would come to the door making that same perfect “o” expression. I even came by before my senior prom. My dress that year was royal blue chiffon. I think she liked this dress even better than the sparkly green one.

“Breanne actually got offered a job in Philly so she's going to take that! It's a health care consultant position for the medical company Siemens, you know the company that makes MRI machines? Unfortunately she's moving in like three weeks.” Thelma knew my older sister Breanne as well as she knew me.

“What did you say? Speak up.” She leaned closer in her white polo and pastel pants.

“Breanne...” I widened my eyes. “She got a job in Philadelphia as a health care consultant.” I nod. “She moves in three weeks.”

Thelma shakes her head, “What?”

“Breanne!” I nod. “Got a job in Pennsylvania.” Nod. “She moves in three,” I hold up three fingers, “weeks!”

Thelma finally shapes her mouth into her perfect “o.” I let out a breath and lean back on her blue couch, the same one, with the butterfly pillow, that lived in the dream house next to mine. It is almost 4:30, almost dinnertime, so she shoos me out the door. She wraps her knobby arms around me, her head digging into my sternum as she gives me the same I-love-you-without-saying-it hug. I pull out of the home’s driveway and glance at the clock; I had only been there for fifteen minutes. I drive across town, still dreaming of the days when I couldn’t keep track of time when I was with her. I’m twenty years old and she’s ninety-five. I know our visits are numbered, but I hold onto the fact that there are too many talks with Thelma in my memory to know which number we are on.

Drowning Girl

by Evan Rogers

There are too many similar characters in my life -- I wouldn't make a good sitcom. When I write about my experiences, I often pigeonhole the people around me, simplifying them into archetypes so that they're easier to understand.

I'm at a party now. It's more of a small gathering -- there are about twenty people and I know nearly all of them. Most of them I know well enough to know what they want in life post college and post parties like this one.

For now, when it's only midnight and the lingering scent of cheap vodka and expensive marijuana is still charming, they're all just beautiful. The rest is secondary.

I'm not like that, as I am the least beautiful person here. In a way, I'm honored.

In the 60s, Lichtenstein was the first artist to re-imagine comic book panels as actual art. He found panels he liked and created massive replicas. Many people argued that he was just reformatting the ideas of others.

He labeled his work pop art.

My favorite comic book panel adaption of his is “Drowning Girl.” It’s a dot painting of a melodramatic close-up shot of a lovely woman being consumed by water, her face and dark hair peeking out of the waves. In a speech bubble, she declares, “I don’t care! I’d rather sink -- than call Brad for help!” She’s a character ripped from some story arc. Lichtenstein chose to ignore what made her drown, instead just focusing on her emotion in that moment.

I enjoy my time with the people at the party. They move like angels, holding out their wings like invitations, parading accessibility that doesn’t exist. They’re full of life and vision, like children but with poise and the problems that come with their impending adulthood.

They tell me things -- personal things -- all the time. Perhaps I’m included because of that: I’ve always been a good listener. One girl is lying on the couch next to me, telling me how she heard her boyfriend has been flirting with her best friend who used to hook up with him back when he was dating her ex-best friend and now she feels like she should starting talking to his best friend again since they used to have a thing and it would make him jealous. It isn’t always that sexual but it is usually that convoluted. Their realities are all heightened and cinematic.

I wonder what it would be like to experience life as they do firsthand, but I’m aware of my own per-

sonal limitations. The men and women in the room are so of the moment, it seems so selfish to want to preserve that intensity. I know it won't always be like that, but it's fun to imagine that their glamour will never leave them.

What was Brad like? Why did the drowning girl refuse to call him? The artwork wouldn't be the same if we knew what had come before or after that moment in the lovely woman's life. I know I could read the comic book she's ripped from and learn all about her. But that would ruin her, in some ways, for me.

Lichtenstein isn't presenting a full character or even an original idea, but he presents that single moment so purely that I don't want more. As it is, I can lock away imagined stories and fantasies in the drowning girl and keep them there until I'm ready, until eventually she slips beneath the water and disappears.

The Way We Move

by Samantha George

From afar, movement looks cohesive; it looks purposeful, even graceful at times. Up close, though, we may see that the minute movements that comprise the final product are at times a bit odd, a little ridiculous. However, it's these seemingly insignificant, awkward movements that result in that final motion, the one we see as beautiful.

I sat behind him in Calculus class. Every day I'd vacillate between the decision to listen to lecture or discuss something absurd with this stranger in front of me. More often than not, I chose the latter. Conversations with him usually meandered through a myriad of topics, resting on each one for only a moment. Rarely did he talk about himself, which was a shame because he was very interesting. He was strange and I liked that. His hair fell a bit past his shoulders, brown going more toward ginger, and his usual attire consisted of a weird T-shirt, cargo pants and sandals. Even during the winter he wore sandals.

A sarcomere is the basic functional unit of

contraction in a muscle cell. It's basically a rectangle spanned by thin tigtropes of molecules called actin. The ones walking the tightrope are myosin proteins. They're comprised of two globular heads that attach to the actin and a tail that links to an anchoring molecule. If the actin is uncovered, the myosin will automatically begin walking, its stride pulling other fibers, causing the muscle to contract. However, the actin is surrounded by regulatory proteins called troponin and tropomyosin that block the binding sites on the actin. Only when the threshold of stimulation is reached will the regulatory proteins move and allow myosin to begin its travels.

We didn't dance much during prom. We wandered around the hotel, exploring an empty arcade, vandalizing strange back hallways with sharpies and pilfering fruit from platters at the front desk. I wondered why he didn't ask one of his closer female friends to accompany him to prom, but I was strangely happy with his decision to ask me. Something had changed in my mind.

When a muscle cell receives enough stimulation, a structure called the sarcoplasmic reticulum releases a flood of calcium ions. These ions bind with those regulatory proteins, troponin and tropomyosin. The proteins change in shape, opening the actin site to myosin. Myosin begins walking; its movement brings the muscle cell deeper into contraction. This is not a model walk, though, or even a normal walk. Myosin

has an awkward, ridiculous way of traversing the span of an actin filament. It's an unwieldy staggering in which one leg swings out to the side, circling in front of the first leg to bind to the next actin site. It pauses to regain composure. Then the other leg goes about the same motion. And so it goes, drunkenly stumbling toward a destination, slowly contracting the fiber.

We spent a lot of time together that summer. It began with his attempts to teach me how to play Portal and evolved into walks that spanned his neighborhood as we searched for good climbing trees. He told me about his attempted suicide, explaining that his two-month absence from school in the winter had been caused, not by an intense flu, but hospitalization as his liver recovered from an overdose of sleeping pills. Since sophomore year, he'd been seeing a psychiatrist. A dozen or so different medications had gone through his system. None of it had lessened his wish to self-destruct. I was glad he was alive, amazed that I'd never known, and so sad about the possibility of his not existing. I wanted him to want to exist.

The next year, I was a senior. He took classes at a nearby college. His friends cut his hair, reducing the shoulder-length locks to almost nothing. I looked forward to Fridays, not because of the weekend's arrival, but because he would come to school to eat lunch with me in our usual place, our English teacher's room. Midway through the year, he decided to attend an art school in New York. Before he left, I realized I liked

him. It was a very inopportune realization that I decided to keep to myself. He'd find someone interesting in New York, someone artsy and strange and perfect.

During his five-month absence, Facebook was our mailman. Our messages experienced an exponential growth pattern. Two-line messages morphed into two-page long responses that had to be typed up in a Word Document before being pasted into a message. Even in writing, his idiosyncratic speech was apparent, but I missed hearing his actual voice. I missed him.

Myosin continues its stumbling forward toward somewhere. I'm jealous of its ability to move forward without fearing where it's headed. Each step it takes is eleven nanometers. A millimeter is about the width of a fingernail tip. A nanometer is one-millionth of that. Myosin seems not to move very far with each strange step, but at least it moves.

He ate lunch with me the first day he returned. We made a meal of passion fruit and mangosteen that he'd brought back from New York. I pestered him with questions. "Where did you go? What did you do? Was it awesome? Did you find any pretty ladies?" The last question just slipped in without my planning it, but I anxiously awaited the answer. "No," he replied with a smile, "they were all old."

I graduated. The beginning of my summer I spent with extended family as they heaped congratulations on me. After that, I spent my time with Zac, climbing trees and finding strange foods. One day,

he told me to come over to his house for a surprise. I walked into his room to find a huge box wrapped in black duct tape. Cutting it open I found another box, which I cut open to find a Dali-style melted clock. I thanked him. I hugged him. I kissed him.

One myosin molecule moving along one actin filament isn't enough to cause a muscle to fully contract. It's when a bundle of fibers is traversed by billions of myosin molecules, all walking toward the same place, all stumbling in the same direction, that things happen. Their motion seems unwieldy and strange, but when an arm bends, when fingers wriggle, when muscles finally move, we see that the arc of movement is amazing. There might be some purpose in it after all.

Young Love

by Tim Stilling

“So, do you know this chick he’s marrying?”

“Nope. I haven’t even talked to Jake in almost three years,” Chris said, his hands tightly gripping the steering wheel at ten and two.

The corner of the map that I held open fluttered in the cool air emanating from the vents. “I guess we’re on I-55 the whole time, more or less,” I said.

“Yep. Thought so. It takes around five hours, if memory serves.”

“Only four hours and forty-five minutes to go!”

“Shutup. Do you have a lighter?” I gave him one. Chris didn’t normally drive. He’s not very good at it. This was his mom’s new car that she trusted us with to go to St. Louis. Chris was invited to the wedding of a childhood friend of his. The invitation included an “and guest” clause and since he was unattached at the moment, I became his de facto plus-one.

Chris lit his cigarette and then rolled down his window, which made that deathly crashing suction noise that only comes from a single half-rolled down

window at high speeds. I quickly rolled my window down, too, to equalize it.

“We’re only making one pit stop,” Chris said.

“You got enough gas for a couple hours?”

“Yeah, I’ll drive until this tank is gone. We’ll stop, piss, eat, and buy gas and cigarettes. You can drive the second leg.”

“That works,” I said. We drove on.

Our taxi driver got lost on the way, but we gave him a nice tip anyways because he let us booze during the ride. We arrived at the quaint church shortly before the ceremony began. Everyone was settling into the pews. I felt like an asshole because I was the only one wearing sneakers. We sat in an empty row towards the back, hoping no one would smell the whiskey on us. It could be taken the wrong way, we thought. Little did we know, half the people there were drunk already.

There was a short mass with a few songs and communion. Then the bride (Erica), groom (Jake), and other people stood up in the center with the priest. Jake is a tall dude, like 6’6”, so he towered over everyone, particularly Erica who barely broke five feet. Natural light seeped in through the stained glass windows and everyone seemed firmly in the moment as the priest went through his spiel: “for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.” Neither of them had second thoughts. It was idyllic.

Everyone stood around congratulating the new-

lyweds before heading to the reception. Lots of hugs and kisses. I went to shake Jake's hand, being a stranger and all, but he denied it. Instead, he hugged me and said, "thank you so much for being here." Seeing people so happy and optimistic seemed unreal.

There was a buffet at the reception. And an open bar, too. Everyone ate and drank and danced. Erica threw the bouquet of flowers into a group of mostly twenty-somethings, half of which were eager to catch it and the other half transparently feigning it. Towards the end of the night, people started clearing out. I stood outside with Chris and a few others, smoking cigars and talking nonsense, when a woman walked up to us.

"Do you have a lighter?" she asked. I gave her one.

"Chris?" she asked, surprised.

"Wow. Hey, Aunt Susan," Chris said. This was Jake's aunt.

"I haven't seen you since you were this high," she said, holding her hand up at about her waist.

"I know. It's been so long. I moved to Chicago and all. This is my friend, Tim. He made the drive out here with me."

"Hi, Tim."

"Nice to meet you," I said.

"Do you guys really think this thing is going to last?" she asked us. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know anyone there. Was she joking? Had she drunk

too much? This was probably not the best subject to discuss out loud.

“Sure” Chris said. “Of course.”

“I think they’re making a big mistake,” she said.

“Why? They seem so happy,” I said.

“They’re too young. Twenty-two years old? It’s crazy. This is some fairy-tale bullshit. I didn’t want to say anything to him, I mean, I did, but my sister made me promise not to.”

“It’s probably for the best if you didn’t say anything,” Chris said.

“Probably,” she said, and threw her cigarette on the ground before stepping on it and walking back inside to the party.

The Birds and the Bea

by Richard Vachula

There is no better name for Bea; her name fits both her physical appearance and her personality. For while that roundly shaped woman spends most of her time hovering over the propped-open jaws of whoever is sitting in the dentist's chair of her bumble-bee-themed examination room, I can't tell you how many times I've heard her buzzing around town. She might say that she wanted to be a dental hygienist because she loves teeth, but my personal theory is that she did it for the gossip. I remember sitting in the waiting room while my sister, then a junior in high school, was in there with Bea for what seemed like an hour and half. After she finally came out, I asked her, in all earnestness, how many cavities she'd had. It turned out Bea just wanted to hear about the homecoming dance. Over the last fifteen years that my family and I have been patients of Dr. Schwarz's, Bea has been our dental hy-

gienist and good friend.

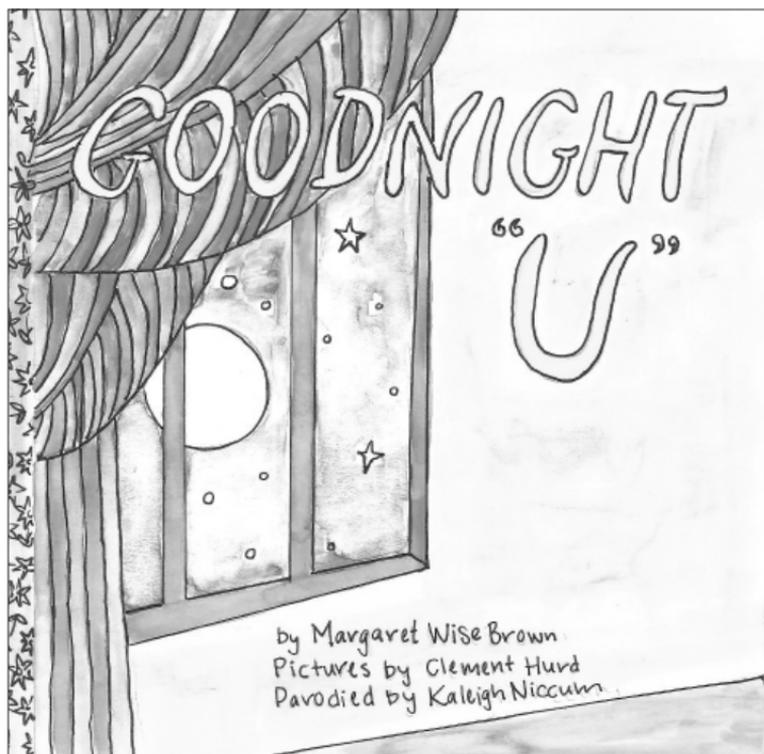
Last month at my checkup, it was as much a part of the routine as the fluoride treatment when Bea asked if my Dad was seeing someone. Bea had asked me and my sister that question every December and June since my Dad divorced my rebound of a stepmother eight years ago. Apparently, Bea knew a woman who was “just perfect” for him, but every time she brought it up, my father avoided it like the plague. He had told my sister and me that he was going to wait until we moved out to start dating again. I’ll admit, any time my father dated since my mother passed away, the situation made me more than uncomfortable, so I have been more than happy with his policy.

When I went to college, my feelings concerning the mystery woman and my father’s loneliness transformed. My freshman floor mates were intrigued by my family background. They all wrongly assumed that the dining hall food was the first thing I had ever tasted that hadn’t been taken out of the freezer and cooked in the microwave. From what I gathered, they thought it was more likely that I had been raised by wolves in the wilderness than by a single father. My floor mates’ reactions to my upbringing made me realize just how lucky I am and how great a man my father is.

Looking back, I remembered all the flack he took when he was trying to balance a career and two kids. I thought of every time I had to tell self-righteous soccer moms that the man with the mustache was in

fact my father and not a kidnapper trying to snatch me on my way home from school. I thought of the Sunday afternoons we spent watching those weird foreign films and folding laundry. I thought of how he bought tampons for my sister on that awkwardly memorable day. I remember hearing his voice soar above the crowd during my wrestling matches. Most of all, I remembered the day my sister and I left for her first year of college. How we left him with an empty nest for the first time in twenty years. I realized then, sitting in that dentist's chair, that while my sister and I had moved on, my father had not.

And so, when Bea asked me if he was single, I told her he was and that it was due time she set him up with this mystery woman. And even though it likely sounded like gibberish because Bea had her hands half-way down my throat, I could tell she understood when she jabbed me in the gum with one of her stainless steel picks as she jumped with excitement. With a big smile she explained how the mystery woman's youngest daughter had left for college the previous fall, how she liked biking and kayaking just like my Dad, and how she too was looking to start a new chapter in her life. And so, before I left the office, I wrote down my father's cell phone number and email address on the back of a business card so that Bea could try to bring two birds with empty nests together.



Goodnight “U”

by Kaleigh Niccum

Outside the tiny dorm room
There was a lost cell phone
And a toga costume
And a broken bottle of Blue Moon.

And girls in short skirts just being flirts
And the speakers at Kam’s playing rockin’ jams
And cups of jungle juice and substance abuse.

And a bus at a stop,
And a bro’s tank top
And underagers pointing out, “Cop!”

Goodnight, room. Goodnight, “U”.
Goodnight, bottle of Blue Moon.
Goodnight, lights and the costume.

Goodnight, skirts. Goodnight, flirts.
Goodnight, Kam’s. Goodnight, jams.

Goodnight, bars. Goodnight cars.
Goodnight, jungle juice. Goodnight, abuse.

Goodnight, stop. Goodnight, top.
Goodnight, nobody. Goodnight, cop.

Goodnight, stars. Goodnight, air.
Goodnight, Illini everywhere.

Writers



Dan Bonistalli was homeless sleeping on a bench in Valencia, Spain when the University of Illinois took him in. Today, he subsists off a steady diet of Jack's frozen pizza and nutella, and checks with Cosmo magazine regarding every major life decision.



Erik Elmgren frequently spends his days locked in a five-foot by five-foot cinderblock room with a solid door and a small window. However, he is not a prison inmate. He is a typical music major who spends a lot of time in practice rooms. When he isn't playing saxophone, he enjoys attempting to conquer his nerves on stage and reconnecting with his childhood through LEGOS.



Samantha George never needs earmuffs or an umbrella. Her high-volume hair works well as both. However, as a Molecular Biology major she knows to restrain the wild mane with an updo when working in the lab. When she's not dissecting mice or searching for trees to climb, she resorts to drinking...vast quantities of chai.



Kaleigh Niccum is a natural blonde who lives in cardigans. Disney princess by day, she moonlights as a bespectacled cubical dweller and Atmospheric Sciences student. She does not have a desk fan.



Evan Rogers is a man of the arts and Rhetoric classes, so he has a copious collection of cheap art postcards and lots of stories to go with them. While he has probably already permanently damaged his hearing by obnoxiously blasting his music too often, he often gets told he's a good listener, for better or worse.



Tim Stilling is a commercial painter. And a Solipsist. Get out of his head.



Ryan Thier doesn't even go here, he just walked in dressed as Elmo one day and sat down. Since then, he's picked up a major in Materials Science. He enjoys coordinating his outfits (poorly, due to his colorblindness).



Richard Vachula never gets much attention when he is with his seven foot tall roommate or date-seeking futon, so he finds comfort in his Geology classes. While he spends most summers standing on the shores of ice cold lakes as a camp counselor, he's always sure to make it back home for his biannual dental check-ups.



Rachel Williamson enjoys walking by the MIA Alma Mater and dramatically leaping off the granite slab. Though she usually wears a Chi Omega sweatshirt and leggings as pants she would much rather don poofy-pink-princessy tutus, like she did in her ballerina days, neither of which Thelma would approve.



Matthew Yang wants to break free. When he's not clawing at the walls or fervently daydreaming, he's working on his Computer Science homework (reluctantly), playing computer games (proficiently), or sketching (incompetently).

Advisor



Carol Spindel has a copy of the Chicago Style Manual that she keeps beneath her pillow. She refers to it frequently as she works on her second book about the people she's met during her time in Africa. She is dedicated to her family and the students she teaches. When she's not drumming for her African dance class or stretching her shoulders out to resist hunching over her laptop, she's making sure to write out all her numbers. She's had many best years.

