

LOCH NORSE MAGAZINE

Loch Norse Magazine accepts submissions of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, playscript and artwork annually November through February.

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Please visit lochnorsemagazine.com to find additional publications for this issue. Online contributors and works include:

- Kaleigh White - Catching Grace (fiction)*
- Zach Nothstine - Toriadhus Station (fiction)*
- Patti Bray - When I Work in the Garden I Don't Wear Gloves (poetry)*
- Nikki Moore - Fractured (poetry)*
- Caroline Plasket - In the Meat Department (poetry)*

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Loch Norse has always maintained a focus on the community; the one within Northern Kentucky University, as well as the one beyond in the Greater Cincinnati area, and as far as this magazine may reach. Coming out of last year, and moving into the editor's position this year, I never imagined that we would be able to develop an even stronger bond with the community, but you guys helped prove me wrong.

I cannot thank you enough for supporting Loch Norse. You have helped our events become the success that they are, as well as the magazine. We would be nothing without you.

It is my pleasure to present to you Loch Norse Magazine: Issue Four. I think I can speak for everyone on staff and say that we are incredibly proud of this issue, these contributors, and what we have accomplished this year.

Thank you so much for picking up this copy and for your continued support.

Kaitlin Mills
Editor-in-Chief

Caroline Plasket

Dishwashers Are Relationship Destroyers

which sounds like an odd thing to write,
 until you come home and find the contents
 of your dishwasher
 packed together like the formation of dishes
 on the table top of the mad hatter
 and you think, "Certainly the seven year old did this"
 but you find out it was the thirty-four year old.
 You wonder how he could think the cups
 fit better on the bottom,
 so you grunt as you fix the pottery,
 like a puzzle, into the great hug
 of the gray rubber-coated,
 wire loading shelves.

I love you anyways.

Just as you love me after I
 spoke harshly to you for
 losing the bottle of spray cleaner,
 and I love you more
 for knowing what I was really frustrated about.
 The long day
 and the piles
 and children not listening
 and that our sons keep putting their dirty laundry
 back inside of their dresser.
 For days that feel too heavy
 being more often than not
 and for my wanting to say
 "fuck it all",
 and for you never putting your dirty coffee cup away.

I'll find it a quarter full,
 light brown liquid
 leaving a ring on the inside of the mug.
 The spoon still in it
 clanks
 as I walk it to the dishwasher.
 But every day
 I am thankful for that walk.
 Like water from a storm,
 it means you are there
 holding me
 like a breath
 when I lose it over more dirty clothes on the floor
 and you know it is about my day going all wrong
 and because someone told me I wasn't good enough
 or you know it is
 about me missing my grandmother,
 or that I am comparing
 my thirty-something year old body
 to my 20 year old body.
 You hold your breath
 for me
 and you hold my hips
 and my breasts at night
 while we a fall asleep
 and somewhere in the house
 your last cup of coffee
 turns cold
 and forms a dark brown ring
 (that the dishwasher can't remove)
 inside of my favorite mug
 on the bookshelves in the living room.

Gavin Colton
Spring Cleaning

Spring
by now, it's time
it's been months.

Dust gathers on a crib
a cavity,
in the bed and in her heart

for the second and final time,
she packs away
the messy remains of her son.

Even the bright walls have started
to fade.

Silvana Hill
Serum

On Sunday mornings Mick sat and watched his wife Ellen get herself ready; didn't occupy the yellow armchair on the closed deck like every other day of the week, but instead watched her put on her face. She used serums and creams first, applied them like his mother used to, from what he remembered, with the tiny rub-dab-dab-rub motions of the fingers that only women knew. Every woman knew them; he'd seen their unconscious magic.

Her fingers tripped over the soft spots underneath her eyes, bluish and bruise-like after a tipsy night or a sleepless one, or on winter mornings when she got sick. Only in winter did she get sick. Every other time she saved for him. That was how Mick thought of it. Every other day of the year she stayed healthy to bring him his soup and his paper and his cups of ginger ale, nurse enough to care for him and wife enough to swat his head when he asked too much at once.

She did the serums as usual and stopped, looking into her faded cherry-wood box, falling apart and loose at the hinges. Christmas gift, that thing, expensive at the time. He had ordered her name cut into the top of it with a diamond laser, and some branches of flowers of some kind that their youngest daughter Katie had called sakura, when she used to read those Japanese comic books, with the pages going back to front. Ellen.

Customers made orders for plain jewelry boxes at the back counter, no names or pictures or anything--those were ordered separately. He always tried, and somehow failed, to find her name among the racks of kitschy key chains and dime store coffee mugs, but she didn't mind. "Means I'm unique," she would say, though of course 'Ellen' wasn't unique at all. He'd ordered a plain colorless etching because it was the cheapest, but that wasn't what he told her. He said it was what

he thought she would like, those plain letters.

And Ellen had said it was beautiful. I'd've done it just the same, she told him on Christmas morning, goose-pimpled in her old milky-blue nightgown with no sleeves and huddling with her coffee.

She applied her serum, touching it under her eyes.

Never rub at your face, never brush your hair wet—that was what she told Katie almost every day when teaching her how to be beautiful.

“You look right pretty,” he said to her. His wife’s face did not move in any way to show she heard him, and he realized he had only said it in his own head. She finished with the serum and uncapped the bottle of skin-colored cream that she used to cover the spots on her skin. When Katie was little, he had looked at her unblemished skin the color of fresh milk and hoped she would never bury it beneath all that cream and powder. But she had given in just the same.

When Mick was young, his mother and father had been simple people, farmers too poor to have any such place to go that would require this kind of thing. In the flat, harsh Idaho sun, his mother’s face had tanned and roughened like pink leather, and her freckles stood out so they looked almost like a joke. Only once, on the morning before a trip into town, had she bothered with makeup, and when she started he asked to come in so he could watch. The best part was the creamy pink blusher; she rubbed it into bloom on the apples of her cheeks, then smoothed and lightened by flesh-tone powder. She looked like a different person, not just younger. Mick watched the roses bloom in Ellen’s cheeks and felt his breath clip, freezing and dropping to the base of his lungs.

In the last six months her cheeks had turned papery, her cheeks drying and suckering to the fine bones below like fish skin to the dock. Unable to have things like milk and eggs and yogurt anymore—they reminded her of the stuff inside the body, she said, festering, and anyway the medicine made her vomit—she was bones. The light pushed right through her. He

had always said he preferred rounder women, women with meat, to be crass, but there was something here too. The shadowy slip she had become, she looked like an angel. She looked like a creature halfway between the world and whatever came after.

They’re pumping me full of chemicals, she had said on the first day of treatments, they’re pumping me full of chemicals and hormones like a cow that’s getting all fattened up to eat. It had distressed her so she couldn’t eat, and there went the first ten pounds. He would take her, today after church, to the diner on Sixth Street and buy her a hamburger, one of the fancy ones with bacon and buttered onions but no cheese. She could manage that. It had always been her favorite. She had eaten it a hundred times across from him at the rickety corner table, hungry as a man, delicately dabbing her lips and passing him the salt shaker.

No one can eat like our Ellen, was what her sisters used to say. And stay so pretty, was what never came after but should have. It was still true.

“Beautiful,” she said to herself in the mirror. No, she didn’t. He had thought it for her and hoped it into her, from his head to hers.

Her hands trembled around the brown-coated mascara wand and he stood quicker than he had in years, crossed the room and took it from her. Those fingers, cold twigs through which the light could shine even when she held them together. The hands that held baby Katie were the strongest thing he’d seen in a lifetime of raking and hoeing and herding; he was afraid of them. They could do things, those hands, full of power like a natural kind of witchcraft. With strength he didn’t know she had, Ellen broke the wand in half and set the pieces an inch apart, exactly even, tears beading on her bare lids. Her eyelashes were gone. He had raged when they told him that would happen; let her at least keep her damned eyelashes, he screamed.

He reached into the suit pocket she had patched over and over again and took out the present: false lashes, thick black, dark little butterflies in their shiny box. Ellen stared. His hugest, most terrible wish was to see the strength and vanity come back

into her face, her hands, her lips that used to talk so sharply. Because he missed it, only because he missed it and needed it and not because she wanted it back; she was going. Her going had already started, so she left the lashes in his hand. "My darling," she said, with a quaver befitting only the grayest, half-gone women. "Sit with me. I don't think I want to go today."

Devan Horton
Charcoal Fish Swarm



Charcoal drawing

Zach Nothstine
Alien in Dublin



Photography

Thomas Brown
The Race of a Lifetime

My mind is the only obstacle
on my journey to the finish line.
Earbuds transmit the sound of guitars
with the vocals of a rock god
to drown out the chit-chat of feet
that keep tempo with the concrete.

I breathe in(spiration), I breathe out(side)
to build strength in my body and
brain. I pass my peers while the spectators
watch me make something of my life.

I run to endure, to endure
the knock downs that life gives.
Endurance is strength,
endurance keeps me feeling
a pulse.

Jamila Lovelace
The Lovelace Chronicle

“Jam...Jam-eye-la... Lovelace?”

I smiled at my professor with all of the warmth that I could muster. I was actually quite amused at my Professor’s poor pronunciation of my first name. It was the first class of my first day at college and I was already anticipating some trouble. I always knew that my first name would be difficult to pronounce, so I put the poor man out of his misery by raising my hand before he could finish. Most people do not understand that my first name is meant to be pronounced with a long E sound where the “r” is, so I am often not bothered by the confusion. However, my professor made astonished eye contact with me after stating my name and began to blush.

“Lovelace? Is your last name really Lovelace?”

My face was smiling, but internally, I was rolling my eyes so hard that they might have struck in the back of my head. I knew what was happening, and I was not prepared to have to deal with it in college. I was trying my hardest not to throw one of my books at his head in order to expel all of the dirty thoughts that were flitting through his mind. His red-rimmed gray eyes looked a bit glazed as he looked in my direction, but not really at me. I murmured my affirmative and sat back in my chair, hoping he would not ask me anymore questions. He still looked at me, but his glazed look was replaced with smug indifference.

“I bet that name has gotten you into trouble over the years, am I right?”

I wanted to jump over the desk and wring his sagging neck, but I resisted the urge out of the pure kindness of my heart. I also wanted to avoid prison as much as possible. I clamped my mouth shut, nodded my head and hoped that he would finish the rest of the attendance. Thankfully, he obliged and I was left alone, attendance was finished and class had begun. However, as I sat in my desk, I became a bit troubled at what had just occurred. This was one of many exchanges between me and my

graying, mid-fifties, “I lived during the 1970s” teachers. More often than any other teacher that I have had, they were the ones to shake their heads in wonder at my last name, and I always knew why. My last name is shared by one of the very first and arguably most famous porn stars of all time.

Linda Lovelace, real name Linda Boreman, was a pornographic actress during the mid-1960s and early 1970s. Her most famous work is in the cinematic gem “Deep Throat”. It’s fairly self-explanatory. The film was made in 1972 and ushered in the “Golden Era of Pornography” in which pornography was made and shown to mainstream audiences and could be shown in regular movie houses instead of just adult peep show theaters. The film ran deep (pun intended) in American film history. For my college professor and many of my older teachers from high school, they could sit with their popcorn and maled milk candy in the balcony and watch Linda Lovelace give her best... performances. My last name literally ushered in the biggest wave of accepted pornography in American history. I was marked for backlash even before I was born.

When I was in elementary school and junior high, I had no idea of the connotations behind my name. However, I knew that some of my teachers used to look at me in shock after they saw it on their attendance sheets. Sometimes the way that they said it made me feel disgusting. A substitute teacher in my seventh grade computer class rolled my name around on his tongue so much, I almost became nauseous. He was making his way around the room to help the other students as I was engrossed in my work. I could not hear him come up behind me, but I felt two hands on the back of my chair and his breath close to my ear. It was rank. He nearly whispered in my ear as he asked if I needed help.

Yuck! I quickly shook my head and yelped no, as the other kids turned around. He quickly straightened himself up and turned on his heel. Shame on him for trying to flirt with a twelve year old! He really needed to flirt with a toothbrush and a bottle of Listerine.

As I grew older, I finally had enough. I was going to find out the true meaning behind my name so I could understand why so many people were so obsessed with it. I spoke to my mother about it and, once she was able to quell her embarrassment, she finally told me the long, sad truth. I had the same last name as an extremely famous porn star. My first impulse was to ask what “porn” was and, after a quick description, my filthy adolescent mind was ready for more. She told me all about the movie “Deep Throat” and even talked about some of her own experiences, as she was a child when the movie first came out. She had a perverted science teacher who spit on their papers and wore socks that had the word “SEX” written all over them in big silver letters. He never called my mother by her given name, “Tonya”, he always called her “Linda”. I was disgusted, but she told me that she learned to live with it and take pride in her name. Although she did not anticipate that I would have to deal with this in my generation, she urged me to be proud of my own last name as well.

But I couldn't. At least, I could not immediately. With all of the strange occurrences that were happening to me, I began to hate my last name. I disliked the fact that I would forever be associated with Linda Lovelace and her artful films. The revelation of my last name came at the worst possible time; the dawning of my awkward years. I was already a walking billboard for Mother Nature's wonders, so the last thing I needed was my name counting against me. I could change my clothes, my hair or put on makeup to change my appearance. But my last name was a part of me and could not be changed so easily. I was angry at Linda Lovelace, a woman who had died years ago, and I had so many questions I wanted to ask her. “Why Lovelace? Why my last name? Why not Loveland, or Loveheart or Heartland or something like that? Why did it not matter to you that other people might be affected by your decision?”

So I began to do research on Linda Lovelace's life to look for clues as to why she chose the name she did. Wikipedia and I become good friends on my quest and we still keep in touch to

this day. What I found about her changed my views entirely. Linda Lovelace was forced into pornography when she was barely eighteen years old by an abusive boyfriend who changed her name for her. He made her do pornographic films, including Deep Throat, until she managed to escape from him. Afterward, she spent the rest of her life as an anti-pornography activist until she died in a car accident in 2002. My mind was blown and my heart thawed. How could I hate a woman who suffered such as she did? If anything, she didn't sully my last name. In fact, my last name sullied her. I felt absolutely awful after I learned the real truth. I managed to forgive Linda Lovelace, a scared teenager and abused woman, forced into a life she never wanted to lead in the first place. I even wanted to apologize to her, and I sometimes did in my prayers.

Over the years, I have quelled my resentments and have begun to think fondly of my last name. I have learned of all of the other amazing people who share the same name as I. Richard Lovelace was a renowned British poet in the 1500s and Ada Lovelace helped to invent the calculator with Charles Babbage in the 1800s. Lovelace was a lineage of royalty in Britain until roughly four hundred years ago. My name has a very rich heritage and is full of artists and idealists and dreamers, all like me. Linda Lovelace herself has often provided me with some ability to throw her name back in people's faces. If anyone mentions “Deep Throat” I am able to talk about her anti-pornography work.

However, I still have some embarrassing moments relating to my last name. When I was on a swimming team, I was always called “Lovelace” and people always laughed at my name. I was terrified that the younger generation knew of Linda Lovelace's work. However, my fears were quelled when I found out that they were laughing because I shared a name with a penguin from the film Happy Feet. Although I have never seen “Deep Throat”, I'm sure that there is a reason that it has remained a classic. Or maybe people just still have fetishes for chicks with feathered hair and bellbottoms.

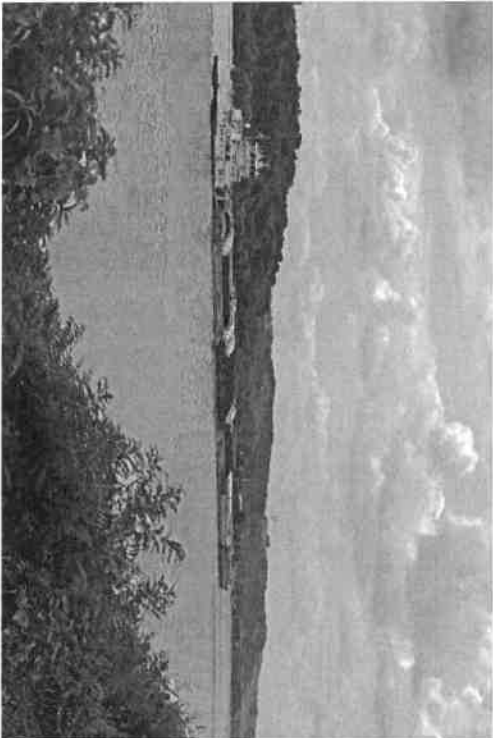
When the film “Lovelace: The Musical”, about the life and times of Linda Lovelace, came out in 2013, the heat was on once again. My professor’s obvious interest in my name started an entirely new cycle of anger at myself and him. I came dangerously close to lapsing back into my old behavior of blaming Linda for her choice of the same last name as I. My anger did not last all that long though. There could have been a variety of reasons as to why he was so astonished at my name. Maybe he took his granddaughter to see “Happy Feet” and was surprised to see a girl with the same name as an animated penguin. Maybe he knew of the works of Richard Lovelace, or of Ada Lovelace’s contributions to science and mathematics. There could be any variety of answers, as the name Lovelace has such a vast and eclectic history. Although it took me some time to realize it, and it still gets to me sometimes, I am still proud of my last name and who I am because of it. I am also truly honored to share my last name with an inventor, a poet, a penguin and, of course, a porn star.

Devan Horton
Birds



2' x 2' Oil Painting

Dyane Kirkland
Commerce on the Ohio



Photography

Patti Bray
Peace Lives Within Them All

I see my childhood home,
 beneath my treaded sole where rains once
 flowed down earthen hills,
 splashed water in a cleansing of it rise.
 And the streams overflowed.
 I was Kentucky born
 upon the wind. Country road
 how you call me back
 to walk barefoot.
 I sink my feet in blue-green fields
 laced with clover.
 Bed of earth
 where I learned to stand, to run; to play.
 I walk familiar slopes, wade in watered
 creek-beds, breathe air into my restless depth.
 I see where life
 once placed daisy halos
 on my head.
 I am filled with tiny pieces
 of my past. I sit
 down to count white
 clouds floating by and reach up
 almost touching time.

Ethan Dowden
The Last Museum

The sand was a problem. Somehow, it was like all the rest of their problems. The cloud of dust seemed to blow around in the wind at will, finding a way into even the tiniest of crevices. No matter how tight they tied things down, the sand always managed to find a way in. It filled everything up from the inside, bringing every moving part to a stand-still before finally eating everything away to nothing. There was no use fighting the sand, and there was no use fighting anything else.

Scott held the blower tightly in his hands, watching the sand billow away from the inner workings of the engine. The breeze would just blow everything back inside soon, but for now he had his own little wind to fight back with. The blower made a ringing noise in his ears as it worked, vibrating under his fingers. He blinked, clearing a few stray grains of sand away from his eyes. With his vision cleared he could get a good view of the camp.

Other ragged figures were doing the same work; sand blowers roaring in their hands as they cleared the crawler's engines of the sand storm's leavings. The crawlers were short, squat and ugly, but they were the only shelter Scott's group had against the deadly sand storms. Jenner was a veteran of the desert and had ordered the crawlers into a circle behind a massive sand dune to protect them from the worst of the onslaught. Scott had sat crouched inside the armored vehicle, listening to the sand screeching at the plated exterior. The sound made him think of a thousand pairs of claws trying to rip the vehicle open to get at the meaty cargo within. His little sister Alicia had kept close to his side, clutching at his clothes in silent apprehension. Scott had sat and stroked her dark hair, his eyes ever on Jenner. Their uncle had sat motionless through the storm, hard eyes fixed on the wall plating directly before him. Scott was always frightened by his uncle's stillness, along with his massive body and shaven head. Jenner was a man who had embraced the barbarism of the

modern world in a way Scott's parents never had. Maybe that was why he was still alive and they weren't.

"Are you done boy?"

Scott turned around, letting the sand blower sputter and die in his hand. Jenner strode toward him, his steps commanding and powerful.

"Yes Uncle."

Jenner reached down and took the blower from Scott's grip, scowling at his nephew's scrawny arms and thin chest. Where Jenner was tall and immovable, Scott was a child that was as apt to blow away in the wind as the sand around them. Jenner reached out with a maul of a hand and ran it over Scott's scraps of newly grown hair.

"You need to shave again, boy. You're one of us now."

Scott nodded, glancing around at the men who were putting the crawlers back together. While Jenner was easily the largest and strongest of them, they all had his look. Big, well muscled and shaven heads marked them as a unit; a cohesive force that would respond to any threat with brute force. Scott had seen them met it out several times in the last year. Sometimes they didn't even need a threat to spark that violence; merely an opportunity.

"Uncle Jenner isn't one of the good guys, is he?" Alicia had asked him one night, whispering into his shoulder by a campfire.

"Uncle Jenner is strong, and he'll protect us," Scott had answered, uncomfortable with the question.

"Why can't he be strong and good?" she asked.

"Maybe that's too much to ask," was the only thing he'd been able to say.

Scott felt a soft hand take his and he glanced down to see Alicia's thick head of black hair. She was incredibly quiet on her feet, especially in the sand and with the sounds of engines everywhere. Scott would have thought the only child in the group would be easier to spot, doubly so considering she was the only one with hair. Alicia was constantly proving him wrong.

"Are we almost to the Museum?" she asked, looking up at Jenner fiercely. At some point she had decided he was indeed the bad guy, even if he was the one person capable of protecting her. Scott watched Jenner scowl back, afraid his uncle was beginning to pick up on her tone. Even if he did, it seemed that Jenner didn't care too much about the opinions of nine year olds girls.

"Any day now, sweetheart. Any day now. Get your things loaded up now, we're leaving," he said curtly, pointing toward their crawler. Scott nodded obediently and took Alicia by the shoulders, steering her away from their uncle.

"You have to be nice to Uncle," he said severely, trying to get through to her. As normal, she shrugged his words away.

"I'll be nice when he starts being nice to the people we meet," she said simply, climbing into their crawler and making her way to her seat. Scott ducked in after her, staying out of the way of the bald men who jostled in behind him. The two of them settled into their usual spots amid the piles of ammunition stocked in the back of the crawler. The vehicle was more or less a giant armored box that trugged its way across the sands on rattling track wheels. The only view outside were tiny slits in the armor, more for ventilation than sight-seeing. The crawlers were designed to transport supplies, not people. Jenner had repurposed them for his endeavor.

"Tell me about the Museum Scott," Alicia said, settling into the little nest she had made of empty supply sacks.

"I told you everything I know already," he said.

"Yeah, but I like hearing about it," she said.

Scott leaned back and closed his eyes. "It's just a story."

"I like stories."

"Fine. It's the last museum, the biggest one ever."

"What's a museum?"

"I answered that already."

"Tell me again."

Scott rolled his eyes under their lids, starting in on the same explanation his father had given him, "Before the war,

before they set loose the Terror Virus and the Immortals, they took all the gentle things in the world and put them in one safe place. All the music and all the stories and all the art. Everything that wasn't death and killing went inside the vaults. They locked them up, so that when the wars were over we could open them back up and start over. That's what Jenner's looking for."

Alicia snuggled up closer to him as the engine rumbled to life underneath them. "Why does Jenner want the museum?"

Scott threw an arm over her shoulder. "He thinks there's medicine there. Maybe weapons. Anything that can help us."

"But you said it won't open up till the wars are over."

"The wars are over."

"Not for Jenner."

Scott didn't have anything to say to that.

Jenner was certain the museum lay somewhere in the desert, but no one knew exactly where. They weren't even sure it wasn't covered under the sand. Jenner had committed them though, and going back was no longer an option.

They found it by accident. The crawlers were making their way slowly across the dunes when the sand began to give way. One of the vehicles began to slip, the heavy weight of the crawler forcing it to slide down the side of the dune. Men were already shouting a warning, watching as the vehicle began to turn and flip. Within moments the convoy had stopped, with Jenner and his men pushing their way out. They all watched in horror as the crawler began to roll down the dune, rotating over and over.

Scott shielded Alicia's eyes as Jenner and his men made their way down to the fallen crawler and opened it up. The people within were surely dead, crushed by the displaced supplies inside. As the bodies were pulled free, the sand around them continued to move, pushed too far by the accident. Jenner had to grab one of his bald soldiers and pull him free of the moving mass. They all watched as the sand continued to fall, exposing something more.

"It's a corner," Alicia said, standing close to Scott as they watched the sand fall. There was a corner indeed, and as the sand began to fall it exposed a wall, or at least part of one. The shiny metal surface shone in the sun as the sand fell away. Their entire contingent stood for a moment, the only sound the wind scattering the sand against the exposed wall. That silence was finally broken when Jenner shot a euphoric fist into the air and shouted in triumph. Scott and Alicia watched as the men around them joined in, shouting and roaring their victory to the sky. They had found the Museum.

"Why is this taking so long?" Alicia whined, drawing designs in the sand in front of her seat.

"It's a lot of sand," Scott said, kicking at a stray pebble the sand had unearthed. Ahead of them Jenner's men worked just as they had for the last six hours, pushing the sand away with whatever tools they could find. They had only so many shovels, so some men went at it with the butts of their guns, roughly made clubs, and even their hands. The wall was massive, but luckily the sand fell away easily. Still, the structure they were attempting to unearth was massive.

"Look, I think they found a door," Alicia said, standing up suddenly. Scott followed her gaze and saw sand falling away from the first thing that hadn't been the single slab of shining metal. It was less a door and more of a portal emerging as the sand poured away from it. Inscribed with writings Scott didn't understand, it was a single ring of raised metal that surrounded what looked like a glass porthole. Alicia grabbed Scott's hand and rushed forward toward it despite his protests. With their small size they were able to slip through the crowd easily, pushing their way to the front as the rest of the group formed a semi-circle around the portal. Jenner was there, alone at the doorway. He shot Alicia and Scott a warning glance that brought them to a halt a few feet away with the rest of the crowd. Jenner turned and walked up to the portal, tall and confident but also wary. The doorway, if that was what it was, appeared much larger this close

up. The glass porthole was as wide as Jenner outstretched arms, and the rest of the portal once opened was large enough to fit two crawlers abreast. Scott had never seen anything so massive. For a moment he was struck with a pang of regret. These were the types of things that had existed before the war, before he was born. The world had been full of wonders, and he hadn't been born in time to see them.

Jenner reached the door and touched it softly. Nothing happened. He rubbed his hands around the crevices he could find, but nothing seemed to resemble a handle of any kind. There was no control panel, no clue as to how the portal was meant to be opened. Finally Jenner made a fist and knocked on the glass loudly.

The response was immediate. Something inside the walls hummed to life, vibrating the entire structure. Bits of sand slipped and fell from the still buried roof, scattering on their heads. Scott and Alicia watched in amazement as a tiny light formed itself in the glass of the porthole, and then spread. At first Scott thought the light was on the other side of the glass, but soon it was apparent that the glass wasn't a window at all. He was seeing a camera feed. He'd only heard stories about moving pictures from his father and mother, but here was one right before him. The picture was dark and full of shadows. The static of interference was unmistakable though. Jenner stepped back, his large body unblocking everyone's view of the picture. After a few moments' adjustment it became apparent that they were looking at a shadowy room with a single figure seated in a chair, half hidden from the sparse light. The figure was bowed and hooded, its features hard to see in the gloom.

They were already made wary by the appearance of the picture, but the booming voice that emanated from the portal was enough to make everyone jump back a step. Alicia didn't scare as easily as everyone else, remaining firmly in position, though she gripped Scott's hand a bit tighter. Scott watched apprehensively as the men around him fell back, lifting their weapons at the sound of the voice. The words rattled around in his head and

shook his bones, so loud and bass was it.

"Welcome to the Last Museum of Mankind. I am the Curator," the voice said. Jenner stepped forward again, the muscles of his back visibly tensed.

"My name is Jenner. I seek the Museum," he said. The crowd was hushed. The shadowy figure in the picture moved slightly.

"Why do you seek the Museum?"

"To rebuild the world, to return it to the way it was," Jenner answered. The figure inside the picture shook slightly, and it's laughter could be heard muffled over the speakers.

"The Museum is not meant to return the world to the way it was. That world was broken. What lies here is meant to build a new world."

"Then that is what we will do."

"Will you do it with your weapons that I see? You come ready to wage war Jenner, not to build."

Jenner struggled to find the words to respond. "These are dangerous times."

"The Museum is not meant for warlords. You will not gain entrance," the voice said simply before the feed was cut and the portal went back to being an empty glass panel.

Jenner cursed, running forward and slamming his fist into the glass. The sound of the blow echoed back at the crowd, but nothing else.

"Now what do we do?" someone called from the crowd. Jenner turned, his face dark.

"We blow the door. I'll kill that damned Curator myself."

Scott watched nervously as Jenner's men unloaded the crawlers, stacking explosives on the portal. Everyone was armed now, walking around the portal wearily. Scott had seen Jenner use explosives before, but never this much. The brick sized casings of C4 were stacked as high as Scott was tall, all being busily wired to a single control panel inside one of the crawlers.

"I don't want them to do this," Alicia said. She was sitting next to him atop one of the crawlers, watching the men and women run to and fro like so many ants in the sand.

"I don't think we can stop it Ali," Scott said, pulling his knees to his chest and wrapping his arms around them.

"The Curator didn't do anything to hurt us. He just knows Jenner is a bad man," she said quietly. Least anyone hear her. Scott agreed with her, and so couldn't really say anything different. He watched as the last of the C4 was stacked and wired. Someone began to shout for everyone to fall back. The burly bald men did so, crouching behind the crawlers nearest to the entrance.

"We should get down," Scott said, taking Alicia's hand. They were on the rear-most crawler but Scott didn't feel safe. Alicia pulled back against him though.

"I want to watch," she said. Scott could tell there was no changing her mind, not without carrying her away. He confessed he was curious too. They remained on top of the crawler, clutching each other's hand tightly. Jenner and his men paid them no heed, focused instead on the explosives. Someone was counting down from ten. Scott's heart seemed to beat to the count, heavy and pounding in his chest.

"Three, two, ONE!"

At the last moment Scott thought to grab Alicia's hands and clamp them over her ears before doing the same with his. The boom was shattering, sending great gouts of flame and smoke skyward. Scott closed his eyes the flames were so bright. He stayed like that awhile, hands over his ears and eyes closed. He could still smell it though; the acrid scent of burnt sand and explosives. Finally the shouting that began around him compelled him to open to the world again. He was not the only one, or thing, opening up.

The portal stood unmarked from the blast. There wasn't even a scratch or a dent on the surface. Despite that, it was still sliding open. Scott watched, becoming more and more apprehensive as the massive opening slid to the side. The men

around him were cheering, but within moments that cheering was cut short.

A figure emerged from the shadows of the entrance. It was enormously tall, easily nine feet. The hooded head had to duck to clear the Museum's entrance. Once clear of the doorway the creature stood to full height, reaching a clawed hand to undo the clasp at the cloak's neck and letting the billowing garment fall to the sand. Scott's scream never managed to reach beyond his throat. Here was his every childhood nightmare come true.

The Curator was an Immortal. Massive, deadly, and inhuman. Created as laborers, they had been repurposed almost immediately as weapons. Nine feet tall, the Immortal had a humanoid shape made by a interior cybernetic frame. Around this skeleton was genetically manufactured flesh. A brain resided in there somewhere, half computer and half independent organism. Six arms spread out from the creature's body, as if ready to embrace Jenner and his men. The skin was thick and pebbled, even on the face. That face may have been the worst part. Blunt human features were stamped there, while all too human eyes gazed out from a manufactured skull. Soldiers from the war told stories deep into the night of the Immortals. They were less flesh and more a colony of genetically engineered microorganisms, and thus would never succumb to disease or old age. They were as smart as a man, if not smarter. They had no morality, no remorse, and no mercy. Armies of Immortals had broken the backs of the strongest nations in the war, but it was thought they had all finally been slain. Here one stood in the flesh, just as Scott's father had described to him.

"You will not gain entrance. Leave now," the Curator said, it's voice deep and threatening. Many of the men stepped back, but one stepped forward.

"I have come too far to be stopped by a monster like you," Jenner said, walking up to the Immortal. The creature's large blue eyes narrowed threateningly.

"Choose your words carefully warlord," the Curator said. Jenner didn't obey. He chose action.

Jenner raised his gun and fired, the magnetically propelled bullet pounding into the face of the Immortal. Stringy bits of scarlet flesh erupted, revealing a ceramic white skull beneath. The men cheered as the Curator staggered back a step. The wormlike bits of flesh hit the sand around the two figures, wriggling like so many maggots. The Curator kept its head turned away from Jenner for a moment before turning back, bits of pink flesh crawling from under its pebbly skin to cover the wound. Within seconds the blast wound was covered in new pink flesh that wriggled from the wound itself. Scott had a terrible premonition of what was to follow and grabbed at Alicia, turning her head away from the view.

"Don't look, Ali!" he said, trying to cover her ears. She struggled against him and they both heard the ear splitting shriek that came from Jenner. Scott grabbed her roughly and pushed her toward the top entrance of the crawler as gunfire erupted behind them. He could hear the Curator screaming, but it was nothing compared to the sound of the soldiers dying. Scott pushed Alicia into the crawler and then followed her, slamming the hatch shut behind them. They huddled there for some time, listening to the muffled sounds of battle grow quieter and quieter.

"We have to go outside at some point Scott," Alicia said, tugging at his sleeve. Scott wasn't so certain. The sounds of the battle had faded several hours beforehand, but the screaming still rang in his ears. He wasn't sure he was ready to face whatever was outside.

"It's going to be bad out there Ali, the Immortal could still be there," he said.

"Well we can't stay in here forever," she retorted. His sister turned and began to unlatch the lid of the crawler. Scott reached to stop her but she was too swift, sliding beyond his grasp and into the world above. He had no choice but to follow her.

It was just as bad as he had imagined. Many of the

crawlers were broken and burning, black smoke still billowing from their ragged wounds. The dead lay scattered about, torn asunder in various ways. As he cleared the hatch to the crawler he realized he had lost sight of Alicia. He called her name frantically, to which she quickly responded to, "Over here! I think he's dying." Scott jumped down from the crawler and ran toward her voice, coming into view of her and sliding to an abrupt halt.

The Curator lay in the sand, its body a ruin. Most of the flesh had been stripped away, leaving a blackened metal skeleton that twitched and sparked feebly. Alicia was crouched next to the massive head, stroking the pebbly forehead gently. Scott almost panicked, but saw that the creature wasn't making any sort of move toward his sister. He wasn't sure it could move at all anymore. He walked forward gingerly, coming up behind her. Half of the Curators face was blown away, leaving a half grimace and one eye filled with pain.

"Uncle Jenner was a bad man, and he didn't want to give the museum to him. That's all," Alicia said, her small voice full of tears. Scott gripped her shoulder, making eye contact with the Immortal that called itself the Curator.

"Will you die?"

The Curator nodded, a pained voice slipping from its ruined mouth, "Yes. The warlord was strong. I was overconfident."

"What will happen to the Museum?" Alicia asked, still stroking the Curators forehead. The single sky blue eye looked back and forth between them.

"Why were you here? Why do you want access to the Museum?"

Alicia didn't hesitate to answer, "I want to hear the stories. There are stories in the museum, aren't there?"

The Curator smiled, as best as it's ruined face allowed it, "Yes, little one. More stories than you will ever have the time to hear."

With a pained effort, it raised one maimed hand and

pointed toward the open portal. "The Museum isn't for warlords who want power. It is for children who want to hear stories. Listen to the stories of the past, so that you will better know how to write the stories of your future. The Museum will care for you, as it has cared for me. You will know when to open the doors again. You will know. You are the Curators now."

The Immortal gave one last gasp of breath before collapsing back, it's heavy body finally settling into the sand and the stillness. Scott felt tears dropping down his face, not at the loss of his uncle and men, but at the loss of this guardian. He took Alicia's hand and pulled her from the body, toward the portal. Once inside, the doors closed behind them. The lights came on, and they saw everything that ever was, and imagined everything that would ever be.

Caroline Plasket
They Were Trying

They seemed like gods.
 But, they couldn't keep our dog from dying.
 My mother said he was convulsing.
 My father buried him in the woods.
 With each passing year
 they were less majestic, and
 I could see them for what they were:
 aging bodies that would one day become forgotten buildings
 I will stand on top of and look at the world from the roof.
 With peeling paint, peeling pain,
 and vines creeping up the sides.

Grant Moxley
Music Hall



Long Exposure, Digital Photography

Grant Moxley
Passing Cars



Digital Photography
Shot on the Second Street bridge in Cincinnati

Eric Braunn
Under Colorado's Moon

-- For Matthew Shepard

I can't see the stars now.
I smell cows,
the dewed grass, the
cold copper of my blood.

I don't know why I'm here.
I was
having, a beer.
Now nylon rope holds me against a fence post,
and my skull is breaking.

All I did was love,
and live.

I can't see more than taillights.

I can smell the spices in Morocco.
The Turmeric, yellow as sunflowers,
turned up to look at only me.
The cinnamon bark curled. It's
the chai we drank, and
the blouse my mother wore.

Where is my mother?

I hope when they,
find me,
she doesn't see.

My God! -
They took my shoes.

Taylor Carter
The Phoenix

"I was twelve going on thirteen the first time I saw a dead human being."

My mother's first love died the day I was born. It was not a marital love, nor a parental or familial or friendship love. It was a type of affection reserved for those who capture the imaginations of preteens with their voices or music or portrayals of characters on the silver screen. Hollywood spoonfeeds you their every action, surely an invasion of privacy, but you can't bring yourself to curse them because the tabloids fuel the imaginary relationship kindling inside your head. We've all had them at one point or another, and many times, it isn't difficult to recall your first celebrity crush.

My first Hollywood infatuation was a bit odd for someone of my tiny age of fourteen, as he was not a teen pop sensation or a werewolf in a vampire story, but a handsome Australian (though I did not know that at first) with golden locks of hair and pale green eyes. And he was 35 years old at this time, playing a mischievous ex conartist turned police officer with the help of his sharp skills of observation. What's not to like?

My mother's first celebrity crush was much more age appropriate. Late in the summer of 1986, cinemas were abuzz with teenage angst about the upcoming academic year. It was a summer filled with now classic hits, such as *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *Pretty In Pink*, *Aliens*, *Top Gun*, and *The Karate Kid II*. In my mother's large, hazel eyes, the most important film of the summer was an adaptation of a Stephen King short story: *Stand By Me*.

The aforementioned teen angst of the summer played right to the soul of *Stand By Me*, as the four main characters, Gordie, Chris, Teddy, and Vern, set off on a weekend adventure that virtually marked the end of their childhood to find the dead

body of a missing kid not much older than themselves.

It wasn't until my teenage years that I learned that not everyone watched this movie on a regular basis throughout their youth. Not everyone had the entire movie memorized by the age of twelve. And not everyone was aware of the phenomenal performances by the young actors, painfully similar to their characters: Wil Wheaton, Corey Feldman, Jerry O'Connell, and *River Phoenix*.

Within the first ten minutes of the film, the ground was set. Though each character was unique, my mother instantly fell for Chris' calm and collected badboy shell. Locked in a family filled with criminals and alcoholics, the entire town, Chris included, knew of his inevitable deadbeat future. Despite the stigma surrounding the Chambers' name, and with the help of his best friend, Chris strived to separate himself from his family, while acting as a makeshift father figure and leader for the rest of his group.

My mother left the theatre with a spark in her step, unaware of the full impact he'd left. The following months consisted of watching his few other films (despite not enjoying the stories), ordering posters of him and the gang, finding interviews and magazines, and memorizing the words that came from the sacred VHS. By that winter, she was completely in awe with the rising teen idol.

When he was not acting, River was a dedicated animal rights, environmental, and political activist. He was extremely well spoken despite not receiving any formal education, wrote essays about Earth Day, bought 800 acres of endangered rainforest in Costa Rica, and was once described by the media as "a vegan James Dean." What's not to like?

But all good things come to an end. And this end was on October 30th, 1993.

That Saturday morning, two panicked twenty year olds rushed to the hospital, two weeks earlier than anticipated. My birth was ordinary to everyone except my family, caught on a video tape that I have still yet to see. I was their first child and

my parents were just children themselves, but we were a family. A happy, little family.

As I took my first breath, River Phoenix took his last. Late that night, outside of a Hollywood nightclub where his friends were performing, River collapsed on the cold sidewalk, convulsing for more than five minutes, the pressures of Hollywood rushing through his veins.

Attempts to resuscitate him were unsuccessful and in the late hours of Halloween's Eve 1993, River Phoenix was pronounced dead. Toxicology reports revealed high concentrations of morphine and cocaine in his blood, as well as other substances in smaller concentrations. While one family was celebrating the birth of their firstborn, another was mourning the loss of theirs.

Everyone but my mother learned of this information the following morning. They looked into my bright green eyes and didn't dare tell her the news.

Three days later, after being released from the hospital, while my father cared for me at home, my mother went out for a quick shopping trip, or perhaps some peace and quiet. Either way, she found herself in the sporting goods aisle of Walmart, quietly singing the title song from her favorite film that was playing over the store's radio. As the song faded, the DJ's voice began.

"And that was Ben E. King with 'Stand By Me' from the soundtrack and movie 'Stand By Me,' in tribute to one of the movie's actor's, River Phoenix, who passed away at the age of 23 this past week." Her heart fell to the floor, and tears stung her eyes. Memories and emotions flooded her fragile, postnatal mind as she rushed the the restroom to let the tears fall, cursing the world for taking someone so important to her. Even today, more than two decades later, her hazel eyes tear up while talking about it.

One day we will all feel this. Without warning, you'll simply be driving to work on amundane Tuesday morning, listening to the radio, and an announcer will be paying a tribute

to a recently deceased celebrity. And though you may not have heard the name in years, tears will cloud your eyes as hours of memories resurface like relationships at a high school reunion. You'll pull off the road and cry for this person you never met, but felt so close to. Because while they seemed invincible on the screen, you were never ready to learn that they weren't invincible off the screen.

"I never had friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve. Jesus, does anyone?"

Collin Eckerle
Hold Your Head Back For Old Sparky

"I pass death with the dying, and birth with the new washed babe."

– Walt Whitman

It took three jolts
 for the holy ghost to appear
 (in tongue form)

above

Tafero's head:
 six inches high.

Dr. Ault calls
 the governor,
 calls the scene
 obscene
 and silently chuckles
 at his accidental rhyme.

He was charged, younger (age 20) with
 "crimes against nature."
 Jesse, born now with the
 Kabalah
 wail of past injustice
 is buried in forgotten soil.

Nick Snider
Cupid Is Blind, But Flies Aren't

21A

The door to the apartment is propped open with a five-pound dumbbell, and I make my way inside. I find a spot in the corner as a couple sweeps through the doorway: the tall, blonde man carrying the laughing woman across the threshold bridal-style.

"Now it's your turn," she says, as the man gently places her back on her feet.

He rolls his eyes as she guides him back out into the hall. She hugs him around the waist, panting and guiding him through the doorframe, dragging him more than lifting.

I explore some of their boxes, seeing clothes and cutlery through the open flaps of the cardboard. Behind me the couple sings together off key, waltzing through the maze of boxes with surprising grace.

"I love you," the woman says, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear. "And I love our new place."

Ending their dance and letting go, the man bends down to rifle through a box. "I love you too, but I can't believe you brought these." He holds up a collection of crocheted dolls. "I was pretty sure we agreed that the only way I was moving in with you was if we burned these. They give me nightmares."

As the couple break into a fit of laughter I fly out the door, narrowly avoiding being hit by the dolls that they are flinging at each other.

21B

The room is cold and smells of lemons: a strong, acerbic smell, like someone tried to dissolve the personality out of the space with the power of Pine Sol. I settle onto a side table, next to a picture that has been laid face down on the polished wood. Looking around, I see that picture frames all over the apartment are face down, many still lying next to the walls from which

they were removed.

I hear footsteps coming down the hall, and turn. A man in a loosely tied bathrobe pads into the room, blue slippers looking sad and threadbare. All of him, in fact, looks sad and threadbare. The dark hair on his face is untrimmed, and his brown eyes look empty. He looks lost, as if the place he used to navigate in the dark when he wanted a midnight snack has been transformed into an alien planet.

He takes a beer from the fridge and shuffles to the table.

"I miss you," he says, staring at the empty chair across the table. "I thought we were forever."

"I thought you loved me, I thought I was your best friend!" He's yelling now.

"I thought we were going to grow old here, raise our kids here." He's staring at his lap.

"I don't know how to do this without you."

22A

The crying is so loud that I almost leave. Curiosity convinces me to move closer to the squalling monster, landing on the back of the armchair in which it's being held.

"I know, I know. Life is just so hard, isn't it, Sam?"

The man cradles the baby close to his chest, gently running his fingers through the tuft of black hair sticking out of the blanket. The crinkled, red face below the hair does not react to his voice, choosing instead to scream a little louder, as if in spite.

"Tell me all about it. Please, don't hold anything back."

He moves the little bundle of joy up onto his shoulder, and I quickly move further away, watching as he gently pats its back through the thick blanket it's wrapped in.

After a few horribly long minutes the crying peters out. The silence in the apartment is so complete that it rings, and the man slumps down into the chair in relief, placing a small kiss on the baby's temple.

"We're gonna make it through this, right, your daddy

and I? You're going to grow up to be happy and well-adjusted? Maybe be a violinist or an engineer? A basketball player?"

The baby's eyes start to flutter, and the man whispers, "I bet you could be a basketball player, Sam. You know, if you want to. I'll support you in whatever you decide to do, I promise. And since I'm not your biological dad there's actually a chance that you could be athletic."

The man smiles to himself, closing his eyes and resting his head against the back of the chair.

Soon, he is asleep.

A while later the door opens and another man enters the apartment. He walks slowly, quietly across the room and smiles down at the pair in the chair. I see tears start to form in his eyes and he wipes them away quickly, leaning down to kiss first the man, and then the baby he holds.

22B

The smell of apple pie fills the apartment along with sounds of clinking glasses and singing.

"I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake. I shake it off. I shake it off! Oh!"

A man has substituted a sponge for a microphone and it drips suds down his wrist as he performs for the glasses in the sink. The pie responsible for the delicious aroma sits on the table and I am tempted to land directly on it, but caution gets the better of me and I alight on a nearby chair.

Drying off his hands, the man in front of the sink takes a place at the table. Carefully, he cuts into the flaky crust that crumbles perfectly like golden snowflakes melting into a river of molten, apple lava.

He forks a bite into his mouth and smiles as a beeping noise sounds from his pocket. He pulls out his phone and places it onto the table in front of him. I quickly move so that I can see the screen over his shoulder.

Jessica: Where r u?

The phone beeps again.

Jessica: Come 2 Maggie's!

Jessica: She misses u.

The man puts the phone back into his pocket. He leans back in his chair and takes another bite of pie.

23A

I perch on top of a tension rod that holds up a tattered, white shower curtain that looks like a white flag of surrender marred by grime and exhaustion. A woman slowly enters the bathroom and closes the door behind her. She keeps the knob turned until the door settles into the frame, and then slowly reverses the direction, allowing the catch to slide silently into place. Her shoulders slump.

Absentmindedly, she scratches at her elbow before turning towards the shower and pulling back the curtain. Inside she finds a nearly empty bottle of clear, generic shampoo and a thinning bar of yellowed soap. She turns on the tap and holds the shampoo bottle under it, filling the container with bubbles and water. Holding her hand over the opening, she shakes the bottle until the suds have subsided and the container appears full once more.

She sits the shampoo back down on the rim of the tub and allows herself to sink down beside it, massaging her calves with worn, cracking hands.

I hear the sound of soft footsteps coming from the hall and then the door creaks open.

The woman springs up, body tense, and smiles.

“Hey baby,” she says, “what are you doing out here?”

“Bad dream,” says a little boy. He clutches a stuffed elephant that’s missing a tusk to his chest.

The woman scoops him up into her arms, murmuring to him softly and running her fingers through his hair.

“How about you sleep in bed with mommy tonight,” the woman says.

The boy nods and closes his eyes as the woman carries

him out of the room, pausing to flip off the light as they go.

23B

I enter the room slowly. The air feels compressed, as if it’s leaning in to watch. The couple sits apart from each other on the bed wearing only their underwear. The man is on the left edge and the woman on the right, their backs to one another. Through the wall I hear the sounds of a bed creaking and the occasional, loud moan coming from the next apartment. There’s a thump, headboard on plaster, and the man cringes, looking down at his lap.

“Maybe,” the woman says. She hesitates and turns in slightly, watching the man from the corner of her eye. “Maybe we could try again?”

The man doesn’t answer.

“Remember that one position? You seemed to like it. I thought...” She trails off as the man shakes his head. Another moan.

The man sighs, twisting and bringing his legs up onto the bed. He reaches for the woman’s hand, resting in the crumpled sheets. She tenses as he strokes her knuckles with the tip of his finger, but brings her legs up onto the bed as well, reclining next to him.

They turn to face each other and the woman brings her hand up, stroking the man’s face. She leans in and kisses him hard, grabbing at his neck and hair with desperate hands. His palms remain flat on the bed, lips moving against the woman’s in a parody of her passion looking like he’s gasping for air rather than kissing.

The woman stops abruptly and moves away.

There’s another thump from the apartment next door.

“Linda, I’m sorry,” the man says.

She stands, rigid.

“I think I hear Tyler moving around in the kitchen, I better go check on him,” she says, voice flat. She pulls a robe around her shoulders, knots the sash twice, and leaves the room.

24A

The couch scrapes across the floor, leaving a trail of torn, fringed carpet in its wake. The child pushing it looks to be about eleven or twelve, clad in too small Power Ranger pajamas. Once the couch reaches its intended destination, front pushed up against the wall, she bounces on the cushions before clambering over the arm to grab a sheet and a handful of pushpins from their resting place on the floor. She returns to the couch and, standing on tiptoes with arms stretching as the sleeves of her top trail down below her elbows, manages to pin the first corner of the sheet to the white wall. I notice the smeared, black trail of dirty fingerprints streaking through the wall's paint.

With the sheet securely pinned in two more places, the girl leaps off of the couch, running around behind it and draping the sheet over and down its back, creating a lean-to with the wall.

Mission accomplished, she bounds into the kitchen, small feet thumping against the floor. She opens the refrigerator. I notice, disappointedly, that it contains only a stick of butter, an open box of baking soda, and some mayonnaise. She stands with the door open for a moment, whether surveying the meager contents or enjoying the cool air I can't decide. The door swings shut as she boosts herself onto the kitchen counter. She pulls open a cabinet, smiles, and pulls out a single package of PopTarts, the cabinet's only occupant.

Carefully, she opens her treat before discarding the wrapper on the floor. She places the food inside of her couch construction and crawls in after it.

Nikki Moore

When I Think Alone

When I think of hashbrowns on goetta
and asstrays I won't let myself use
but to dump straw wrappers and
Lance cracker crumbs in, and the way
my smoke might dance in the dim
yellow light if I were to light one,
the contrast of it hovering in front of
the long mural, waves crashing, and
sea foam jumping off of the wall,
spilling over my hotcakes and blending
with pools of butter and syrup, producing
a cocktail of evenings drowned
in bottomless coffee cups.
When I think of the fuscina stain on
the cup's brim, telling the story of lips
on skin, skin with the same fuscina markings
perhaps endless, but perhaps not, easily
washed away with the tide on the wall
and found staring back at me in the bottom
of a now empty coffee cup
waiting for the next wave to come settling in.

CONTRIBUTORS

CAROLINE PLASKET is a senior at Northern Kentucky University majoring in English.

GAVIN COLTON is a senior at Northern Kentucky University majoring in Journalism and minoring in Creative Writing. He is from Co. Kildare, Ireland. *Spring Cleaning* is a piece inspired by a water color painting that portrayed a faceless woman sitting on a bed beside an empty cot. Much of this poem was inspired as a sequel to Seamus Heaney's *Mossbawn I*.

SILVANA HILL is a junior Journalism major with a minor in Women and Gender Studies. This is her first publication in *Loch Norse Magazine*. She has also published non-fiction pieces and articles online at xojane.com.

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DEVAN HORTON will graduate in the fall after earning a BFA in painting. She works at Mellow Mushroom with other fellow artists which is where she gets a lot of her inspiration. She is primarily a drawer and a painter. Her parents are both very creative. Her mother is a musician and her father is a graphic designer and artist, as well. She grew up locally in Covington and has always been an artist.

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ERIC BRAUN is a senior majoring in Creative Writing. He adores painting with words and aspires to teach someday. *Under Colorado's Moon* is a persona poem that memorializes Matthew Shepard, expounds upon his possible final thoughts and brings to forefront the sacrifices and issues faced by those of the early LGBTQ community in the U.S.

ETHAN DOWDEN is a senior at Northern Kentucky University where he studies Creative Writing, Communication Studies, and Honors. He's glad that someone finds his writing interesting.

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