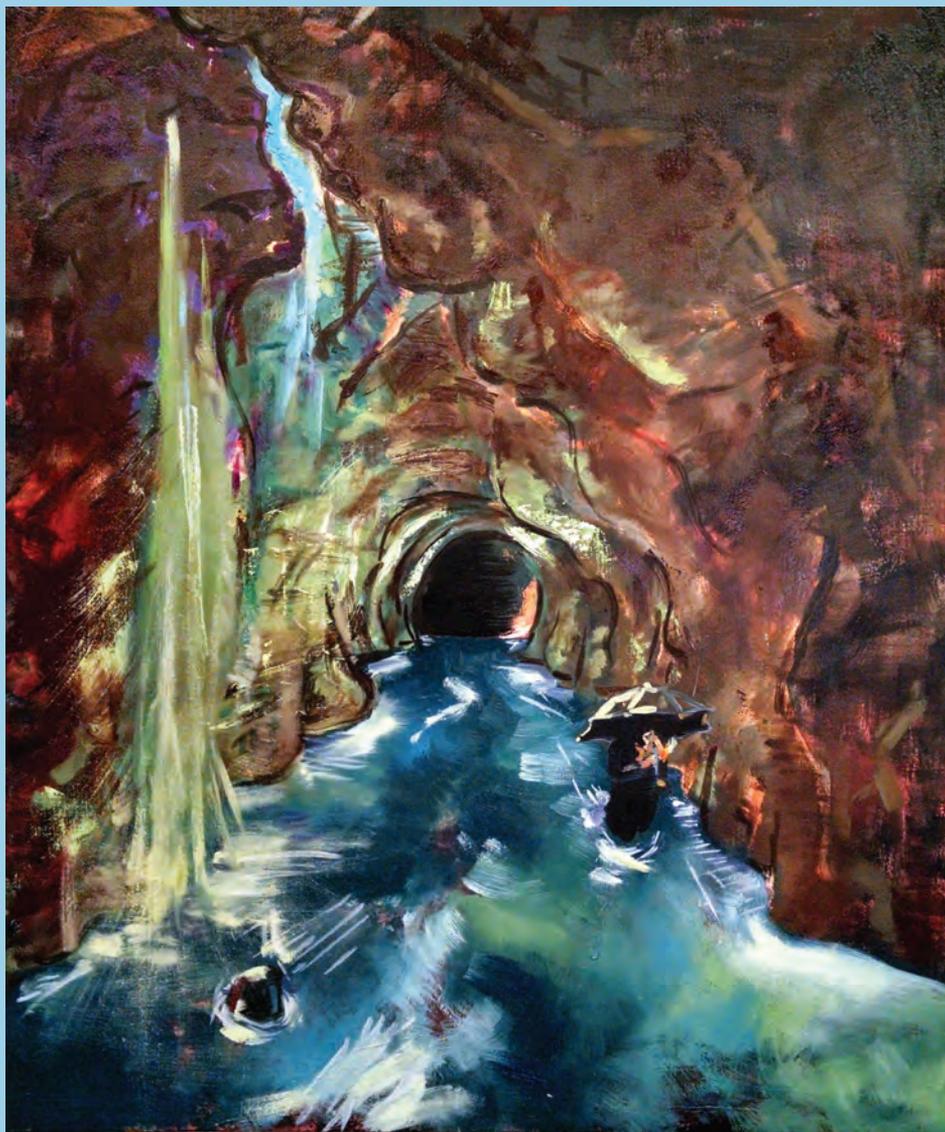


lines

from the middle of nowhere
a literary and arts journal



A Warning from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Within this journal, you are guaranteed to find daunting examples of creativity, talent, and originality. Do not be alarmed because that can only be expected from FHSU students. They just can't help themselves. If you can not handle such things, please feel free to go read a phone book or stare at a blank wall. However, if you are brave and willing, continue and enjoy the hard work of your fellow students.

This hunk of papers stapled together would not have been possible without the help of my board members, Dr. Lexey Bartlett, Sigma Tau Delta, and the Fort Hays State University Printing Services. So if you are absolutely appalled by this journal, blame them. I had nothing to do with it ... ■

ADALINE BILLINGER

Editor

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Guardian's Bribe

HANNAH SCHIPPERS
Art Education Senior

My First Secret

NICOLE BORCHERS

Art and English Senior

Peeking narrowly around the corner
I creep slowly up our beaten down red steps,
Carefully judging where each one creaks.
The walls and ceiling tinted by years
 Of a chain smoker
The screens illuminating the room
In bright multicolored light
His chair so worn, the room smells of leather,
Hot leather - like he's been sitting there all day.
Papers flutter, as he shifts between projects.
A cigarette burn marks the end table
Where he keeps his ashtray and his keys.
I watch him as he curses at the wall.
The forbidden fruit, so tantalizing
I say them secretly in my head.

■

Inspiration

ASHLEY BALZER

Physics Senior

The dreams that came so slowly once
Now raced freely about
Inside my mind they spun and danced,
All trying to break out

Their whispers turned to shouts and screams;
I tried to calm them down
The more I tried, the more they fought
For here they'd not abound

I thought that I was helping them
By causing them to wait
But they were ready long ago;
Already they felt late

At once I saw what I had done;
It came so clear to me
Held in so long, they'd wait no more—
No longer only dreams

I let them smash the barrier
That my mind had become
At their release, they leapt for joy
And their light struck me dumb

Before so loud; all silent now
I scarce could take it in
They moved too fast for sight or sound
I thought back with chagrin

Imagining where I would be
If I'd not held them down—
I snapped back to my present cares;
A smile replaced my frown

For now my dreams were all alive,
Preparing to take flight
They took me by the hand and then
Brought me up to the light





Icarus Swallowed or Saved by the Sea

SHAWN BUSH

Psychology Junior



The Job

TIFFANY SCHANK
Liberal Studies
Graduate Student

The Skyscraper

CAROL ALLAIN

English Junior

She stands proudly,
Straight and erect,
Climbing gracefully up
Towards the clouds.

The Master Architect
Carefully designed and ordered
Each and every brick and stone
In order to realize the image
He so longed to create.

The steel and mortar
Selected in her construction
Are strong and durable,
Designed to outlive the living.

Her front doors are impressive and shiny,
Welcoming all who pass through
With a sense of joyful anticipation.

Many throughout the world
Are touched by her presence,
Receiving wisdom and solace inside her walls
And inspiration from her image.

Through wind and rain and the fiercest of storms,
She stands as a reminder of the durability of her strength and spirit.

An inspiring view awaits all who look through her casements and
They depart with the knowledge of their true place in God's great planet.

Those who are blessed to stand beside her gracious magnitude
Are forever encouraged by a desire to emulate her complete beauty
And to also leave their mark for generations to come.



Intonations

BONNEE BENTUM

MIT Graduate Student

Sensing your voice is near
Wanting more of the sound to evaporate methodically into the soul
Ghanaian King grooves his tone
Inflecting tremors rumbling with energy
Causing the masses to stir
His forte timbre heard as a low and gentle roar

Using his most earnest and sincere accent
When AfriKa has been served on his plate
Mother has blessed him with divine song
Giving him all desirable flowing heavenly voice modulations

In turn
Her majesty becomes unsettled, unnerved, rattled
Twitching into all he articulates
Melting as if exquisite tone had never lain upon her eardrum
Keen to all subtle commands of his cadence
Flustered that he may not speak again

Living On ostensible sound

King & his Queen

Lifting her majesty into dance
Angelic dance whispers to her Ghanaian King
Harmoniously elevating him tenderly close at hand
Tempestuous fiery rhythms cautiously bound
Vibrant Energy mightily explodes





Thought

NICOLE BORCHERS
Art and English Senior



All Tired Out

RYAN SWAYNE

Ceramics and

Secondary Education Junior

The Dawning Dusk

Hues of orange, yellow and pink

Race across the sunset sky

All the stars begin to wink

Sun's release and its last sigh

What most think brings cold and dark

Sets to work the Maker's minds;

Sets ablaze the insight's spark;

Shows all what the brightness blinds

Much affected, these minds burn

Live with passion, fueled by truth;

Now to see and do and learn

All by light of lightless youth

■

ASHLEY BALZER

Physics Senior

Evolution

Concrete mountains

Concrete jungles

Concrete parking lots -

Invading the horizon

Luxury overpowers nature

The need is not, but done is it anyways.

Change: concrete growth.

Insanity ensues

People fight -

Over nothing, and everything

Words are sharpened

And fists are dirtied

The green revolution

Two opposing bodies

Working simultaneously

■

NICOLE BORCHERS

Art and English Senior

A Look in the Mirror

KRISTIN CANADA-ANTHONY

Leadership Graduate Student

So many of us walk by day to day and take a look in the mirror,

But we never actually see who we truly are.

Some of us wear tinted blinders that distort our beauty.

We stick our heads in the sand

And we miss out on the magnificent radiance of ourselves.

We sell ourselves short, and thus, never comprehend the extravagance.

We don't see the true elaborate nature of our own grandeur.

Some of us wear rose colored glasses.

We see ourselves as pure, righteous, and true.

Meanwhile, we are a black hole of filthy wretched ugliness.

Sucking the life out of all who are unfortunate enough to cross our path.

Oh to remove the blinders and those rose colored glasses.

To obtain ultimate vision and see ourselves for who we truly are.

The us that is portrayed to the world, and more importantly,

The us that our Lord sees.

Perhaps we could, if we weren't just so frightened to look.

■



Seven Deadly Sins

JULIA KENT
Painting Sophomore

Redemption, in Three Parts

ASHLEY BALZER

Physics Senior

[Part One: Desert Island]

Trapped here in this abandoned land
What troubles I must oft withstand
A weariness of heart and hand
Begins to take a toll

My stomach aches from emptiness
My mind from plagues of long duress
But naught compares to all the stress
Attacking now my soul

I wish that it could be undone
What brought me to this land of sun
I cry out, "You have truly won!"
Surrendering control

[Part Two: Transformation]

You see, my hope was fading fast
I tried yet I could not outlast
The suff'ring stemming from my past
I truly was confined

But then someone calls out to me
And peace—forgotten luxury—
Extends beyond my misery
To calm my weary mind

This foreign hope began to grow
I saw that there is much to know
That's hidden since so long ago
And only I can find

[Part Three: Escape]

I gazed up at that blinding light;
No longer could it steal my sight
For I was now to make my flight
From this forsaken place

I gathered up my scarce effects
And went to where the sun reflects,
Where land and ocean intersect
My life behind effaced

That cosmic sea called out to me
And now, at last, I could agree
That I had more to do and see—
A new life to embrace





Jack 3

KAT GOETTING
English Junior

A Stand in Harper's Wood

TERRI ENGDAHL

Human Services Senior

My cheek burned where the snowball had struck. A trickle of warmth ran down to my jaw. I was bleeding.

I knew who had thrown it. Unjon was fond of making heavy, wet snowballs with small, sharp ice cores. He had a strong arm for throwing. We might try to avoid his missiles, but he was a good hunter and knew how to target. He was man-size already, quick and powerful. A smart boy would submit to Unjon. A smart boy would find a way to become one of Unjon's unimportant followers, overlooked except to fetch and carry for him. A smart boy would learn this quickly.

I was not a smart boy.

Unjon was not alone that day. With him stood the strongest of his followers: Gap, Brine, Prophet, Newt, and Yancy. These were not their birth names. These were the names given among themselves, the identity they claimed in the society of their peers.

Children were not named for their parents. This was vanity and the elders frowned upon it. Names were sacred and must be earned in testing. Birth names were given to name a trait of a child's spirit until they reached the time of testing, when they would earn their true names.

Unjon had no boy name. His father named him Underjon at birth, naming his son after himself without drawing the displeasure of the elders. Flesh of his flesh and his to mold, Unjon was truly his father's creation. He was stronger and cleverer than Jon Caleb, and so he became dangerous. I wondered what his true name would be, and what his father would say when the time came. The elders chose one's true name, but Jon Caleb was not an elder. His father, Caleb Martin, was not an elder. No man or woman of that line ever sat within the stones. Jon Caleb was determined to change that.

And so there stood Unjon with his company around him and a small arsenal at his feet. They stood while we covered behind fallen trees and in cold trenches of deep snow. They stood between us and the village. They stood between us and home.

Gill and Ulf had already run back deeper into the woods. They would climb and wait in the trees until it was safe. But Unjon had sent others of his company into the woods to wait beneath the trees: to make camps and light fires and hunt, to roast spitted meat and lure the two boys hour by hour through the long winter night.

Cant and Meek huddled in a trench. Both of them were frightened, and panic was tracking their spirits.

I lay beside my arsenal behind deadfall. Blood from my cheek fell into the snow. It fell on the snowballs.

“Your friends are in the trees,” Unjon said to us. “How long do you think that will last?”

He paused, giving the day time to linger on our hearts, to weigh on our thoughts.

“Two of you,” he said, “for both of them. Come out now. Come to me, and I’ll let the squirrels go.”

This time, I thought. I knew Unjon. I knew he would hunt us again, corner us. I knew he would continue until he had all of us under his thumb.

“Or stay where you are,” Unjon said. “We’ll flush you out. It’s only a matter of time. But it will go worse for you.”

I peaked over the edge of my snow trench and saw him. He was smoothing a small bit of snow, shaping it into a sharp node of ice. He held it up to the sun to examine its edges, turning it this way and that. He smiled a small, dangerous smile that struggled to lift the corners of his mouth and glinted in his eyes like the sun flashing on the ice in his hand.

I sank again into my dugout and hurried to get my thoughts in order. I was not terribly clever. I was not fast or strong. Still I had to think of a way out of that trap. I would not surrender to a bully. But I did not want to be there when Unjon made good on his promise. “Worse” did not appeal to me, especially when my hands were numb and my face was sore and sticky-stiff where the blood had dried or frozen.

I was thinking about Unjon’s snowballs, about the ice at their cores and an idea tickled behind my eyes. It fluttered and my thoughts circled it. I was afraid of what was growing and trying to be born because it seemed that I must face Unjon ... or ...

Motion caught my eye and pulled me from my thoughts. Cant was waving his hands and squirming. I had seen a bird, once, lying on the ground at the foot of a tree. I did not know how it came to be there or what had happened to it, but it was on its back and flapping its wings and bouncing all about but getting nowhere. Cant was like that bird.

“Kid!” Cant called to me and it was like the wind blowing snow over an icy lake.

I turned my hands up: what?

He seemed to be having a fit as he told me with a series of wild gestures that he was not going to wait for Unjon to flush them out. He and Meek were going to surrender.

I shook my head so hard that my brain rattled inside my skull: No!

Cant nodded and looked even more like an addled bird. His fit grew and seized his whole body as he argued his case.

I held my palms out to him: wait.

I tapped my head and patted my chest: I have an idea.

Unjon went on talking: more of the same. I ignored him and tried not to think about what his companions were doing.

Cant looked away. He looked through a hole in the log at Unjon and sighed. I could see his shoulders melt and his head sink. When he looked at me again, he shook his head. His mouth said: I can't.

His boy name fit too well.

I scowled my deepest scowl and crossed my arms. I willed him to stay.

Cant shook his head. He reached behind and patted Meek, who was curled up into a ball: we go.

I took a snowball from the pile beside me and drew back my arm. With my other hand, I pointed at Cant and gave him a fierce face. I shook my head.

Cant threw his chin at me. He knew me. He counted on our friendship. So did I.

The snowball flew from my hand and exploded on Cant's chest. He grunted and wiped spray from his face but could not wipe away the surprise from his eyes or the hurt that crumpled the corners of his mouth. I knew that I did not have much time to tell him my plan. The hurt was growing and filling his face with anger.

I motioned to my pile of snowballs and to his. I pointed to the woods behind us. I waved a dismissive hand in Unjon's direction. I told Cant without words that we three should take our arsenal and go into the woods. I could not explain more but begged him, with my hands clasped beneath my chin, to trust me.

Cant crossed his arms. He was still angry. He looked first to Unjon, then to the woods. At last he looked at me and tilted his head and made a crooked face that told me he did not think much of my idea. His face was saying to me, I hope you know what you are doing.

I nodded and felt more gratitude than confidence.

I told Cant without speaking to gather Meek and all their snowballs and go into the forest. I pointed to myself. I pointed to Unjon. And when Cant looked betrayed, I grinned and pointed to my pile of snowballs. His eyes grew and grew until I thought they must come right out of his head. He said something I could not hear and shook his head. He patted Meek again and made him move and gather snowballs with him. Before they went into the woods, with their bodies curled over their arsenals and fear making their faces white as the earth around them, Cant and Meek looked at me and silently asked many questions and spoke many doubts.

I nodded again and filled my arms with hard sculpted snow.

And then I saw them. It was as I suspected. While I was negotiating with Cant, Unjon had sent Gap and Brine to enclose us. They stood between us and the woods. Cant and Meek froze.

I did not think. I saw them there and my heart grew fierce. It was too much to have to face Unjon and his boys day after day. And then to be cornered and hope for escape only to be cornered again. It was unbearable to me in that moment.

I do not recall what happened next, and Cant used to tell the story better anyway. For years he told it and always embellished more and more of it until he had made a new story with other boys and other events and a far grander outcome. For me it is a hazy memory.

Gap jerked backward and fell. Brine lurched sideways and was suddenly on his belly in the snow. My ear screamed and I could not hear from the right side. Something hard caught me on my left shoulder. My head throbbed above my right eye.

And I was down. I had left my trench and somehow found myself swimming in the snow, rolling and crawling and grabbing.

I did not see the others

Only Unjon and I remained

I do not remember climbing to my feet again. Snowmelt dripped from my hair and clothing. Blood stung my right eye, and I realized that I had caught one of Unjon's snowballs there. I shivered and my teeth chattered.

I do not know how my numb hands could have made another snowball. It was small and lumpy like a cold rock. I held it loosely in my hand. With one good eye, I measured the distance. I was deciding on a target—should it be the head? or the arm? or that very special place on boys?—when the woods came to life with a flurry of birds and screams and running things.

It turned out those screaming, running things were boys. They were Unjon's boys. Cant and Meek had flushed them out! Wonderful! Cant told it later but before he could begin his long series of embellishments and grow a completely different story, I learned that he and Meek had gone into the woods and come upon Unjon's boys where I knew they would be: sitting happy beneath the trees where Gil and Ulf had taken refuge. They did not expect two frightened boys to attack them.

At first, Cant and Meek threw one after another of their armloads of snowballs. When those were gone, they made more creative choices. Many animals live in the woods. Some small. Some big. And all of them leave some evidence of their passage: a footprint, a bit of fur. And scat.

Most of it was hard and dry. Some exploded into a powder that filled noses and mouths and clung to snow-wet hair. Some were like rocks and left small cuts and bruises and bits of themselves on the skin. Some was still soft and just wet enough to spatter and stick wherever it hit.

Unjon's boys ran for the village. Only his most loyal and most dangerous remained. They were lying in the snow around us, with dark thoughts like war paint on their faces. I did not see them. I did not hear the others screaming and running.

There was Unjon.

And there was me.

All of a sudden, Unjon's head jerked to the side and he reeled a bit. The snowball was wet and heavy and spread in a thick spray when it hit. I did not see who threw it, but one of the boys had gotten creative. They had mixed droppings with the snow and made a new kind of ammunition against Unjon and his boys. Unjon wiped at his face and flung the filth away.

I could not help myself: I laughed. It was not smartest thing to do, but as I said: I was not the smartest boy in Harper's Wood.

Unjon looked at me, and my laughter died at once. Dark fire shot from his eyes and whispered a promise to make me pay for his humiliation. I knew that even though he always traveled with his pack of boys, he and I would be alone when he caught up with me.

I met his eyes and defied their fire: so be it then.

■

Kindred

LIA BLANCHARD

English Graduate Student

I got in the checkout line behind the trashy woman in sweats. Her cart was as big as a bus, with a monstrous attachment on the front holding two small boys. The rugrats were bundled up against the cold and carelessly strapped in; one of them had a shiny river of snot cascading over his upper lip into his mouth. Disgusting.

I only had a half-gallon of milk in my hand, but even if she had noticed that, I doubt she would have had the grace to allow me to go ahead of her. I wasn't in a waiting mood, so thank God she only had a few items; juice boxes, macaroni and cheese, standard loser mom fare. I stood there and tried not to look at Snot Boy while his mom paid for the groceries—with food stamps, of course. She was pregnant, and, naturally, she had no wedding ring. At her age, you'd think she'd know better than to keep cranking out kids. Preventing them was surely cheaper than raising them, but I guess it's easier to receive welfare checks than work at a real job.

When she was finished, she fumbled her wallet and dropped it on the ground. She blinked at me with smeary eyes and mumbled something unintelligible as I picked it up and handed it to her. I wished she would just hurry up. I needed a cigarette.

* * *

When I dropped my wallet, I nearly lost it. Right there in Walmart, I almost had a breakdown over a wallet. I hadn't cried yet this year—not when my perfect husband suddenly went off the deep end and the boys and I had to move thousands of miles away. Not when our fresh start required a trip to the food stamp office in the first week. Not the week after that, when I realized I was pregnant; nor later when I learned the hard way that no one hires a pregnant woman, even one with a college education. Not even when we'd walked into the store tonight and I discovered that I'd forgotten to stuff my pockets with tissues to wipe Jake's nose and I had to spend the whole shopping trip avoiding looking at my three-year-old for fear I'd retch. But the moment my wallet hit the floor, I almost lost it.

A helpful man about my age picked it up and handed it to me. He didn't say anything, but he seemed like a regular guy, dressed in jeans and a work shirt with a pack of cigarettes stuffed into the front pocket. Brown hair that needed a trim and green eyes with a few more wrinkles than I suspected should be there made me wonder if he hadn't had a hard year, too.

I blinked back tears and thanked him a lot, this kindred spirit of mine, then pushed the boys out of the store to flee back to our apartment.

■



A Crumbled Past

KAITLYN LAMMERS
Fine Arts Senior

Acceptance

JOANNA LORING

History Graduate Student

It doesn't become clear to fourteen-year-old Cody, not right away, when he listens to the waves crashing against the shoreline. He lies on the sand relaxed in every way. He opens his eyes and stares at the white sky with stray puffs of grey clouds. He blinks a few times. He has never felt so comfortable in his entire life. The sand beneath him feels smooth and warm. The constant sound of waves soothes him and he has no desire to move.

He closes his eyes.

Images flicker through his mind like a fast forward movie. He sees himself as a young boy when his father was teaching him how to ride his bike. The image switches to his smiling mother handing him a bowl of strawberries and ice-cream. Then, his brother laughing and jumping off a rope swing into a crystal clear lake. The images continue at a faster pace - snapshots of his life as his memory filters through the good times of his childhood.

Cody opens his eyes again and briefly wonders where he is but the desire to return back to his memories draw him in. He closes his eyes once more and tries to conjure images of his past. Nothing. He tries again but the images are gone. Resigning his effort, Cody stands up and surveys his surroundings. The beach is deserted and eerily serene. He wonders where everyone is and tries to remember the sequence of events that led him to this place. Confused and annoyed at his lack of memory, he sits.

"This must be a dream. Perhaps if I go to sleep I will wake up in my bed."

He lies down and closes his eyes but he still cannot sleep, no matter how hard he tries, he is just too restless. He opens his eyes once again and notices the grey cotton shaped clouds becoming dense in the distance. Cody lifts his hand up to the sky and tries to touch the clouds.

Remembering a memory as clear as day, his older brother, Jack, lies next to him on the sand. They both touch the clouds with their outward hands.

“Cumulus clouds. We learnt about the clouds in school last week. I’ve decided I wanna become a meteorologist. It’s a job where if you get the job wrong it’s okay. How cool is that!”

“What do you mean?” asked Cody.

“Have you heard about the Butterfly Effect?”

“No.”

“Well ... meteorologist can never predict the weather one hundred percent because a butterfly may change the flap of its wings.” Jack is very passionate and animated as he explains the theory. “Let’s just say ... in Japan something as inconsequential to a human such as a ...”

“What’s inconsequet ... inconsequent ...”

It’s Jack dictionary phase, he likes to find big words and use them.

“Inconsequential means it’s not important. So a butterfly flapping its wings, is that important to you?”

“No.”

“Well a slight and I’m emphasizing slight flap of any insect wing in Japan could ultimately cause thunderstorms right here in Virginia Beach.”

“No way!”

“Mr. Cutter said it’s a case of cause and effect. See ...” in the distance the clouds appear darker. “Soon we will have a thunderstorm. A butterfly caused that.”

“Did not!”

“Did so.”

“That’s stupid.”

“You’re stupid.”

His brother laughs and throws sand at him. Cody jumps on him and they scuffle around on the sand, laughing and yelling, until Cody finds himself scuffling alone. The image reminds him of the movie, It’s a Wonderful Life that they were forced to watch every Christmas where the cop tries to grab the angel but the angel disappears. His brother disappeared too ... but no ... wait ... it was a memory from his childhood. What he thought he had just experienced with his brother happened when he was eleven-years-old.

Cody is totally confused. “Jeez, this is crazy. Come on. Let me wake up already!”

Cody sits up and feels very alone. The loneliness depresses him. He lies back down on the sand and closes his eyes.

Cody grips the railing of his new boogie board and rides the wave. The new Moray Cruiser doesn’t disappoint him. He smiles then laughs. The speed is amazing. He feels like he is flying over the wave and it gives him an adrenaline rush. He slightly leans to the left, the board turns as it should and gives a longer ride. The wind has picked up and the other guys in the water have disappeared. He doesn’t care, he’s having the time of his life. He skims to the shoreline then stands

up. Surveying the ocean he decides to take one more wave. Cody drags his board and plunges right into the water. Paddling out, he notices it's getting dark. Mom will get mad if I'm late for dinner. He paddles further out to catch the last long ride in. Waiting for a set of waves he notices the conditions have changed dramatically. He feels the rise of the swell as waves clash ahead of him. The wind has changed direction peeling distraught waves backwards. This is definitely going to be his last ride. He turns towards the shore preparing to take his last wave when he notices someone sitting on the beach and realizes he has drifted quite far.

No.1. Jack rule - if you drift, paddle back to the starting position or you will continue to drift.

He scans the beach houses. He remembers dropping his bike in front of a large yellow house. His eyes follow the neatly lined beach houses and guesstimates he's drifted about a quarter of a mile from the yellow house. He paddles parallel to the row houses until he sits in front of the yellow house. Cody notices his arms have started to ache. He rests for a second, aware now how tired he feels. He decides to paddle to the shore before a set comes in. There will be other days to catch the perfect wave. Summer has just begun so there will be plenty of time.

Annoyingly, his board gets tangled in a mass of seaweed and kelp. He drifts further out as he untangles the mess from his prized board. Without notice, a set of waves leashes over him and he flips off his board and immediately is dragged under. Cody fights the ocean's pull by kicking his legs and moving his arms in an attempt to stay above water. For one hopeful second he is able to stay afloat in the heaving swell. He scans the ocean for his prized board but the waves probably carried it to shore.

A wave crashes over his head. He splutters and coughs. With a sinking feeling he knows he is in trouble. He waves his arms hoping to catch someone's attention. His feet get tangled in seaweed and he is pulled deep into the freezing cold water. He kicks off the seaweed and quickly swims upward. Now he is fully aware of the icy cold brutal water. His lips tremble and his body shakes. His breathing is coarse but slowly manageable. A thin mist rolls in and he feels trapped. A wave clobbers over him again. He gasps for breath. It's difficult and he almost chokes. Panicking, he kicks upward. He finally is able to breathe and sucks in air when another wave pounds him down. Then someone grabs him and he is pulled up. It's a girl. Her long blonde hair is a matted mess. He coughs frantically trying to take deep breaths.

Fear of losing control, of not being able to breathe, of not staying afloat, of the confusion, the anxiety of trying ... trying to survive, the hopelessness of his weak body, terrified and wanting to desperately to survive, he frantically grabs hold of the girl. His one object is survival - to live - to breathe. His body screams for air. Cody climbs her like a ladder demanding a safe haven but he only pushes her down. At that moment he doesn't care. He will endure anything to live ... to see his parents ... his

brother. He wants to breathe, to take in slow breaths of life. He must live, he begs to live. But he is swept under as threads of sea grass brush by him.

He remains vigilant. He kicks and flaps his arms until his head reaches above water. The girl has disappeared. He doesn't care. He is floating. Hope is a milestone ... a resilient thought. Hope is now the new light. Perhaps he will be home for dinner. He will be late and mom will be mad. He will be happy to see mom mad.

His eyes sting and head hurts. He coughs up water, every small breathe he inhales hurts but he is breathing. Exhausted, he tries to swim towards the beach hoping he makes it before another set of waves drag him back. The urge to get to solid ground is intense. He can see the beach just a short distance away. He must swim to the beach ... must swim to the beach. His arms are lead weight, the rest of his body is numb and ... he just wants to close his eyes and sleep.

Then he sees the girl but it is her expression of pure terror driven in her eyes before being swept back by another set of relentless waves that tells him the truth. He is dragged and pulled down into the icy water.

No more strength. He just wants to sleep. To let go. Salt water fills his lungs. Cody tries to breathe one more time instead intense pain pitches through his entire body. He tries to fight for air but he is paralyzed and then ...

nothing.

No fear.

No pain.

He sees an image of himself floating, moving fluidly like a jellyfish. Shocked, Cody quickly sits up and takes in his surroundings almost hyperventilating with the stress. "A dream, it must have been a dream. Or ... am I dreaming now? I don't understand."

Fear driving him, Cody jumps up, "Help me!"

He yells again. "Someone help me!"

The beach remains deserted. Thoughts go through Cody's mind, maybe I was washed up on shore. That's got to be it! Strolling on the warm white sand he feels a slight balmy breeze. Cody walks to the ocean's edge and allows the water to roll over his feet. The waves are small and grey with small white silver tips that gently peel against the shoreline.

He turns and follows the endless white sand. There are no beach houses or trees. There are no people or animals. There is nothing but the ocean and the sand. He suddenly sprints along the shoreline. He runs to find an end. But the ocean and beach go on forever. He leaps and yells thinking of his favorite childhood toy.

"To infinity and beyond!"

He continues to run. Nothing changes. Even the light never filters. Slowing down, Cody stares at the sky and realizes there is no sun or moon.

He stops. "Where am I?"

Thoughtfully, surveying his surroundings he realizes there is no color other than black and white with shades of grey. There is no night and day ... no concept of time. There is not even a season to relate too. Nothing changes, everything remains the same.

Then it dawns on him. Just like when suddenly you get an answer to a difficult problem that you've been trying to resolve for days. The answer hits him loud and clear.

Cody shouts the words. "I'm dead!"

As soon as the words come out, Cody feels exhausted. His body melts to the ground, calmly, he moves into a fetal position, he is not afraid instead finds comfort and warmth and something else ... peace as his thoughts disintegrate into nothingness and before he closes his eyes, the world around him disappears.

The End.





Wardens of Thistledown

JOE BORRA

Wildlife Biology Senior

Puddle Jumper

TERRI ENGDAHL

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The last day of October breathed cold and sent clouds running across the sky in streaks of tie-dyed grays. Karen Grymb didn't mind the weather. October was her favorite month. She loved the change of seasons, loved the way the wind stung her cheeks. She was especially fond of the cold, blustery fingers of wind that crept inside her coat and between the layers of clothing. They made her shiver and giggle and snuggle deeper into her cold-weather gear. She adored the way the air smelled, wet and frosty and earthy; you never knew if it would rain or sleet or snow.

Snow was fun to dance in or to catch or, after a particularly fierce fall, to build into snowballs or forts or tiny snow villages. Sleet made everything glittery and crackled in her hair and on her clothes. Rain was the best of all. Rain left icy puddles for her to play in. Her favorite game was puddle-jumping: pitting her prowess against the sizes of the puddles, hurtling them in rapid succession without wetting so much as the tips of her shoes. She didn't always succeed and, more often than not, splashed herself to her knees with all the grace of an elephant at a waterhole.

That day promised to be a Wonderful Weather day for Karen. It was by Karen's estimation a perfect day. The rain had spent itself making dozens of grand puddles for her enjoyment, and a new storm looked to be brewing before dark. School was out for the day, and Karen was making the most of her walk home.

It was a good walk: not too far, not too difficult. At ten-and-a-half, Karen was proud that she could walk to school and back again unaccompanied. Not only could she navigate the route her parents had plotted for her, but she had discovered other paths. It was not something every fifth-grader could do. Karen knew several kids who lived closer or who had only one turn to remember, and they couldn't do it. They had to have a parent come meet them in the school's library to walk them home. Not Karen, no sir. She could do it all by herself and then some.

So today, as most days, Karen was stuck behind younger Walkers at the corner of Becker and Elmer, ready to scream at the waste of such a perfect day. Puddles were waiting to be found and conquered! Karen despaired while waiting for her chance to cross, grumbled to herself as she waded through the quicksand of little Walkers crossing Becker Street. She had tried to find a different route home that would not involve such a lengthy process, but it didn't seem to matter which corner she chose anywhere near Patterson Elementary. The sad fact of life was that little kids were everywhere, and their sole purpose in life seemed to be getting their heels right under her feet.

C'mon, c'mon, she thought to herself. Why do you kids walk ... so ... SLOW?

Karen kept her hands at her sides, trying not to shove or jostle anyone, but these kids just weren't moving. One girl dropped a priceless piece of paper, presumably an art project to be framed and hung in the Louvre; and a couple of boys stopped to look for someone behind them, causing a knot of angry bumping until the crossing guard snapped a command and the two hurried across. At last, Karen reached the far corner of Becker and Elmer. Her puddle quest could begin, and she knew just where to find all the best puddles.

Elmer Lane was pretty tame by her standards. The sidewalks around Patterson Elementary were just too new, and the ground had not settled enough to create much noteworthy geography. Once she reached Fitch Street, the landscape changed dramatically. Left along the parent-approved route to her front door provided a fair crop of puddles, but a right turn at Fitch led to an older neighborhood with huge trees and compromised walkways, the perfect habitat for puddles. Either direction was fantastic for leaping puddles or, when the temperature dropped, for skating them. But the all-time greatest puddle waited where Karen was forbidden to go.

She had discovered it last year while trick-or-treating with her parents. It was four whole blocks from Fitch, on Dolor Lane, which was easily the spookiest block she'd ever seen, with old creaking houses and gnarled trees that loomed over the street and yards. Even Mom and Dad had seemed a bit unnerved and hurried Karen from door to door as fast as Halloween etiquette allowed. The experience so upset her folks that they'd admonished Karen never to stray so far as Dolor Street. "Grounding won't be the worst of it, Karen Marie Grymb," her mother had said, promising a fate to be decided after long consideration while Karen sweated it out in the confines of her room.

Karen had already conquered many puddles along her route that day. Though her shoes remained relatively dry, the legs of her jeans were already soaked to the tops of her thighs, to the tips of her pockets where her coat flapped open, carelessly neglected in her rush to enjoy a fresh crop of puddles. The Great Puddle, however, was enormous and its presence, its challenge, could not be easily ignored. So it was that Karen disregarded her parent's prohibition and found herself once again on Dolor Lane.

The Great Puddle spanned three entire sections of sidewalk and part of a fourth. It poured over the exposed roots of a monstrous oak on one side of the walk and, on the other side, covered much of the unkempt lawn that lay at the foot of a large and possibly haunted house.

The house was the stuff of which the best and scariest ghost stories were made. It wasn't just old. Her grandparents were old but they were still fun. She didn't look at them and see the grave that waited for them but rather the long years of happiness that hung from their sagging skin and painted their thin white hair. Nothing fun or bright emanated from that house. It seemed ... wary.

Watching.

Waiting.

That day, the Great Puddle offered a new temptation for Karen. In the center of its voluminous body, spread-eagle to the sky, lay a brightly-dressed cloth doll.

Karen stared at it for a moment. The wind gusted but the surface of the puddle remained dark and glassy, unbroken by the smallest ripple. The doll never moved however hard the wind blew; it remained perfectly still, arms and eyes open wide to Heaven.

It struck Karen as very sad that this pretty little doll should be lying in icy water beneath murky October clouds. Drowning, she thought and a trickle of fear ran down her spine. All at once, the joy went out of her day. Karen no longer saw the beauty in the changing autumn leaves. She no longer felt a thrill at the nip in the air, once heady with autumn aromas that now stuck in the back of her throat, moldy and fetid and foul. The day twisted, turned bleak and dreary and sorrowful.

The doll stared and contemplated nothing.

Karen approached the Great Puddle. She stopped at its edge and considered. She couldn't leave the doll soaking in the water. Something about it called to her, begged her for rescue. It was such a pretty doll even if it was a bit babyish, something an infant might cuddle while drowsing. All the same, she wondered how she was going to get the doll out of the Puddle without getting wet. It was a fresh aspect to her usual game, and Karen was determined to find a solution.

She looked around for a tree branch, a stick, anything. Despite the wind and rain, the trees were miserly in their leavings. Twigs and leaves littered the block but none were of much use. The neighborhood ached with neglect, and Karen saw nothing amid the scattered toys and lawn furnishings and general refuse that would suit her purpose. Her shoulders drooped beneath heavy spirits: she had no hope of winning this game today.

The doll, however ...

The doll could not be left
(drowning)

in the water. Karen couldn't allow it, was compelled to
(save her)

do something about it.

Karen waded into the Great Puddle.

The water was unbelievably cold, biting at her feet with arctic ferocity. It flowed over her ankles, saturated her canvas sneakers. The cold crept along the delicate skin on top of her feet, crawled above her ankles, snaked upward and inward to the depth of her bones. It froze her so thoroughly that Karen could not even shiver.

The wind played a dry creaking melody in the trees, haunting in its rasping cadence. Leaves raced by, skittering and whispering and never once touching any part of the Great Puddle. Karen stood at its center, stood beside the pretty cloth doll, and the day darkened.

After long moments of quiet forgetfulness, her thoughts caught in a frosty web, Karen reached for the doll. Her arm lifted with the stiff languidness of a statue cast in the likeness of a young girl.

The doll turned its head to look into the eyes of its savior. One plump baby-doll hand lifted from the water, brushed Karen's fingertips. A rime of ice traveled from that juncture, moved onward to cover her hand and upward along her arm, spread over the breadth and length of her body. Her breath crackled past her lips and dissipated in a plume of fine crystal. Karen stared at her hand, wanted to jerk it away, wanted to deny what now stood in front of her.

She could not move.

The little girl holding Karen's hand was pale and petite and pretty. She had large blue eyes that smoldered with something cold, something dark, something that never looked on the world with human eyes. Her long black hair hung in water-heavy pony tails that dripped in cadence with her sodden dress. Blossoms of pink bloomed on her milky, translucent cheeks.

"Come inside," the girl said. "It's warm inside."

Karen dragged her gaze to the house, noting its debilitation and wondering at the girl's promise. A wind chime wept a discordant melody but hid itself somewhere along in the eaves.

"We can have hot chocolate and cookies," the girl said.

Karen swooned in a pocket of sweet buttery air that swirled around a breath of chocolate.

"Come on," the strange girl said, tugging Karen's hand. "Help me out of the water and we can eat and play."

Karen took a hesitant step toward the edge of the Great Puddle, wavered toward the house.

"Don't you want to get warm?" the doll-faced girl asked. "Aren't you just starving?"

Karen gasped at the cold in her bones and longed for the penetrating heat from

a thick sweet cup of chocolate, hungered for a satisfying mouthful from a freshly-baked cookie.

Together, Karen and the doll-faced girl left the Great Puddle and approached the weary old house. The wind chimes beckoned softly, still weeping their sad tune. The broken walk tugged at Karen's wet shoes, urged her closer ... Closer ... CLOSER.

Up one step ... two steps ... hand in hand, two little girls made their way home. Three steps ... four ... the cold settled deeper even as phantom heat curled under the front door and along the floorboards of the porch, curled a come-hither finger of chocolate and baked delights.

Two right feet landed at the top of the stairs, one clad in black canvas and the other in black patent leather. Two left feet followed and drew a groan from the tired wood.

The chimes fell silent.

The front door opened with a click and a sigh. The house greeted the girls with darkness and dust, with murmurs of sweet promises, with honeyed cobwebs and syrupy lies.

The doll-faced girl squealed with rapture and leaped through the doorway, giggling and clutching Karen's hand.

Karen had time for one panicked thought before stumbling across the threshold, one thought screaming as it fled from her mind:

RUN ...

■



When Oil Spills

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