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SATORI

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TWENTY-SEVENTEEN

A literary magazine run by WSU students.

MISSION STATEMENT

In Zen Buddhism, “Satori” is the Japanese word for enlightenment, seeing into one’s own true nature. Since 1970, Satori has provided a forum for Winona State University students to express and share their own true nature and their creations with the university community.

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THE WINONA PRIZE IN CREATIVE WRITING

This year's edition of Satori includes the winners of the Winona Prize in fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry. The Winona Prize is made possible by a WSU alumnus who wants to encourage students to pursue writing.

THE WINONA PRIZE WINNER IN FICTION

“RUBY” BY SAJDA OMAR

“I was immediately drawn into Sajda Omar’s highly imaginative short story ‘Ruby.’ A deep exploration into childhood cruelty, and its tragic consequences, “Ruby” draws the reader into a complex, psychological portrait of a young girl ostracized by peers. Well written, impressively original, and emotionally potent, this is powerful fiction that matters.”

-Fiction writer and judge, Sheila O’Connor

RUBY

BY SAJDA OMAR

Grandma's hair was like mercury. I didn't know it when she was alive, but once at the library I found a book about the elements and saw a picture of it. Her hair was shiny and silver and flowed like thick water, like water that was filled with glitter, something only science could explain: mercury. It was always parted perfectly down the middle. When I was a baby, I would tug on Grandma's hair when she bent over my crib. When I told Mom this, she said nobody remembers things when they're a baby, but I remembered everything. I would tug on it, and Grandma would smile because her hair was so strong and it didn't hurt her at all. Every time I think back to her funeral my head hurts; my brain gets tired.

At the funeral, I was five and my hair was just as long as Grandma's was. My uncle lifted me up so I could look over her like a bird or an angel. My hair hung down around my face and reached out for her, but when I looked inside it wasn't her at all. Grandma's hair was pulled back into a bun that left her head resting awkwardly on the satin cushion underneath. Grandma never wore her hair up, especially not in a bun. I asked Mom why her hair was up and if I could undo it because I

knew Grandma would have preferred it down. I wanted to touch it one last time; I wanted to tug on it like I had when I was a baby and maybe that would wake Grandma up and she would smile at me and everything would be normal. Mom said absolutely not. She grabbed my arm and pulled me away and I never saw Grandma again.

The next day, Mom brought me to the library to cheer me up. After a long time of going through all of the shelves, Mom pointed me in the direction of the free bin. There were lots of books piled inside of a wire basket and a sign that said "FREE" in green marker. I had decided on a book of Brothers Grimm fairy tales. My favorite was Rapunzel because it reminded me of Grandma. I read it over and over and every night I would feel anger in the pit of my stomach when Mother Gothel cut off Rapunzel's hair. I cried with Rapunzel when she could no longer leave her tower and I went to sleep, satisfied with the happy ending I knew by heart, my fingers wrapped around my braid. One day I decided I wanted to carry the story with me everywhere, but the book was too heavy. I raised up on my tiptoes and searched all the drawers in the kitchen for a pair of scissors. I wanted the pages to stay as

neat as possible, so I cut them all out as close to the binding as possible. I started cutting as I walked back to my bedroom. And then I tripped and the scissors jammed into the soft part under my chin. I'd never bled like that before. Mom found me crying in the hallway, collecting the pages I had dropped.

After many stitches, I was home in bed. Mom lectured me and I cried because I hadn't done it on purpose. She told me I wasn't allowed to use scissors anymore, not even at school. She shoved my fairy tale book into my hands. The cut-out pages were folded haphazardly and wedged in the binding. A few pages had little specks of my blood on them. I decided that the rest didn't have to be neat since the cut-out pages were already ruined. I ripped them out and folded them with the others. At school, I stapled it like a book and kept it in my backpack for the rest of the school year.

When I was seven, I had very long, very blonde hair. It was the kind of blonde that almost looked white and I felt like Rapunzel whenever Mom had time in the morning to braid it. She told me that when I get older, I could curl it like Grandma sometimes did, but right now I was too young. I knew that I would probably always be too young if she had a say in it.

The scar on the bottom of my chin was raised and in the shape of an L. I imagined myself with a big

red burn on my forehead and didn't think it'd be the worst. Grandma sometimes burned the side of her face when she curled her hair and it never made her ugly.

Samantha Price brought cupcakes to class for her 12th birthday. My birthday is in the summer so I never celebrate at school, though I'm sure nobody in class would want to eat anything I brought anyway. Once, in fourth grade, I brought cookies for Valentine's Day and Samantha told everyone that they were contaminated, then flipped her long red tresses. "*Don't you know those sprinkles are all of Ruby's hair shavings?*" They were store-bought cookies. My mom would never shave my head so close to the kitchen.

Samantha walked around with a big smile on her face, handing out her birthday cupcakes. They all had different colored frosting and sprinkles. I wanted a purple-frosted one.

"Samantha, have you brought enough for our new student?" Ms. Stevens gestured toward a girl with tan skin and very long, very black hair. She reminded me of a dark Rapunzel. I couldn't stop staring at her. We had all seen her when we walked in, but nobody said anything to her at the time. I had sat silently next to her and admired the subtle wave of her hair.

"Oh, right," Samantha said, as if she actually

hadn't seen the new girl before now, as if that were possible. "I only brought 25." She pouted, acting like that really hurt her to not have enough for everyone. She flipped her bright ginger hair. I wanted to reach out and grab it.

Samantha walked to the new girl's desk and handed her the last cupcake. Its frosting was purple. I did not get a cupcake. I could feel my face becoming pink with embarrassment. Nobody noticed that I didn't get a cupcake, except dark Rapunzel and Samantha.

"Before we begin class, let's have our new student, Lyla, introduce herself." Ms. Stevens smiled to the new girl, motioning for her to stand up. She stood and seemed rather calm for being a new student. She tucked her hair behind her left ear.

"My name is Lyla Sleiman, and I moved here from Ontario." She gave a small smile before sitting back down. She swept all her hair to her left side, away from me.

Ms. Stevens thanked her and told everyone to pull out their English homework. I bent down to my backpack to grab my folder and when I got back up, half of a cupcake with purple frosting was placed on my desk. It sat in its wrapper so that no desk germs would get on it. I looked over to Lyla, who stared at the board, absent-mindedly chewing on her half of the cupcake. She had a small smile on her lips, like the first one hadn't

left, and her black hair flowed down her shoulder. Even fluorescent lights could not distort its perfect coloring.

I sat next to Mom, clutching my braid, while my second grade teacher, Mr. Allen, talked about how I was a very bright child, but my hair was becoming a distraction.

"Ruby is a very bright child, but her hair is becoming a distraction," said Mr. Allen.

Mom looked concerned. She nodded quickly like she knew exactly what he was talking about. I didn't understand how hair could become a distraction. Everyone had hair except Mr. Allen, who was balding at 30.

"If you could find a way to keep the hair out of reach? Ruby doesn't pay much attention to anything else in class other than her hair and when we have journal time she barely writes because she'd rather hold onto that braid." Mr. Allen suggested cutting my hair and I wondered if he could even suggest that in the first place. I grasped my braid tighter.

"Oh, no. That hardly seems necessary in this scenario." Mom sounded like an actress, pronouncing her vowels like she was stretching. *In thiiiis scenaariooo.*

"Well, any way you can fix this distraction would be wonderful. I'd hate to see Ruby's hair hurt her education." He said hair like he thought his baldness made him

smarter.

The next morning, Mom did not braid my hair. She brushed it back roughly and pulled it into a tight, ugly bun. I looked like a sad ballerina. A clumsy ballerina. I looked like Grandma when Grandma looked nothing like herself.

Sitting in class was impossible without the weight of my braid over my shoulder or the feeling of it in my hand. My face felt like it was being pulled backward. I hated this stupid bun. I hated Mr. Allen for ruining my favorite thing. Every time I raised my hand to stroke the top of my head, Mr. Allen would glare at me and shake his head as a warning.

I watched all the other girls in class run their fingers through their hair. Libby Beswick had her hair in curly pigtails. Lisa Bennett had all her hair clipped out of her face so it ran down her back. Samantha Price had her orange hair in a braid like mine. There was no way she would have known I'd come to school with my hair all tied up, but something in the way she played with her braid made me suspicious.

When I got home, Mom took my bun out and brushed my hair until it was smooth. She left me to my homework. I asked her to leave the hairbrush. She gave me a strange look and shrugged. Once she closed my door, I started pulling out all the hairs that were caught

in the hairbrush. Soon I had a small nest of little white-blond hairs in the palm of my hand. I started keeping that in my pocket whenever I went to school. I ran my thumb across it all throughout the day. It would tangle and get staticky and get stuck to the inside of my pocket.

Lyla made friends with Samantha Price and all the other girls that made fun of me. Lyla wasn't like those girls. She was nice. When we switched pages for spelling tests, she would fix my misspelled words when Ms. Stevens wasn't looking and she would always share her gum with me. I imagined what would happen if Lyla got gum stuck in her hair. I would offer to cut it out for her and then when she wasn't looking, I would keep the un-gummy piece in my pocket.

I needed my braid to focus. Even the simplest subtraction problem was impossible if I couldn't hold my hair. All I could think about was the emptiness of my hand and the constant pulling on my scalp. It gave me a headache. A small ball of matted, tangled hair in my pocket could not replace the smoothness of my hair perfectly twisted together. No strands would knot or tangle when I ran my fingers across it.

Mom greeted me when I got off the bus. We walked together into the house and she undid the bun.

The hair at my roots sighed with relief. Mom made jokes about how brushing my hair was like untangling a rope. I turned to her with the caution I always used after the L-shaped scar marked my chin. I asked her if I could stop wearing buns. She shook her head, trying to look sympathetic but failing. I stayed silent for a few minutes and then turned back to her.

“Mom, could I maybe use the scissors?” I searched her face for any sign of resistance.

The counterfeit softness left her face. “Why do you need the scissors?”

“I—There’s a bunch of shapes I have to cut out for an art thingy. For school.”

“An art thingy for school.”

“Yes.”

“I don’t think so. I’ll cut the shapes out for you.”

I swore to myself, though at this time swearing to myself was *darn it* and *shoot*. It was silly for me to even think ‘the art thingy’ could convince her. She would never let me use scissors, even with her closest supervision.

“Okay,” I said, because if I said, “Never mind Mom” she would know I was up to something. So Mom cut out ten different shapes for me with great care and I watched her intently, wringing my hair like it was wet. When she was done, Mom asked me if I wanted her to braid my hair because I was twisting it so tight.

“No, it’s okay, Mom. I’m gonna do my homework.” I collected the stupid shapes and ran upstairs. I’d had this problem before. The next option was to rip.

Lyla had become my friend, too, which was not something I expected. I was surprised that Samantha Price and her friends didn’t shun Lyla for being my friend, but they didn’t really care. One day Lyla asked me about why my head was shaved and it wasn’t anything like how Samantha would ask. Sometimes Samantha would ask if I was going into the army, or if I could get my money back at the hairdresser’s. They weren’t really creative, but they still made my face get all pink and hot.

“Did you not like having to wash your hair?” Lyla guessed.

“I used to have really long hair...” It wasn’t really an answer, but it wasn’t wrong.

“Well, why don’t you anymore?” Her prying was more like curiosity. She seemed like the kind of person who liked knowing about people because she liked people. Samantha liked knowing things about people because she liked to hurt them.

I shrugged her questions off because it was easier to just shrug them off than to explain.

My jaw tightened. I closed my eyes and counted to three. I gripped hard onto a ribbon of my hair and ripped. *Riiiiip*. I whimpered; the pain from the base of my scalp made my eyes water. The part that I ripped felt cool and stingy and when I touched it, I winced.

But I had a piece of my hair in my hands and it was so soft and long and wonderful. I would braid it up so it wouldn't get tangled in my pocket. I thought I could wear it as a bracelet sometimes and other times I could leave it in my pocket and run my fingers over it as if it were still on my head. Mr. Allen would think he had won, but I would know he hadn't.

I started to braid the strands together. When I had finished I was left with a sad, thin rope of hair like a garden snake. It wasn't enough. I decided the strand alone would be the perfect size for one section of a braid. I needed two more pieces.

Riiip. It was a small sound with a big sting and for each tug I cursed Mom and Mr. Allen and my five-year-old self for running with scissors. *Riiiiip*.

Lyla always touched her hair in class. She would run her fingers through it and pull it all to her left side and whenever we watched videos, Samantha Price would sit behind her in the dark and braid her hair. Lyla's hair was a dream. Even in the dark it was shiny and black-

er than the night sky, probably. I imagined myself with long black hair and I decided I could have any color hair because my skin tone was so plain that it would match. At first I thought Lyla would not look good with my white-blonde, but then I supposed she'd look even more like a magical creature, a water nymph with dark skin and bright hair. Whatever I imagined on her, she was still beautiful. I told her one day that I wished I had hair like hers, that I would be pretty if I had hair like hers.

"Why don't you grow your hair out?"

"My mom won't let me." I looked down at my hands.

She furrowed her brows, which were also pretty. "You don't need hair to be pretty."

I looked back up at her. How could she be friends with Samantha Price?

"My mom has short hair. She says it's less work in the morning. And I think you look cool; you have really long eyelashes and you don't have a weird-shaped head." We both laughed at that. I didn't believe her words, but they made me feel better.

"What is my head shaped like?" I didn't want to end the conversation. I wanted her to tell me that I was pretty so that I could pretend I was.

"It's like...an onion?" We both burst into laughter.

Between gasps for air, Lyla tried to explain her reasoning. “Onions are round ...” inhale “and white and...” exhale “so is your...” inhale “head!” Our sides hurt. After we wiped our tears, Lyla invited me to her birthday-slumber party. I could feel my face turning pink, but it was a happy pink for once.

When I came home I told Mom I looked like an onion and cackled. She didn’t think it was funny like I did.

“What are you doing?” Mom’s voice was hollow and frantic. She swung my bedroom door open.

I sat with my legs folded underneath me in front of my mirror, braiding the strands of hair I had ripped out. I jumped because her voice was so loud compared to the soft rip in the silence of my room. Mom was holding a bowl of spaghetti; she put it on the floor because her hand was shaking so bad. I asked her what was wrong.

“What’s wrong?” I had almost finished braiding my hair. I hadn’t used scissors and there were no rules against what I had done; that is what I would tell her if she was mad at me.

“Why is your hair in your hands and not on your head?” She said hair like how kids in my class would whisper *shut up*. “It’s just a little, Mom. It didn’t hurt or anything,” I lied.

“Let me see your head,” Mom said in a hushed tone that meant she was angry. I blinked and she was right behind me in the mirror, inspecting my patches of missing hair in a quiet panic.

“Oh, Ruby . . . What have you done?”

Lyla and Angela Higgins shared a birthday. Angela Higgins was Samantha’s ugly, frizzy friend who always made fun of me for not only being bald, but for always carrying around my pages of Rapunzel. She was ugly because she was so mean and she wasn’t pretty enough like Samantha to make up for it.

Angela and Lyla walked around the class during break time and handed out their shared birthday treats: caramel apples with rainbow sprinkles. I knew I would not be left out from the birthday treats because Lyla was my friend. They weaved through all the desks separately with their own trays and each of my classmates picked an apple when it was their turn. Angela rushed to me, one caramel apple left on her tray.

“Here you go, Ruby.” She smiled sweetly, but it was still very ugly. I wished Lyla had brought me my treat instead.

“Thank you.” I made sure to sound both polite and indifferent.

Angela kept smiling as she turned around and

returned her empty tray to the front of the room. My eyes burned. My tongue burned. The breath that came from my mouth was hot and sour. It was an onion. I heard Samantha and Angela cackle from behind me and then suddenly everyone was looking at me and cackling, too. I knew my face was turning pink, but I pretended it was because the onion was so spicy. I kept taking bites, tears streaming down my face from embarrassment and anger, not wanting to let them win. I looked over to Lyla. Her hands were covering her mouth. She looked confused, but her eyes were smiling. For a moment, stinging betrayal poked at my insides and then I realized I could not be mad at her. I think I would have laughed, too. If I was her, I would laugh at me, too. Ms. Stevens scolded Angela briefly and that was it. It was her birthday, after all.

Lyla handed me a napkin to wipe my eyes. I took it and thanked her and she told me she had no idea Angela did that. She gave me my actual birthday treat and I tried to forget about our inside joke about the onions. I wondered if she even remembered, if it even crossed her mind that it wasn't a caramel tomato or caramel lemon, but a caramel onion. A white round onion. The shape of my head.

I was sobbing. Snot ran down into my mouth. I

sat uncomfortably in one of the hard dining table chairs. I was pathetic and Mom made sure to tell me.

"Please, don't!" I hiccupped and sobbed louder. I sobbed so loud my head hurt and my ears were ringing. Mom yelled at me to stop crying. She put her hands on my shoulders and looked me in the eyes.

"You need to breathe. You need to calm down."

I couldn't breathe or calm down. Mom pulled the scissors out of their special drawer and told me to sit still. I swung my head left to right; she couldn't cut it if I was moving. She wouldn't. She tugged me forward; her hands were clutching at both sides of me.

"You will sit still. If you move, I might cut you and it will be your fault."

I whimpered one last plea, but her eyes stayed angry and wide. She shook her head.

"Ruby, this hair," she sucked air through her teeth, "thing—it needs to stop."

I had lost. I clutched the pieces of hair I had ripped out and sobbed. Snip. Snip. Scissors were nothing like the slow pull of ripping. They were quick and painless, but somehow hurt more. She cut my hair until it stuck out straight from all sides of my head. My eyes stung and my cheeks were chaffing. I hated Mom. She wasn't Mom anymore; she was Mother Gothel cutting Rapunzel's hair so she could never leave her tower.

She was cruel and ugly and when she pulled out the electric shaver I knew I would always hate her.

When I came to school the next day everyone whispered, but all of their whispers put together made the classroom echo with hushed voices. I heard bald and cancer and weird thrown around the room. Mr. Allen had smiled at me and asked if I had gotten a haircut. I told him I got it to look like him: ugly and sad. I was sent to the office.

Mom only allowed me to go to Lyla's party if she could first call Lyla's mom and ask her questions like "What will the girls be doing?" "When will they be going to sleep?" "Do you have a special place to keep scissors?"

I groaned at every question and she shushed me every time. Mom never forgot; she held on to things tightly for reasons she only ever explained as 'for my own good.' I told her she made me sound crazy once she hung up the phone.

"Don't act crazy and you won't sound it." Her words were like the blades on scissors. Don't act crazy snip and you won't sound it snipsnipsnip. My eyes got hot and watery, but I held it together because at least I could go to the party and maybe braid Lyla's hair. My breath still smelled like onions even though I had brushed my teeth for a very long time. I didn't tell Mom what happened. I didn't want to. I imagined it was something

she could have done herself when she was my age and I didn't want to risk seeing her laugh. Snip snip snip.

Mother Gothel was shaving my head four times a month. My hair grew fast and thick and she never missed an opportunity to plug in her electric shaver. I had no hair to keep in my pocket. Mother Gothel had swept up all my hair and put it in a paper bag and burned it in the sink. The kitchen smelled like my hair for five days. I counted.

On my eighth birthday, I told Mother Gothel that all I wanted was for her to stop shaving my head. She told me she wanted me to stop calling her Mother Gothel. I cried until it wasn't my birthday anymore and then I fell asleep.

When I was nine, my class did Secret Santa. Once a week we got presents from our Secret Santas. My person was Jake Jensen. He was very plain and he left in fifth grade. I gave him patterned pencils and chocolate and other stuff you give to people you don't know. My Secret Santa was Samantha Price. I knew it was because first I was given hair ties, the ones with the plastic balls on each end, and then I was given barrettes and butterfly clips. My last big present, the one where the Secret Santas revealed themselves, I was given an old, tangled wig with a Christmas bow on it.

Samantha looked satisfied with herself.

Once, at age ten, Mother Gothel and I went to Grandma's grave. I decided I would stop calling her Mother Gothel because when the wind blew her hair around her face, I saw a shiny silver hair sprouting out of the top of her head. I started calling her Mom again because I wanted hair that could one day look like Grandma's; I wanted her to stop shaving it. In the afternoon, she fell asleep on the couch. She didn't usually take naps, but I think seeing Grandma's grave made her tired and sad. I crept up to her and searched for the silver hair and when I found it, I plucked it out. I ran upstairs to inspect it. It was nothing like Grandma's. It was wiry, dull, and nothing like mercury.

Mom helped me pack some things for Lyla's party. She packed pajamas and a toothbrush and a piece of paper that had her cell phone number scribbled on it. I told her I knew her number by heart.

"This is for Lyla's mom, in case you do something and she didn't save my number."

It felt like a punch in my gut except my gut was a bag of flour. I felt the impact, but the pain lasted for no longer than a second. Mom rolled up a blanket and stuffed it in my pillow case.

Lyla's house was in a neighborhood for wealthy

people. I was not poor, but I was not Lyla. She could have been Rapunzel in real life. All the houses were big and shiny and clean. Her house had blue shutters and a basketball hoop. I tried to imagine Lyla playing sports, her hair pulled back all sweaty and tangled. It didn't seem right. Mom pulled into the driveway and unbuckled her seatbelt. I asked her why she was getting out of the car. "I am going to speak with Lyla's mom before I leave."

"Please don't, Mom. Please." I didn't want Lyla to overhear anything Mom would tell her mom. I didn't want to be the weird one here, too. At least if I could help it.

"Fine. Make sure you give her my phone number." She gave me a chilly look and then told me to have a good time like it was a warning. I thanked her and ran to the front door.

Lyla's mom answered the door, greeted me with a warm smile, and didn't even glance at my shaved head. She told me her name was Elaine. I'd never met an adult who introduced themselves by name. She guided me to the basement door, where I heard laughter and music.

"Go ahead. We'll have cake in a little bit." She smiled again. She looked like Lyla with her jet-black hair, though hers was short and spiky. Lyla was right: her mom was pretty, but she would be prettier with long, flowing hair.

I handed her Mom's phone number and she took it like she knew the type of mom I had and then I walked downstairs. The laughter stopped once they saw me. Samantha and Angela glared and Libby Beswick was there, too. She was the least mean of the three, which didn't mean much because she was also glaring. Her hair was an eruption of tight brown ringlets all over her face. I always wondered what it'd be like to braid her hair, twisty ringlets in a twisty pattern.

"You're here!" Lyla beamed and ran to me. "You can put your stuff next to mine."

Samantha, Angela, and Libby remained on their perfectly-made sleeping areas and said nothing. Samantha's arms were crossed and Libby fiddled with her curls defiantly. I set down my things but didn't set up my blanket and pillow.

We ate cake and played truth or dare, but Samantha didn't want to play for very long because she couldn't slide in as many mean comments as she wanted to with Lyla paying attention. *Truth: How much does your mom save on shampoo?*

At one point we played a dancing game on the TV. I wasn't very good at it, but Lyla wasn't either so it was just funny. Angela got mad because we weren't taking it seriously.

When we started a line of hair braiding, Samantha made me sit in the back because I had no hair for anyone

to braid. It didn't sound mean just because it was true, and that's why it was mean. Lyla sat in front of me and I finally got to touch her hair. It was just as soft as I imagined and I braided it over and over again.

And then I went to the bathroom. And when I turned the corner, I heard Angela snickering about my caramel onion. I stopped in my tracks.

Samantha's voice: "Did you make that up? Is that a prank people do?"

Angela's voice: "I got the idea from Lyla!"

Lyla's laughter, a little too hard of laughter: "Don't blame me!"

But I do. I blame Lyla and her nice hair that gets her friends that are not nice and don't have to be. I blame her because she gave Angela our inside joke, our friendship maker, my invitation. She let Angela turn it into a prank, a way to tell me I'm not good enough. And so I've been sitting in the dark for three hours just waiting for them all to fall asleep. I pretended I hadn't heard a single word and crept upstairs and found where Elaine kept the scissors. She does not keep them in special places because she is not cruel and she does not let mistakes become punishments. I wish that Mom were here sound asleep with her electric shaver, so I could buzz the hair right off her head and then she would feel cold when the wind blows and extra hot under bright lights. So she could look like

me and Mr. Allen, all ugly and sad.

And now they are all asleep and I am sitting here with scissors in my hand and now I am good enough. I am the winner because I don't need to grow my own hair when I have scissors. I am the winner because Samantha and Angela and Libby and Lyla can't tell me I look like an onion and then shove one in my mouth.

Samantha's hair falls all along her face and pillow.

Snip.

Angela's is in pigtails that Libby gave her.

Snip snip.

Libby's hair is wrapped up in a silky scarf. *Snip.*

And now it's not. *Snip.*

And Lyla. Her hair is pulled all to the left side like it always is. This time it is not away from me; this time it is right in my grasp. I am touching it and holding it and twisting it ever so slightly. I position the scissors right up to her ear lobe. *Sniiiiiiiiip.* It takes a second to get through all her hair. I hold it up to my face. Sometimes black hair looks brown when you get up close, but Lyla's hair is still like the night sky and I know she is not Rapunzel because her hair doesn't die when it's been severed.

I collect all the hair. I put them in piles. This is Lyla's, this is Samantha's, Libby's, Angela's. I cut up more hair until they look like boys, until they look like me. Snip snip snip. I bunch up all of their hair into my hand and

take one of Angela's barrettes from her overnight bag. I clip all the hair together in the barrette and then I hold it up to my head. In the mirror I am all of them all at once except I'm not because they are white onions, even Lyla and Libby. I was right: all the colors look good on me.

I place Libby's ringlets all around Samantha's patchy head and giggle. When I place Samantha's hair on Lyla's pillow I stare. She doesn't look like an evil princess or anything magical. She looks like me with pieces of red hair all over her pillow.

I giggle. My laughter bubbles up in the back of my throat and soon I am cackling like I have just fed them all a caramel onion with sprinkles, like their tongues are stinging and their eyes are watering. I cackle because they're like my little dolls. They're like Grandma in her casket except I'm allowed to touch.

I go upstairs because I'm thirsty and my mouth still stings no matter how much milk I drink down with Lyla's birthday cake. Lyla has a fancy refrigerator that gives you water from the door, but I know that there are big bottles of orange soda inside. Lyla said orange soda is her favorite and it is mine, too. We could have been such good friends. I see a bag of onions and I scoff at the way such a happy moment has become acid in my stomach. A three-pound bag of onions and I have a staring contest. I grab four onions out of the bag and then one of the

bottles of orange soda. I cradle four white, round onions and soda in my arms and skip down the stairs.

After I peel the skin off the onions, I start jabbing holes in each one with my new scissors; I am keeping them. I stick little pieces of each girl's hair in the cratered onions. Little dolls form before my eyes and I laugh even harder than before because this time they are actual onions. I place the little doll heads next to their real life doll heads and laugh at how big it makes their heads look on the pillow.

I compare the leftover strands with one another. I rate them on softness: Lyla, Samantha, Angela, Libby. I rate them on color: Lyla, Libby, Samantha, Angela. I rate them on everything and Lyla comes in first for every category I can think of. It's four in the morning now and I am tired, but I have one more thing to do. I gather all the leftover strands from each girl together and clip them back into Angela's barrette. I braid them all together and carry that braid in my pocket and it won't matter how many times Mom wants to shave my head and punish me for missing Grandma's hair to tug on. I will have a piece of hair from each girl's head and when I get home I will cut a piece from Mom's head and keep it around because even though it's not Grandma's it's the closest thing to it.

It takes a moment for me to realize how loud I am laughing. Samantha wakes up slowly. She lifts her head,

and when her hair stays on the pillow and the onion rolls onto the floor she screams and I laugh even harder and tighten my grip on my scissors. She has big patches of hair missing; she looks crazy. Samantha continues to scream and now she is crying. Angela wakes up and it takes her a bit longer to understand what is happening. Her hands are feeling all over her head and she's running her fingers through the long strands that I missed. Libby is a heavy sleeper and she is last to wake up once Lyla screams for her mom. I have no sympathy for any of them, crying because their hair is all gone even though it's still more than I have. Their moms will buy them wigs and extensions and let their hair grow back out of their heads. Their moms are not cruel; even Elaine is too nice to say anything. She runs down the stairs in a pajama set and gasps. She runs back up the stairs.

For a while, Samantha tries to pull the braid out of my hands and I kick her away. It's mine now! I think I yell, but I'm not sure what parts are inside my head. Libby is crying at the reflection of herself in the window and Angela is threatening to sue me even though I don't think she can do that. Lyla sits on her sleeping bag and stares at me. She doesn't say a word; she just stares at me and feels around at all the blunt ends of her hair. She is still beautiful, I realize. Samantha lunges at me again to grab the braid and I run away. She chases me in circles around

the basement, screaming that I'm a freak and that she wants to kill me. I wave the braid behind me and taunt her like how she taunted me with that purple frosted cupcake and that raggedy wig and all those hair accessories. Libby starts to chase me, too, her tears becoming rage. Libby looks much meaner when she is angry. Angela doesn't do anything but yell and I know she is all bark and no bite.

I am huffing and my legs begin to hurt. We have been running for much longer than I thought and I start to wonder where Elaine went. All of the girls are still screaming and crying, except for Lyla. I turn to look back at Samantha and laugh in her face with the braid in my hands. I put it at the back of my shaved head so it looks like I have a ponytail and I neigh like a horse. And then Angela kicks her foot out. I fall into the pile of sleeping bags and I do not realize until I hear a different kind of screaming that the scissors have been in my hands the whole time. Lyla screams for her mom. The scissors stick out of her left cheek, blood collecting at the edges. Footsteps pound down the stairs and I hear a gasp that belongs to Elaine and a colder gasp, like a gust of winter wind, that belongs to Mom.

“Oh, Ruby . . . what have you done?”



NINETEEN
BY ELYSE HOFFMANN

AN ODE TO SEXY SEXY APPLE CIDAR VINEGAR BY COLIN KOHRS

“[Sexy sexy][v]inegar contains natural properties which help control eczema. Many people believe that white distilled vinegar and [sexy sexy] apple cider vinegar ([SS]ACV) will offer the best relief from eczema. Always use raw, organic, unfiltered, and unpasteurized [SS]ACV containing Mother. The [sexy sexy] vinegar has to appear dark and cloudy with the sediment at the bottom of the bottle.”

--Admin, HomeRemediesForLife.com

your sour stings across my broken skin
a burning pain to heal at a later time
I let it fester meditating til when
my nails will be sent to prison for their crimes
the little nubs so broken down by war
without a noble cause they fight for fun
a war-crime joy an unrelenting sore
a genocidal toddler with a gun
I want your body spilling across my own
your puckered wet and dry to press against
my pillaged town you visit and I groan
and for a brief moment the pain is un-sensed
but the chained and locked up Hitler will always be freed
Scratch. Scratch. Scratch. Scratch. Bleed.

NEXT TO ME – FOR COLIN
BY RACHEL WILLIAMS BELTER

He's all side glances and raised eyebrows—
Mind scuttling from thought to idea faster than
He can speak and I can't keep up with him so
I listen— hands gliding, he passes a crumpled
piece of loose leaf. My name rests above
fourteen eloquent lines. I look up and
“phenomena” rests on the tip of his tongue
and I can't help but wonder what he's doing here,
next to me, in this room, in this middle of
bum fuck nowhere town—I quickly hand the
paper back and reciprocate with a smile—
I can't say what I need to before he starts

Scribbling down more lines on a blank sheet of
Drawing paper, his lips mouthing “the sin,” his eyes
Filled with absurdity and sarcasm, his fountain pen
Writing the words fucking khaki vest—He recites
Plath's “Fever 103” from memory and I realize
It's okay that for now, he's here, in this town
In this room, next to me, writing edgy poetry because
I know with a brain like his it won't be long before
he'll be getting his doctorate, making people feel
inadequate after reading his work— so for now I'll
just enjoy every second that he's here, in this tiny
town, in this depressing grey room, sending me
side glances with his raised eyebrows.

WHAT MAKES UP YOUR SOUL?

BY AUDRIANNA WICHMAN

Sometimes I want to fade into
The colors of oblivion
So that our skins match
Perfectly. I want to surf
On its grassy tides and
Let my teeth rot on the
Sugars of it-doesn't-matter
And who-gives-a-shit
But other times I want to
Drink so much fluorescence that
My insides scream neon and
I spit radioactive rain so that
Every eye wants me
I want to pick attention like
Flowers or crab apples into
My basket—twisted DNA woven
Between “Help Me”—until it
Spills and I have to twist my
Ankle not to step in it

BARELY
BY BEN MCCRARY



FOUR ENCOUNTERS WITH MINNESOTA'S WINTER

BY MEGAN WEFEL

(12/30)

Snow falls now in tiny flakes
Glistening freshly, as though
Someone cracked open a star
Spilling its crystalized blood
In a glittering majesty upon the Earth.

(1/4)

I wake up in another universe
With my dog who races by me in the tundra
Oblivious to the wonderland I see.
There is no semblance of my woods,
Only acres of fluffy white chrysalises.
What will hatch out of these?
A new wonderland for another time.

(1/11)

It's hard to breathe.
The cold has its grip around my lungs
And squeezes tight,
Until I wheeze.
It slaps my face and makes it burn
And reminds me I'm alive.

(1/13)

The flakes kiss the Earth
As they reach the journey's end,
As if they had listened in
When my mother took my baby brother's hand
As she guided it across the kitten's fur,
And told him, "gentle."

FLOWERS
BY ALEXIS Prowizor



27 AUGUST 1997
BY AUDRIANNA WICHMAN

In my mother's womb,
Two forces combined.
One gentle, one nuclear.
Optimism and depression molded my brain.
Daisies and thistles sprouted from my scalp.
Five fingers formed to turn up fresh earth, and five to crack and bleed.
Ninety plus years and alcoholism danced in my DNA.
One vocal cord was assigned to singing and one to screaming.
Little star freckles peppered the skin that stretched over black blood.
And when I tumbled out,
My mother wept because half of her was in the world and
My father wept because half of him was in the world.

FIRECRACKER GIRL
BY ELYSE HOFFMANN



FEAR

BY LISA DARASKEVICH

A spider climbs across the room
just there, not
controlling until
It's not where you
thought it was
somehow existing
Beyond the eyes
crawling in unsettling
near air.
It structures itself
in a web nest
letting you know
it won't be leaving.
You continue your day
returning to the room
and it's there
Full view and
Darker, elongated, stronger.

GROOVY
BY BEN MCCRARY



JUNK DRAWER SOULS

BY NICOLE JOHNSON

I feel like I have nothing figured out. I swear some people were given a life survival guide but they ran out of copies when I was supposed to get mine. Recently I've tried to convince myself that we're all rushing around with a skewed compass and fuzzy heads. We're all just trying to make it. Underneath our skin we hide frazzled minds, sealing our confusion with a confident smile. Some of us have calloused skin and others of us more fragile, but all of our skin has been a path for tears and embellished with laughter lines. We all have junk drawer souls, scattered pieces of things in life we don't know where to place. Sealing them tightly, ignoring the cobwebs in our darkest corners. But maybe if we stopped acting so tough and threw our hands up in surrender, stopping our tireless act to make it look like we all have it figured out... if we all just sorted and shared our junk drawer souls instead of closing them, I guarantee people wouldn't see a junk drawer; they'd see a treasure chest of knick-knacks

and beautiful stories from long ago. I guarantee you're not alone. We all have messy little lives and walk around carrying our own baggage and stories. Maybe that life survival guide doesn't even exist; maybe we're all just really good at faking it.

SHATTERED GLASS
BY ZACHARY VIX



SLIPPING ON GLAZED SIDEWALKS

BY KAITLIN MCCOY

I invent these words, though not all of them,
only the best and isn't it strange the way trousers hang

Painting these buildings as though swinging from cranes
held aloft like the heads of so many folded paper birds

Within the privacy found in the middle of a city street
my sister wanders and leaves her thoughts trailing

Sounding almost as loud as the calls we all wait for and never receive,
a hundred pennies on strings clatter in the wake of nothing.

NICE, FRANCE
BY LISA DARASKEVICH



DEPENDENT BY ANNETTE DEYO

Zack sat on the edge of their couch, staring holes into the clock over the mantle, counting the minutes until Mat would be late getting home. Fifteen. Mat had fifteen minutes to get home. Zack wasn't stupid; he understood that there were a thousand legitimate reasons for Mat to get home in twenty or even thirty, but today it had to be fifteen.

While he waited, Zack planned out what he would say regarding the trash still lingering by the back door. Last night, like all nights after the raccoon incident six months back, Mat was supposed to take out the trash. It was what he always did for Zack, but last night he had fallen asleep on the couch while watching reruns of some show they had both seen a thousand times. There had been a lot more TV watching since they stopped going out seven-and-a-half months ago.

Ten minutes left to go when the door lock clicked. The sudden unexpected noise of the opening door startled Zack. He swung around, scared of the sudden noise, entertaining the possibility of an intruder. He relaxed when he saw the familiar brown of Mat's coat in the doorway. And for a moment he was relieved. Why is he early?

Zack wondered. Is he always this early? Is he just doing something else for ten minutes every day? He turned back around, clutching his hands together and trying to keep them from shaking.

"I'm home," Mat called out like he always did. He looked into the kitchen, expecting to see Zack standing over the stove making dinner. He wasn't there, and there was no reply. Maybe he's upstairs, Mat thought.

"Take out the trash," mumbled Zack from the family room.

Mat, shocked to suddenly hear his husband's voice coming from behind him, turned toward Zack.

"You scared me," he said with a sigh of relief.

"You didn't take out the trash last night, so take it out now." Zack spat the words out as if they tasted rotten on his tongue.

". . . sorry . . . ?" Mat replied, confused by Zack's poisonous tone. "Wait, why didn't you do it? You had the entire day off," he continued.

"So?" snapped Zack, standing up.

"So why couldn't you do it?" asked Mat, getting angrier and letting some of his frustration slip into his

voice. He was always the one to stay calm on the rare occasion they would fight, but he had no idea what Zack was so upset about.

“Because it’s your job!” shouted Zack. “You take out the trash. I’m scared of the raccoons so you take out the fucking trash!”

“Are you that helpless? There aren’t any raccoons out during the day. What are you so afraid of!?” Mat yelled back, no longer making any effort to conceal his frustration with Zack’s overdependence. “What the hell is wrong with you Zack? Ever since . . .” Mat’s voice trailed off.

He knew what was wrong; it had all started seven-and-a-half months ago. When Zack, for reasons unknown to his partner of five years, had decided to come out to his parents. Mat wasn’t there when it happened; Zack hadn’t wanted him to be. After all, Mat had never been great at handling negative feedback. Zack wanted to protect him from the outburst he was anticipating from his parents. Seems Zack was a little more affected by the whole rejection thing than he thought he’d be. “Ever since that,” Mat continued, his voice growing quiet, “you’re not the man I married.”

The room fell silent. Zack stood there in the living room biting his lip, terrified to contaminate the space around them any further with the disgusting accusation

he had on his tongue. Perhaps he could still forget and pretend like it never happened. But he knew it had. It was like rotting fruit; it would only get worse the longer it was left to sit in the bowl. Eventually something had to be done.

“S-so does that make i-it o-ok—” Zack choked on the words, but the anger welling up inside forced him to remain resolute. He continued, “Does that make it ok to cheat on me?”

Mat, shocked, let a moment pass; he knew it was too late to deny it now. Not that he intended to; ever since it happened he had wanted to confess, but Zack was under a lot of stress. Mat decided it would hurt Zack more than what he could handle, so he opted not to tell him.

Zack immediately understood what that moment meant. “Ah— sorry I’ll take out the trash. It’s fine. I’m sorry I yelled and said something so stupid,” Zack said, regretting having brought up the issue.

Mat stood in the kitchen and stared at the floor, silent.

“Tell me I’m wrong...tell me I’m an idiot who couldn’t tell you apart from a stranger. Tell me you’re disappointed that I would be so suspicious!” Zack pleaded desperately.

Mat didn’t move.

“C-come on Mat, why aren’t you saying anything? Be mad at me. I’m distrusting you...” Zack’s voice faded.

Mat kept looking away, his hands tightly clenched into fists. He sat back into the kitchen chair, resting his elbows on his knees, and unclenching the fists that held his head in his hands.

Zack closed his eyes, fighting back tears. He dashed out of the kitchen, running up the stairs to their bedroom. He paced the room, trying to think of something, anything to do, but his mind was blank. Lately it seemed everything had been going wrong; for Zack, sleep had become a luxury. He was too tired to think clearly; it felt like every ounce of his energy had been ripped away. Zack collapsed into bed, and sleep quickly took him.

Bright morning light shone through the windows into the cold bedroom, waking Zack, who had slept on Mat’s side of the bed. Ugh, who forgot to close the curtains? Zack thought, still half-asleep, shivering in the cold room. He reached to his right, unconsciously searching for Mat’s warmth, but found only the edge of the bed.

Last night’s events rushed back to Zack; he bolted up. Where is he? Did he leave? Zack jumped out of bed and dashed downstairs. Just as he was about to turn the corner into the kitchen, he stopped. New scarier thoughts popped into his head. *Why wouldn’t Mat have already left? I’ve*

been a terrible husband, I haven’t been paying attention to him, we haven’t been doing things together. I can’t even remember the last time we just talked. Why wouldn’t he want to escape from me? After all, he’s already been with somebody else. A sharp pain pierced into Zack’s chest. He held his breath, fighting back panic, then turned the corner.

Mat was sitting at the kitchen table in Zack’s usual chair. He, like Zack, was still wearing last night’s clothes. He was staring into a full coffee cup, looking tired. Zack let out an audible sigh of relief. Mat looked up but avoided eye contact; his eyes were red and swollen.

“Mind if I join you?” Zack asked quietly.

“Uh no—of course not,” Mat stammered as he stood up. “Can I get you some coffee or something?”

“Thanks.” Zack nodded, then took a seat at the table in the spot Mat normally sat. From here he had a good view of the kitchen. He watched Mat fumble with the sugar container and a small smile played across his lips as he thought of all the times Mat had been watching him in the kitchen from this very seat.

Mat gently placed the mug down on the table and sat back down. He clenched his fists together. “I know... this won’t cut it...but, I’m sorry. I’m so sorry and ashamed of what I’ve done. I’ll do whatever it takes to make this right.” Zack stared into his reflection in the black coffee.

His initial reaction was to be upset and lash out. He wanted to yell and call Mat a traitor, but perhaps it was the way Mat looked, sitting there in last night's wrinkled clothes with dark circles under his red swollen eyes, that kept Zack calm and aware of his own part in their strained relationship.

"I'm sorry too," Zack said, clutching his coffee cup. "I haven't been there for you; I haven't been a good husband . . . God what happened to me? I used to be so great..."

Mat, who had been anticipating the worst, relaxed and lifted his head slightly. "It's not your fault, that kind of thing would get to anyone." Zack's decision had been an off-limit topic, but Mat needed to know, so he continued: "But I don't understand why you told them in the first place. You must have known how they were going to react."

Zack let out a sigh and leaned back in the chair, staring up at the ceiling. He took a long sip of coffee; it was dark and sweet, just how he liked it. "Yeah..." he replied. "I played it out a thousand times. I knew in my head how they were going to react. I thought...I honestly thought I had gotten to a place where I could handle it, but hearing it for real was different."

"Why tell them at all?" Mat asked.

Zack paused, taking a moment to pinpoint what

had made him want to come out to them so badly. It was always something he wanted to do, but fear of being told he was mistaken or needed fixing kept silent the urge to share. "You're so important to me Mat, I hated hearing them tell me to find a wife. I wanted to shout, 'I don't need no wife. I got a husband and he's the greatest ever!' I wanted them to know you, but I also wanted them to know me. All of me. Every time I saw them I felt like I was lying. I thought if I could show them how happy I was they would be able to be happy for me."

A new wave of guilt hit Mat and he lowered his head back down.

"I still love you, Mat, and I still want to be with you," Zack said reassuringly.

"I love you, too. I want to fix this so badly but I don't know what I can do," Mat said, not making any effort to disguise the shake in his voice.

Zack thought for a second. His eyes wandered over to the door; the trash had been taken out. "Well, how about to start, from now on, I'll take out the trash."

SPRING

BY BEN TEURMAN

Trees stand like silent sentinels
Bare trunks, devoid of green
Huddle in small clusters, as if for warmth.
Thin branches, cold as ice
Scrape and rattle together in a cold wind.
No birds alight upon the skeletal branches,
No squirrels scamper up the rough bark,
The world seems dead,
All sight of green or life hidden beneath the snow.

Evergreens, with their long, sweeping branches
Strain beneath a load of snow
That has laid to rest in upper branches.
Beneath the trunks, pristine snow
Untroubled by the feet of men or animals,
The snowdrifts piled and gathered,
Smooth snow like waves frozen in full fury
Blown by strong and rough winds.

The sun shines white, hidden from view from
behind opaque clouds,
Light reflecting off pale glistening snow.

And for a moment, you feel a warmer air,
The world seems to come alive all around you,
Waking from its winter sleep.



WB ZAJ DAB NEEG (OUR STORY)
BY MELODY VANG

IF (A PROGRAMMED POEM)
BY MEGAN WEFEL

Black Screen
White Text

//Title = After the Events

If Action = Wake up Then
Go and interact
Smile fake
Cover scars
Find some sunshine
Else

 If Action = Leave Then

Get in a car

 Just drive
 Don't look back
 Don't look forward

Else

If Action = Seek help Then
 Ignore the whispers
 Find a listener
 Don't believe them
 Stretch too thin

Else

 Stay in bed
 Find a tool
 Whisper goodbye
 Action stops

End If

End If

End If

LIFE SUPPORT
BY ZACH SPANTON



I WISH
BY LISA DARASKEVICH

I wish I could be like her
her life trapped in her arms
like a teddy bear
flowing off her soft genuine hair
and her tiny jacket and boots.

LEAVES
BY ALEXIS Prowizor



THE WINONA PRIZE WINNER FOR POETRY

“HOW NOT TO BE A POET” BY CHARLIE UTZMAN

“‘How Not to Be a Poet,’ by Charlie Utzman, stands out for its striking rhetorical use of the imperative voice which drives the poem forward and makes for a dynamic, active poem that instructs, badgers, and aims to persuade. Whom the poem aims to persuade is not immediately clear, but by the poem’s conclusion we become attuned to the poet’s own desire to bolster his convictions. I am also impressed with the poem’s striking use of original images, and the way it moves between more personal and more public registers. This is a strong, memorable poem.”

-Poet and judge, Mike Wunderlich

HOW NOT TO BE A POET (AFTER WENDELL BERRY)

BY CHARLIE UTZMAN

I

Bite your nails and throw them
on the ground. It deserves
nothing because it is nothing.
Win a goldfish from the fair
and let it die. Not like you
did when you were seven.
Not on accident.

II

Hide yourself within yourself. Don't
be a sieve to your emotions. Be a
water bottle, full of milk, buried
in the mud. Don't wait for yourself
to spoil. Embrace it. Yearn for it.
Then ignore it.
Only want and never give.
Only take and never think long
enough to feel anything. Be the bouncy
ball flung down the open hallway. Move
one place to the next without effort
or reflection. You will slow when
it is time.

III

Cut tethers. Cut adverbs. Cut nouns
and cut vowels. Speak in 0's and 1's.
Speak in minutes left until 5pm. Live in
notifications and breathe in LED lights.
Express yourself through digits on
paychecks and hours logged in.
Hide yourself so deep within yourself that
once a rush of years has passed you won't
know where to look.

KANGAROO BLUES

BY RICH HERRMANN

Jack's head was the first to appear from the shadows. Light flickered across his face, painting dark rings under his eyes. Tom came out next and patted Jack's shoulders. He was carrying a beat-up radio that blared static as he fiddled with the knobs. Martha and John neared the fire, arms wrapped around each other's hips. John whispered something in Martha's ear. Her smile blossomed and she let out a belting laugh that drowned out the waves crashing against the sand. John grinned and scooped Martha up. They careened back and forth before toppling over into the sand in a flurry of giggles.

"I'm bored," Ann said, fixing her eyes on me. Shifting my weight from one leg to the other, I began to focus my eyes to see everything and nothing at the same time. It was like being stuck in an elevator. People begin to pile in, and the screen ticking through the floors suddenly becomes the most interesting thing in the world. I couldn't speak.

"Whatever," she said, standing up. "Turn that music up. I want to play." I watched Jack's grin widen as she peeled off her shirt and shuffled out of her capris. Tossing them in the sand, she

began working on her bra.

I was thankful for the darkness. I could feel my face turning beet red. Her nipples perked up in the cool air and reached for the stars. She ran toward the ocean, kicking up swaths of sand. My eyes were stuck to her. She had bounce. Almost no girls my age had it. Having bounce was like getting two gumballs with a single quarter. Either you have it or you don't—she had it.

"Wait for me," Tom shouted as he carefully laid the radio down in the sand. The song's lyrics passed through my ears unrecognized. I was watching Ann float in the water as she bobbed with the waves. Her golden hair pooled around her, glowing. I saw Tom swimming toward her, muscles rippling in the moonlight. He reached her and they disappeared under the waves. My heart jumped, catching in my throat. Their heads reappeared. I could hear her laughing as he wrapped his arms around her and she drew his head in. My heart sank and I closed my eyes.

When I opened them Jack was sitting by me. "Three more days. Can you believe it?"

“Can you believe she’s with him? She should be with me. I’ve liked her since the second grade. Why’d she choose him?”

That was what I wanted to say. I settled for a “Yup” and shifted my gaze to the fire. I could feel tears beginning to come. Blinking with determination, I stood up and clenched my legs.

“The fire’s getting low.”

“Mhm,” he grunted absently. He was watching a swarm of ants flee as bits of log crumbled, raining miniature meteors on their colony. “I wonder if they plan for the future.” He began working his hands in a circular motion as if he were trying to shape the idea into existence. “Like, do they plan where to build? Hey Mr. Ant, we’d better build at least this far back from the ocean. Otherwise when the tide comes in we’re done for.”

“I doubt it.” I heard bitterness in the words as they came out. “But maybe,” I added.

When I reached the tree line I heard Jack laugh. Martha had told him the one about the kangaroo with the three jelly beans. I smiled as I pictured a kangaroo bartering with beans. It disappeared as I thought of Ann with Tom. She’d been my friend for as long as I could remember.

We’d kissed once after school beneath flickering fluorescent lights. I didn’t want to lose her. The stack of

driftwood tucked under my arm began to wobble, and I gripped it tighter. That kiss had happened two years ago. Since then we hadn’t talked much. It seemed like I was stuck in a crowded elevator whenever I saw her. I couldn’t lose her to Tommy. No way.

I spotted a large stick. Sand fell out of it as I swung it over my shoulder and began walking back toward the fire.

Martha and John lay sprawled out across the sand. Her head bobbed as his chest rose and fell. She murmured inaudibly and drew her legs closer to him, leaving a groove in the sand.

“The fireman’s back,” Jack whispered.

“Hey,” I said and began feeding the fire.

“Are you excited?” I stole a glance toward the sea.

Tom and Ann were locked in an embrace. “It doesn’t seem real. A few more days and we’ll be in high school.” I wished I was sitting in class listening to a teacher drone. Jack had turned the radio off and the silence was crushing.

“I don’t want to grow up. My parents never go to the beach. They come home from work and plop down on the couch. What’s the point of growing up if that’s all there is to it? I want all of this when I’m older,” he said, waving his hand across the beach.

“I want to fish and lay in the sand and swim. I don’t really want to go back.”

“Me either. I’m going to miss all of this.”

“Do you think we’ll still be friends once we get back?”

I didn’t know how to answer. I hoped we would stay close. All of us. Even Tom. I picked up a couple sticks and tossed them into the fire. “I hope so.”

“Me too.” Jack leaned forward and pulled the sticks out of the dwindling fire. “Let it die out. I want to sleep without it tonight.”

I thought of Ann swimming in the frigid water. “In a bit,” I said, tossing the sticks back in. “It will go out when we’re asleep.”

I rolled off the log and closed my eyes, knowing that sleep wouldn’t come. I wished the music was still on. If I had the radio close to my ear it might have been loud enough to wash out my thoughts. I thought of John and Martha cuddled up, sleeping peacefully, and decided against getting the radio. The fire would have to do. I listened to the embers crackle; I was trying to time when the next piece would pop. My mind kept drifting back to Ann. We had learned how to ride our bikes together. I’d learned on my brother’s hand-me-down and she’d been on a blue Schwinn. The blue paint with white letters looked so cool. When she sat on the seat it was as if she

were sitting on a cloud.

“You awake?” Jack asked.

“Yeah,” I whispered. Everything sounds better whispered. Phrases like “gimme that” and “I double-dog dare you” are filled with spark; they sound like something the hero in an action movie would say before he walks away from an exploding building.

“I checked out the class list today. I have Sadie in all my subjects. She has the coolest hair.”

“Do you like her?” I almost asked, but smiled instead—of course he did, along with half the other guys in our grade.

“You have Rachel in four of yours,” he whispered.

“She’s cute,” I whispered back. I fell asleep thinking of the kangaroo and his three jelly beans. She’d like that joke.

HORIZON'S GOODBYE
BY ZACHARY VIX



VULVA 3.0

BY COLIN KOHRS

In between my legs I hide
a thing I dare not show.
Computer update specialized,
my Vulva 3.0.

You hide the same, (the secret tech
in every slut and hoe).
Electric metal techno bits,
your Vulva 3.0.

Her cold and greasy metal, where
mechanics dare not go.
A car, a truck, for sure! But not
her Vulva 3.0.

But we are all a hive mind in
collective bitchy woe.
A server-crashing user-surge,
our Vulva 3.0.

They gossip, y'all are ign'ant folk,
so much that you don't know.
The NSA has gone and hacked
your Vulva 3.0.

They flash, encrypt, update, and sell
the information flow.
A never ending mystery:
the Vulva 3.0.

THRONE
BY ZACH SPANTON



DAY OF THE DEAD

BY KAITLIN MCCOY

The chill bites in the still air before sunrise.
Black water, smooth and reflective as obsidian,
only ripples when the orange paddle slices
through it – a pumpkin carving
 in reverse.

Fog hovers over the water, but is visible only
from a distance. Up close it disappears
like a dream you tried too hard to remember.
But it's still there, if only in the form
 of invisible droplets
clinging to your exposed skin as you pass
through it, the air prickles your flesh
and raises hairs tipped in water drops
as if you had passed not through fog at all,
 but a phantom.

Fallen leaves extend like golden breadcrumbs,
a trail across the black, mirrored surface,
as they drift away from the shore to the lake's center,
a path to be followed by any who can walk
on water, but now is not the time for
 the resurrected.

The day of the dead is almost here.

WISTFUL
BY MELODY VANG



ON COLLECTING SHELLS WITH MY SISTER
BY AUDRIANNA WICHMAN

We woke with the world
As sunlight was just a forming idea
In its mind.
Barefooted
We poured our coffee
And eagerly jogged to the sand.
Despite the ocean's gaping, carnivorous mouth
The bright yolk of sun peeked at us and
Foam lapped at our toes.
The ocean had spewed a plethora of treasures
In the night.
Our pile of black, peach, cream, and lavender
shells grew,
Pieces of ex-life, smooth from the misunderstood
creature's belly.

Instead of roaring,
The ocean purred with each breath it
took on the shore,
And I realized that
There is no sweeter sound than my sis-
ter's giggle,
The waters are not evil, and
If I could,
I would plunge into the salty depths
With her hand in mine,
And live, just the two of us,
Forever.

SANIBEL SANDS
BY ALI JOHNSTON



LOWKEY ALBINO

BY RACHEL WILLIAMS BELTER

I met some interesting people while working as a cashier at my local Office Max store in my upper middle class, conservative, Jesus-loving town. I was focused, doing my job. A man came up and placed his items down and I began the process of scanning his legal pads, rolodex, and photo paper. I could feel his eyes on me. I finished checking the items and looked up to which he said, “you’re really pale, maybe you should get some more sun.” I smiled and said something like, “maybe you should get some goddamn manners.” That was a lie, I wish I had said that. Instead I awkwardly laughed and said, “Yeah I know,” because the customer is king, even the rude motherfuckers.

HEAD HELD HIGH
BY ZACH SPANTON



WANDERING

BY KAITLIN MCCOY

What I mean when I say I taste dust on scattered thoughts
is that taking you with me makes my feet drag, then lose track
of the ground because I can't reflect the gleam of the sun like knives
laid end to end, or earrings dangling, or keys piled tight in a jar.

When I say I want to slip into your beautiful what I mean
is I have trouble sleeping on a loud night in a quiet city,
the clap of leaves on cement and the swish
of wind tugging on each blade of grass.

AUGUST DUSK
BY ALI JOHNSTON



MENSTRUATION
BY LISA DARASKEVICH

Menstruation straightens
Evoking the mind
while stirring the digging
pains like everything
is gold, bright as
the light bulb
Blinds the eye.



WINONA BRIDGE AT NIGHT
BY JONATHAN HUNT

MOTHER GOOSE'S ROAD TO CANTERBURY

BY COLIN KOHRS

Yankee Doodle went to town
A-riding on a pony,
Stuck a feather in his cap
And lived a life of sin.

Little Miss Muffet
Sat on a tuffet,
Eating her curds and whey;
Along came a spider,
Who sat down beside her.
The two both lived lives full of sin.

Jack and Jill went up the hill,
To fetch a pail of water;
Jack fell down, and broke his crown,
and lived a life of sin.

Little Jack Horner
Sat in the corner,
Eating of Christmas pie:
He put in his thumb,
And pulled out a plum,
And said, "I lived a life of sin."

And so Doodle, Miss Muffet, her spider, and both Jacks
Chose to go on a pilgrimage to fill in the cracks
made of sin, in their souls (so unstable and weak)
And so onward they traveled, redemption to seek

The spider was first of the five to depart
With the smallest of legs (and the smallest of hearts)
After two steps he faltered and ached deep within
So he left them, continuing on with his sin

It was Doodle who left, one day after the bug
Though a natural rider, he still felt a tug
in his heart, just that miniscule stab of a pin
That poked him too hard. He rode back to his sin

Both Jacks left together, in separate ways
As they both could not handle the other one's gaze
That were fixed on Miss Muffet's most beautiful skin
So they both trotted off to their two lives of sin

Poor Miss Muffet remained on the soul-search alone
With the weight of the sins in her heart to atone
The weight of those curds and the whey and the spider
Memorium-weight of the sin deep inside her

At last she arrived where to have her sins loosed
at the nest of the magical mothering Goose
"Oh I wish to be free of my sins!" said Miss Muffet.
"I wish to be free and go back to my tuffet!"

Said the Goose, "dear Miss Muffet, you've traveled so long
"and much longer than others. I see that you're strong.
"If you wish to be cured of the sins that you bear
"Just one change you should make, and I think it quite fair."

Said Miss Muffet in haste "I will do as you ask."
Said the Goose in response, "You have one simple task.
and that task is to look at the life that you live
"And to give it more meaning. With meaning you give

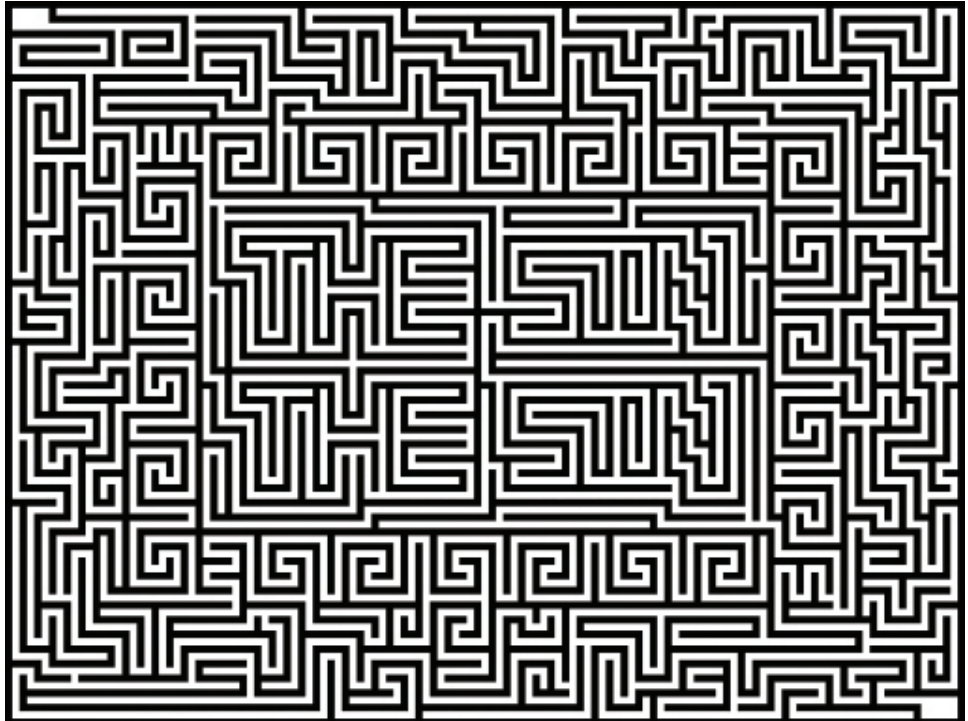
“A more colorful story, more colorful life
“A fantastical fable, a moral-tale rife
“With much more than a tale of a girl and a spider
“I need more than that bland act of sitting beside her!”

“I need more than your curds and much more than your
whey
“I need more than the cheap fear and running away
“I need more than your bottom end parked on a tuffet
“I need truth that goes farther, from you, dear Miss Muffet.”

“But you are my mother!” said Miss quite confused.
“It is you who decided my fate, Mother Goose!
“I can’t live my life as some cheap allegory,
“I can’t change my ways if you’ve written my story!”

The Goose stared back angrily, chest high and puffed
And with no words for Muffet she sat there, quite fluffed.
Miss Muffet had made up her mind. With a spin
She turned on her foot and went back to her sin.

THE SIN, THE SIN
BY COLIN KOHRS



BEHIND
BY LISA DARASKEVICH

Left behind is the night you
wrapped me in your arms
toxic bloodstream to bloodstream
flowing through us like
child dolls on swings
during a lightening storm.

HELP
BY BEN MCCRARY



THE WINONA PRIZE WINNER FOR NONFICTION
“HERE’S TO THE BITCH FACED GIRLS” BY DANIELLE EBERHARD

“Eberhard does a superb job of blending incisive takes on her own personal experience with relevant background and scientific research, developing an argument against what she deftly terms ‘preconceived ideas of gender’ that is very difficult to refute. Reading it, as a man, I found myself frequently questioning my own private reactions to others’ facial expressions, an exercise in self-analysis all males can surely profit from.”

-Nonfiction writer and judge, Kent Cowgill

HERE'S TO THE BITCH FACED GIRLS BY DANIELLE EBERHARD

I was born with an unfortunate mouth. A mouth that turns angrily into my chin – naturally pouty, thick, and sad. It is the most pointed feature on my face and it has defined me since adolescence. Without smiling my face rests in a placid state of displeasure. I have arched brows, narrowed eyes, and a big, sloppy, downturned mouth. It has once been described as “looking as if I am constantly staring into the sun and I’m pissed about it.” My mouth has angered people, disappointed people, intimidated people, and coerced people into asking, “What’s wrong?” without ever uttering a word. People look at my mouth, connect the dots from my brows to my eyes, and declare, “There’s a bitch if I’ve ever seen one,” and I am decided.

I was sitting on the bus when the “Please smile for me, honey” began. I was six years old. My bus driver, before the bus left the school and we still sat, waiting for the other kids to be let out from their classrooms, would taunt me from the front seat, “Smile! Smile! You never smile! Give me a smile, Danielle!” and I would shyly sink into my shoulders and my classmates would tickle me and tell me jokes – trying to get me to smile. I would eventually give in

and offer a small, dipped smile before sliding behind the brown, re-upholstered seat until the bus rolled out of the school parking lot. I would sit, curled behind the bus seat, wondering why he only asked me to smile, wondering if I didn’t smile enough, was there something wrong with me – and today I wonder – why was a grown man concerned so much with a six-year-old girl who didn’t smile? Why do men ask women to smile at all?

Interestingly enough, women weren’t always smiling. Amy Cunningham writes that almost 2,000 years ago the stigma behind smiling was reversed. Women were barred from laughter and smiling. Their public persona was blank-faced and tight-lipped. Emotion out of a woman’s mouth was sinful and linked to Eve’s seductive smirk. The only smile a woman could utter was one that was replicated on the Virgin Mary’s small, half-mooned mouth. It wasn’t until the nineteenth century when women, cheerfully smiling, were featured in advertisements plastered across the globe and suddenly it was jarring to see a woman sit in idle, unsmiling, contemplation (Cunningham 163). The mass production of the smiling woman worked to perpetuate the gulf dividing women and men.

Psychological and sociological studies alike have concluded that women smile more than men. In “What Drives the Smile and the Tear: Why Women Are More Emotionally Expressive Than Men,” Agenta Fischer and Marianne LaFrance discover that “happiness, sadness, and fear are more typically associated with women, whereas anger and pride are more typically associated with men” (Fischer and LaFrance 23). The study also found that it is easier to detect “happiness on female than on male faces,” (23) and that “when the emotional expression is ambivalent [. . .] observers tend to see more sadness in a female face and more anger in a male face” (23).

This gendered perception of emotion correlates to the social expectations of gender as well. Women are generally perceived to be caretakers. As caretakers, women are anticipated to “smile more, focus on fostering a positive social atmosphere, and on displaying enthusiasm, admiration, and love” (23). Although women, thank God, have traveled far from the patriarchal role of the housewife, there are still social expectations embedded in modern society. Women are generally perceived as the more emotional, submissive, and gentler sex – and all of that can be surmised through one warm smile. A woman who isn’t smiling “would more likely be considered as unfriendly or asocial compared to men who do not smile” (23). And thus sits my own angry, frowning mouth and the

plethora of men who have a problem with it.

There are two types of men – yes, men, because throughout my sad-lipped existence, I have never once been asked to smile by a woman. Women have complimented my smile – my mother would tell me, her hands wrapped in my hair, “A woman at the pool came up to tell me how pretty your smile is,” – and my dental hygienist, almost always a woman, once told me, “Your teeth remind me of Denise Richards,” – which I believed to be a compliment. Women have told me, quietly, nervously, that they were intimidated by my angry existence, but never has a woman told me in the sweet, summer night, sitting under a tree, “You know, you’d be prettier if you smiled more.” It is always men.

Now, I have been asked to smile by various types of men, but over the years I have found two general categories: men who want to sleep with me and men who are so old, they aren’t completely used to the millennial, completely-over-it, angry girl.

Category one: men who want to sleep with me. The boys, because, let’s face it, they aren’t really men, who want to sleep with me ask me to smile as some strange, domineering form of flirting. They situate my sad mouth as a problem. It’s something they can fix. They can mold my angry face into that of someone

livelier, happier, and probably better. They like to compliment me and tell me, “You’re so different. You aren’t like other girls. You’re sarcastic and mean.” I’ll roll my eyes and fake a smile as they lean in closer to whisper, tucking my hair behind my ear, “You’re so pretty when you smile. You should do it more,” and then they’ll grin as if they’re convinced that they’ve won me with that clever, little line that I’ve heard more times than I can count. See, boys who want to sleep with me usually view me as some mountain they have to climb: this face isn’t easy, but once they reach the top I’m uninterested and vehemently reminding them that “I am just like other girls. This is just my face.”

Category two: old men. Old men ask me to smile because my unsmiling, downturned mouth is ruining their customer experience. I get asked most to smile by old men at work, even when they aren’t my customer and even when I’m not working. They usually have sagging faces, stark white hair, and big ballooning bellies perched on thin, pencil legs. Old men in particular hate it when I’m not smiling. To them, it’s a personal attack. They like to shake their wrinkled fingers at me and wink, because they have to dress it in a warm, friendly tone before bellowing, “Smile, honey, it’s almost over,” and then they’ll grin and stare until I crack open an uncomfortable, mouth-splitting smile.

“Ah! I got her to smile!” they’ll victoriously declare to their buddies, their pals, their friends – as if my churning mouth is some laboriously won prize. Sometimes, bizarrely enough, they’ll brag to their wife and I’ll look into her sad, sallow eyes and we’ll mutually share the quiet understanding of what it’s like to be an unsmiling woman in a world of men. Because, remember, women who don’t smile are unnatural, unbecoming, *uncanny*.

I’ve asked men and women alike if they’ve ever been asked to smile – if someone’s ever said, “You’re better looking when you smile.” Most women respond with a “Yes.” A coworker of mine at the local shoe store, who also works part-time as a bartender, is asked on a regular basis to smile. She is unbelievably beautiful and her mouth, unfortunately, also sits on the bottom of her face in a frown. The attention she attracts is unwarranted and disgusting. I once asked her, my elbows resting on the front counter at work, head in hands, “Do men ask you to smile a lot?”

She paused, her fingers resting above the keyboard of our kiosk. “Yes.”

She brought her index fingers to the corners of her mouth and gestured in the shape of smile. “They like to do this a lot.” She repeated the gesture. “Smile.” Her voice was high, fake, and wrung dry with annoyance.

I shook my head. “How does that make you

feel?”

“It’s annoying. I get really mad and it makes me uncomfortable.”

I imagined my coworker at the bar, surrounded by drunk, intoxicated men and I shivered. Even if you aren’t extraordinarily beautiful, being asked to smile is a universal problem that women face at some point throughout their lives. On the other end of the spectrum, most of the men I’ve interviewed stare blankly and shrug, say, “No” in response. My youngest brother, Jacob, was born with the same unfortunate face. He looks angry, positively pissed, when his mind is somewhere else - some would say to a worse degree than mine. I asked him recently if smiling was ever a problem for him. He told me that when he was in grade school his classmates and teachers used to ask him to smile. They would try to make him laugh or pitifully inquire, “What’s wrong?” But since he’s entered high school – since he became a muscular, masculine, one hundred percent bona fide man, the smiling thing stopped. Men are allowed to be stoic, to sit in an angry, silent calm without worry, question, or pause.

Because when I entered high school, and particularly college, the smiling thing happened on a daily basis. In high school I was pegged the angry, quiet girl. I spent seventh through tenth grade wondering why people didn’t like me – only to find out that they were afraid of me.

They were intimidated by my quiet, smoldering mouth, and in rural, Christian, white Minnesota, an unfriendly face was an unapproachable face.

When I was in ninth grade one of my friends told me, “My brother thinks you’re a butterface.”

I remember pinching my brows and asking, “What does that mean?”

My friend shrugged, rather nonchalantly. “He thinks everything about you is hot – except for your face.”

That stung.

After that I would sit in the mirror and pick apart my face, wondering what it was that made it so ugly. I kept returning to my giant, pouty mouth and decided it was too much. I asked my mom if I could get a new one and she reassured me, “People in Hollywood pay a lot for a mouth like yours.”

I didn’t really believe her.

Of course, once people got to know me and realized that I am rarely angry – “It’s just my face,” I would reassure them – they would tell me, laughing, “I thought you were mean! But now I know you’re not!” and I would sheepishly smile in return. I was almost voted Most Changed in high school because my classmates thought that my smiling face made me different – when in reality I had hardly changed at all. I just learned to smile at things that were unfunny, wrong, or uncomfortable.

College trained me to respond deadpanned, blank face, “It’s just my face. This is just how I look” on cue to the typical question, “What’s wrong?” I was new again. My first year of college at Minnesota State University, Mankato - Home of the Mavs! – meant I had to inform every classroom each semester, to multiple different people, “No, I am not mad. I am ok. Nothing happened. I am fine. Don’t worry about it. This is just my face.” Everyone would laugh and it would be over. It became routine. This was also the first year I heard of the term *Resting Bitch Face*. Someone with resting bitch face looks angry a hundred percent of the time. Without smiling, without trying to express any kind of emotion, they look like a bitch. This term, of course, only applies to women. I remember seeing the words *Resting Bitch Face* everywhere and I remember classmates using it to describe me. Other women, whose smiling endeavors I do not know, used it passionately to describe themselves. I saw it on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr – it spread like wildfire. Now it was endearing to look like a *bitch*.

And suddenly I felt like I wasn’t alone. There was a community of angry-faced girls just like me around the world, and we were mad about it. Just google search it today: *why do men ask women to smile?* And you’ll stumble across over 52,600,000 results in less than 0.56 seconds. There are journal articles, blog posts, Twitter feeds, news-

paper columns, etc. dedicated to the world of angry-faced women and they all point to one general consensus: Don’t ask women to smile.

Why? Because we hate it.

Kyle Capogna, in her article “How I Feel When Men Tell Me to Smile,” stresses that when a man asks her to smile she feels “like I’ve been contracted to provide entertainment for him – a contract I never signed... Basically, I feel objectified” (Capogna). It makes us feel less like a human and more like an object designed for male enjoyment. Asking a woman to smile is asking a woman to change something about herself - something physical – that is impossible to change. A human being cannot consciously register the expression on their face a hundred percent of the time. A smile, a genuine smile, is a response to something that makes us happy. Smiling is a good feeling, but asking a woman to smile? Demanding a woman to smile for your own personal enjoyment? That smile you so desperately long for becomes forced, faked, and pushed through quivering teeth.

As harmless as it seems, asking a woman to smile is a form of harassment. There are no laws, no regulations, or rules that mandate women to smile. It is only a continuation of preconceived ideas of gender – and let me be clear – emotions and facial expressions should not be gendered.

Men and women alike should be allowed to express whatever the hell they want – within the limitations of the law – without social repercussions.

So, just let me be angry. I want to sit undisturbed with my unsmiling, unhappy, unfortunate mouth because for the most part I'm not unhappy – I'm just not actively smiling. Even if I am unhappy, it's ok. I'm allowed to be unhappy, allowed to be human. Maybe at one point in my life I wanted to be the bubbly, happy girl that always smiles, but I'm glad I'm not. I like that people are scared of me – intimidated by me. I like that men find me unapproachable. I like that my mouth is large, pouty, and downturned. I like who I am. It's just my face and I've learned to live with it. You should too.

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