



PROFILES

BY THE VANDERBILT REVIEW

COVER ART: UNTITLED by Freddo Lin

PROFILES

You are now holding the inaugural fall edition of *The Vanderbilt Review*, and we—the editors, staff, authors and artists—want to thank you for your interest. Six weeks ago, we asked you, the Vanderbilt student body, to explore what the word “Profile” means, and you will find in these pages the best of what filled our inbox. Some of these pieces were chosen for their unique aesthetic merit and some were chosen because they explicitly take up our theme. Ultimately, however, these pieces all gesture towards larger questions: what is literature, and why is it important to us today?

There is no use denying social media’s influence on this semester’s *Review*—we chose the theme “Profiles” because we find ourselves living in a world where identity is often a thumbnail image, a profile-picture. We find our friends here, and we find a space to create and maintain connections, explore interests, and share passions. Humans have always been in the business of constructing ourselves as social beings and so we are right to feel comfortable in this digital world.

“Profile,” however, has other connotations. When we “profile” someone, we construct an identity for him or her, an identity that usually reflects our own fears and logic rather than that person’s genuine character. “Profiling” cuts corners. “Profiling” replaces identity with pre-formulated images. “Profiling” resists genuine encounters. A “profile” is a view from the side.

We learned from your submissions—a lot. We learned that you are not satisfied with two-dimensional relationships, or a world in which identity is a cheap formation. To this end we give you back your submissions, convinced the best art is about sharing genuine connections. And maybe, if we begin to listen to each other—paying attention to the way that we each endeavor to create fiction— we can clear a space for authentic “Profiles”. We at the *Review* believe at least one thing about literature: it is worth reading because our peers are worth listening to.

With these few words, we proudly present *Profiles*, the inaugural fall edition of *The Vanderbilt Review*.

THE VANDERBILT
REVIEW

2013 - 2014

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(803) 323 - 7638

DeLesslin "Roo" George-Warren

*Text me you love me
Text me you hate me
Ask me a question
Ask me a secret
Say what you want
Ask what you need*

BOILED PEANUTS TASTE
 BETTER THAN SCIENCE
 (A BREAK UP POEM)

Will McCollum

Facades play tug of war with their edifices-
 Toying with our desires to make meaning:
 Like when I thought I could know your taxonomy.
 I tried to approximate a scheme of your personality
 But I didn't even notice your leaving,
 Absorbed by categories and iconography.

Idolatry and narcissistic rendering:
 Hacking through a mangrove forest and
 building an indulgent fire on the beach;
 Distilling fragrant herbs then drinking the gin—
 Self-alienating myself through and within
 ----- you.

I should have been content to sit on your boardwalk bridge,
 Confused by your intricate, crisscrossing shadows and
 Knowing you like the taste of gas station boiled peanuts,
 Not a pious profile that gives no glory to your light.
 Static caricatures garble the subtle aging of your wine
 Like these combinations of letters imprisoning my mind.

RICE AND BEANS

Malcolm Friend

No filet mignon
Or lobster bisque

For this Boricua.
When I die

I want my last meal
To be rice and beans.

All I require
Is simplicity:

Red beans over
White rice.

The same thing
My father used to eat,

Grandma Thelma—
God rest her soul—

Heating up the stove
On 112th and Lexington.

“But, Mom, we had rice and beans
Yesterday,” my father complained.

“No, Chico, yesterday
We had rice and beans;

Today we’re having
Beans and rice.”

We make do with what we have;
What we lack is pushed

Out of our minds.
We adapt,

Code-switching masters
Dealing with dualities:

Like my father
When he duped Grandma Thelma

By switching from
The simple flavors found

In the Spanish
His mother was raised on

To the English tongue
She always had trouble swallowing,

His ingenuity rewarded
With a frying pan to the head;

Like me, in Greece,
Hoping to avoid the woman

Trying to swindle American tourists:
I-sorry-pero-yo-no-peaky-mucho-english;

Like Grandma Thelma,
Who left the tropical shores

Of her native Puerto Rico
For the cold winters of New York.

Rice and beans
Is more than just a dish;

It is the complexity found
In the simplicity of a smile

When, at your high school graduation,
Your father, tears in his eyes, tells you

That your abuela is shedding her own tears of joy
In heaven.

I want that smile spread over my face
When I die.

SMALL SIPS

Katy Cesarotti

My mother doesn't know how to have fun at weddings. She gave up alcohol when I was still in high school; by now she had been sober almost a full decade. For years she begged off dinner parties and book club meetings until the invitations dried up. Drinking didn't suit her, she would always explain with a moue of distaste.

Weddings, though, could not be avoided. My mother sits at her assigned place card, back straight, toying with her silverware set. I smile at the waiter as he takes our orders (water is fine, thanks) and manage to send only one wishful glance at the open bar.

The DJ announces my cousin with her new husband in their first dance as man and wife. They sway in place, oblivious to the commotion around them. Relatives and family friends pause by our table to say hello on their way to the dance floor. We exchange bland sentiments about the ceremony as they parade by in twos. I've never seen the bride look so happy, wasn't the ceremony lovely? And look at the napkin folds! My mother and I remain seated. We are flanked on either side by two accusing empty chairs – our plus ones, left unused.

When I was eleven years old, my father announced that I needed to learn about wine. He took me down to the bar in the basement, a remnant from his bachelor days, and seated me grandly on a high stool. I spun a little back and forth, my bare feet dangling above the floor. He set a red wine glass in front of me, explaining that it had a wider, rounder bowl than its white wine counterparts in order to accelerate the oxidation process.

"The first stage of tasting wine is sight." I nodded like this made sense. He uncorked a bottle and poured, flicking his wrist at the end to prevent dripping. "How bright is the wine? How viscous? What color?" I cautiously picked up the glass by the stem and tilted it to the side. Red rivulets chased each other around the inside of the globe.

"Now for scent. You need to volatize the esters, to release more nuances of the aroma." I rolled his phrase around in my mouth – "volatize the esters" – and stored it under my tongue for later. "Set the glass on the table, your fingertips on the base – that's it, move it in a nice gentle circle. Now give it a nice deep whiff." I obeyed. "What can you smell?"

It just reeked of alcohol to me, cloying and over-sweet. "Grapes?" I offered. "Take this seriously Alice. Try again."

Ladies who lunch live for occasions like this wedding, country club affairs when they can get all dolled up in their Coldwater Creek finery. They descend upon us like a murder of crows, cackling and cawing for gossip. (Are you seeing anyone? Are you seeing anyone? The bouquet toss is coming up, are you seeing anyone?) My mother and I have nothing to satiate them. My last date was with a co-worker, almost half a year ago. He took me to dinner at a chain Americana restaurant – we split the check – and then to a party at his ex-roommate's apartment. His friends all still lived at home and sported No Shave November beards. They bellowed slap the bag! and swung wildly at a plastic bag of Franzia held aloft in the kitchen. The fluorescent ceiling light

made it look like a bag of blood as it sloshed in their drunken grasp.

My mother does not date, as she informs the ladies brusquely. That phase of her life is over. The ladies wilt, unsure how to progress, and chatter excuses for their departure. My mother raises her water glass to her lips and we watch the dancing couples in silence. The bride is with her father now and he spins her into a dip. They come up laughing and breathless. My mother swallows.

At our impromptu basement wine tasting, I concentrated and took a deeper inhale. “Cinnamon? Apples?”

My father smiled. “This is a super Tuscan. You’re close – this one is supposed to have elements of red fruit, layered with new leather and savory herbs. Go ahead and take a small sip. Swirl it around in your mouth a little, let it wash over on all your taste buds.”

The dry taste made me want to gag. No leather notes.

“This was a tough one to start with – it’s very complex. Did you like it?” I bobbed my head. He smiled, a little sadly. “One day you will. This is what the good stuff tastes like – never let a boy buy you cheap shit. It’ll only give you hangovers.” I contemplated this maxim seriously. “This is the same wine your mother and I drank the day you were born – I smuggled the bottle into the hospital waiting room, for celebration. Your mother was holding newborn you, all red and misshapen, when we toasted to your future. This was the first drink she craved, after going nine months without alcohol for you. It reminds me of how much we love each other. How much we love you.”

I ventured another sip, letting drips settle on my lips and then licking them off. He clapped my shoulder gruffly. My father was not a sentimental man. “Hold out for the best, Alice. You’re beautiful and funny and so, so smart. Never settle.”

I drive my mother home after my cousin and her beau disappear off into the sunset. I drop her at the front door. We hesitate at the goodbye. My childhood house is dark and shuttered behind her, the lone kitchen light left on to deter intruders. I ask feebly if I could help her with anything. She says maybe just one thing (could you just take the trash to the corner on your way out? tomorrow is trash day) and gives me a light pat on my wrist.

No lights flick on in the house, even after my mother shuffles inside and closes the door behind her. As I lug the garbage bag to the corner it clinks, the heavy sound of glass. I peek inside out of curiosity. It is filled with wine bottles – expensive vintages, five dollar convenience store varieties, red and white and sparkling, all jumbled together. All the bottles are empty. They chime together as the bag shifts in a chorus of loneliness.

ELEGY FOR THE DETAILS

Victoria Barner

When I was younger,
we kicked the pinecones—
tiny, misshapen soccer balls—
across the asphalt.
I fed ducks stale bread
and when one bit my finger
you laughed, because we always laughed.

She asks now if I remember you.
I always say yes.

But what I remember is tarnished
by what I've been told.
I know I remember sitting
outside the door,
EMTs inside. And I just sat.

I remember not crying much.
I remember a funeral.
Greetings, awkward and too kind.

I remember soft-boiled eggs,
how you'd put the cracked and empty shells
back together.
You'd tell me they were whole.

But I don't remember dates or ages.
I don't remember your scent
or your exact words
or each place we went.

I remember the stories others tell.
I remember that I'm supposed to remember
I remember how to put egg shells back together
and I can still, at least,
kick pinecones across the street.



TOURIST

Lucy Gonzalez

TWO HOMES

Bryan Byrdlong

I.

Love holds within the theory of Amen:
 The belief that people fervently fear
 Breaking stained-glass, chandeliers.
 When the glassblower's word recedes.
 We count the days till we must pay in pieces.
 The end is: a swift elbow when it comes,
 A class of carelessness, Capoeira threats
 frozen in epithet. "Shards"—the loud
 and low regrets. Glass never has a choice

Sitting tame within its frame, before dividing it exclaims.
 So be it!

II.

An amber child I hold mosquito and mite,
 Melting in a body of anthracite,

My reflection mirrors my light, and is gone,
 Its shout swallowed by their shattering song:

Mother's pane cracking into pointing fingers
 At Father, who never could take a hint.

These singers split my voice between two homes.
 One recycled the aftermath in a tome.
 The other while feigning the blush of water

Digs its tipsy tungsten into my sole.
 I step among love's pieces to feel whole.

My only protection: A broom, a ribbon,
 An album's impression of long division.

CROSSING SOUTH DAKOTA

Sarah Bienstock

Derching in the shoulder of the interstate, Norma pulls her father's heavy corduroy jacket tighter and bounces on her toes to keep warm. The frigid South Dakota air steams her breath and bites her skin as she raises her hand and, yet again, thumbs west. The approaching car flashes its headlights, but doesn't stop, and Norma slides out of the way as it speeds by, snatching her cold-stung fingers back under her armpit.

When she left, Newark had still been balmy with Indian summer. Every afternoon she clamored off the school bus and climbed up the fire escape to sunbathe her bare legs on the apartment's concrete slab of roof. Listening to crackling Jefferson Starship on the portable radio, Norma reveled in the uncharacteristically warm breeze, trying to forget how thick the air felt inside. Since her mom started keeping to the sofa, Norma's father locked the apartment in perennial dusk. With the windows snapped shut and curtains drawn, the only light came from the television in bluish, flickering ellipses. Climbing back down into that dimness, Norma would have to steady herself against the kitchen counter, allowing her pupils to begrudgingly dilate so that she could find her way to the couch and replace her mom's untouched water glass with a fresh one.

In South Dakota the frost has already set in. Only mid October and the temperature dips close to freezing as the day grows lean. Down to nickels and lint in the lining of her pockets, Norma had wandered far from the rest stop, the tip of her thumb dragging her like a caught fish. Now the sun sits low on the horizon and Norma's cheeks are rubber under her fingertips. She wonders if she shouldn't have stayed at the stop anyway, hiding out in a bathroom stall for a nice lady with an empty passenger seat to give her a lift.

In fact, the closeness of those stinking rest stop toilets would be a relief right now. Here the land lacks shelter or variety. The dusk wind comes long across the flat plains, gathering momentum. Norma is the only upright thing for miles, and the wind barrels into her from all directions to blow her wide jeans tight against her legs and blind her with her frenzied copper hair. But back at that bus stop, standing still made Norma's thinking too fast. Lulled by the midday warmth, she had thought she could at least walk to the next gas station or motel. If not, maybe a truck would pick her up. After all, she reasoned, the I90 had been downright crowded coming out of Boston.

Now Norma understands there is nothing in South Dakota. The entire state is as flat and brown as crushed cardboard. Eons of people passing through have packed the earth hard and inflexible. Norma has been walking for miles, but there have been no houses. The rest stop she left is the last she's seen. The few cars driving by had been going fast, cutting the state length wise in their hurry across it. With no hills or landmarks, the road feels endless. Norma cannot tell how far she has come or how fast she is going.

All afternoon the sun had been a compass, warming her face and coaxing her forward. But now darkness creeps in at her back, climbing up the eastern sky. The remaining daylight squints and recedes into a delicate line of flame along the horizon. The sky itself seems to sink with the sun, leaving unchecked space above her, a dark throat gapping to swallow her whole.

Irrationally, Norma begins to fear looking up. She hunches down as she walks, chin tucked into her chest. Like a child, she slides her arms out of her sleeves and into the body of the jacket to hug herself. To her delight, it is much warmer with her hands folded close against her chest. Craving more of a reprieve from the wind, she wanders a few feet off the road, lowers her backpack to the ground, and crouches down to pull her legs into the coat as well. With a final glance around the barren darkness, she yanks the collar of the jacket over her head to join her limbs in the coat's interior.

Inside is wonderful, a soft, little room. The flannel lining has the acidic, dusty smell of her father's cigarettes and sweat. Norma's mother used to banish him outside to smoke, and all winter long he had huddled on the balcony in his corduroy jacket, lapel turned up, lighter sputtering in the wind. But by summer, Norma's mother had permanently retired to the sofa, and her father began smoking inside. He'd sit up late into the night, slouching in an undershirt, blowing sour smoke rings over a sweating bottle of beer. His unsleeping eyes would stay fixed on the couch, where only his wife's folded hands could be seen through the murk, incandescent like the wings of a huge, resting moth.

Inside her flannel womb, Norma too can only see hands. Like her mother's, hers are so pale they make light in the absolute, October darkness. Shriveled from the cold, her fingers refuse to flex; her thumbs refuse to unstick themselves from the others. They are the useless bone hands of a skeleton, and holding them close, Norma begins to cry.

She had set out for California, the hot oven, the golden land of forever summer and forever sunset. Instead she was taken to the dark, empty north, where she will die in a ball on the side of the road. She wonders if anyone will find her corpse out here, or if the wind will simply carry her away, rolling her body like tumbleweed across the frozen plains. Maybe it will roll her all the way back home, back through Boston and New York, back to her doorstep where her father can scoop her up and straighten her out and lay her down next to her mother in the humid, New Jersey earth.

But then Norma realizes the dry, South Dakota soil is trembling under her feet. A horn honks and, startled, Norma jumps up, threading her arms through her sleeves. She spins in a full circle, unable to find the road, and then she sees the car, coming towards her, slowing. The headlights hit her full on, engulfing her in brilliant light. Dazzled and blind, for a wild moment, Norma fears the sky must have swallowed her after all, sending her up and up through midnight space, and all the way to heaven.

SELF-PORTRAIT AS A CARDBOARD BOX

Olatunde Osinaike

Break me down into constellations –
coordinate planes packed with
crystals and peanuts –
Mask my fractures and
equip my dimensions
to surf the crowds.

Expedite my expressions to be shipped.
Immediately.

Fill me up
with Christmas joy,
nostalgia, and seas of
cereal. For I have dreamt of
feeding exiles
stripped of makeshift shelter.

Carry me against gravity.

Label me Storage
and my essence with scripture.
Tattoo directions to salvage
my lasting layers,
before I'm discarded
to waste and origin.

Track my remnants.
Pass my scraps along
just as I was:
let them testify.

LUPUS

Jacob Culberson

*an apocryphal note written by Flannery O'Connor
upon an anniversary of the death of Virginia Woolf*

Everything she thought was the mark on the wall
and wrote was
and is
and lives still, subsisting,
both where she saw it
and where she painted it in words which struck
and strike above their weight,
in that which she sought to believe
she had eluded
until her her arrogance overcame her
and, pocketing those loud
and silent creatures of time
and refusing to be refuted thus by the weight of glory
and the eyes of Virgil,
she abandoned Apollo for Poseidon.



ALWAYS NEVER David Brandon

FRANNY AND ZOOEY

Anonymous

Is it too early on a
 periwinkle Saturday
 hand-dipped motionless still like
 birdsong on a yellow blanket summer day
 to read a year-torn taped-spine
 Salinger? Salinger smelling
 of mildewed bookshelves
 late night coffee stains
 in subtle rings like fairy circles
 shallow stale breath of dust mites
 and invisible haze of natural oils
 that left one-in-six-billion prints
 on these aged and aging
 sunset glazed
 thought gilded
 pages. The library card says West
 Georgia. I have been to Atlanta once.
 I was thirteen hair still in
 braids thick like blackbird necks;
 they swung in pendulums in a silent rhythm
 as I walked,
 my shoulders sloping.
 Thirteen. An unlucky number. That year
 I sliced
 at the tender velvet skin of my forearm
 with an eyebrow razor
 watched
 in round-eyed wonder indigo loathing
 tiny liquid roses
 wine-tempered and Valentine deep
 bloom sequentially from the fertile
 brown soil of my flesh.
 Then I held my breath and slathered on
 ointment thick as Crisco
 distanced me from me
 a psycho/
 logical split:
 the ill and the healer.

But either way, that was not in West Georgia.

How many hands –

rough hands tender hands bruised hands

criss-crossed with

salt blue spider legs hands

pockmarked, tobacco bitten

hands smooth and without flaws,

glazed clay fingers, ceramic wrists

hands paper white autumn sun orange

and brown like storm clouds on painted yellow mornings –

have settled like sand on these sand-colored pages?

How many thoughts –

quick and slow and bright and dark

young and old

fearful fearless fearing self

have traced these liquid lines

blue-black ink scuttling the cranium

seeping

into pores mythical and microscopic?

How many unlucky West Georgians

drowned

in youth cynicism june bugs humid air of deep South summertime

have stamped nostrils to fairy circles

(à la sweet broom moss and café au lait) and

inhaled oh so deeply

praying,

closed lips and open eyes (as readers do)

to dear Salinger - this time our author-god -

for small favors:

eternal salvation

another mild winter

straight As and

kinship in misanthropy?



THINGS FROM THE SEA

Vibhu Krishna

POEM FOR T. E. HULME

Jacob Culberson

What manner of beast is this dry moon:

May waning steeply into June—

but the distance is unthinkable.

What sort of creature is this mountain'd bay:

Low tide waxing onto grey—

AN ORDINARY WEEKEND, DISSECTED AND OVERANALYZED

Anonymous

On Monday, I fell in love. Not in reality, of course – I was far too sane for that, I liked to think – but in the ever-tumbling waterfall of my inner delusions I imagined the young clerk at the French-style café smiling sheepishly, writing his number on the back of my receipt, and agreeing to roam the neighboring bookstore with me as we played intellectually childish games, literary scavenger hunts and the like, giggling like lovers or toddlers or drunk old women as we relished enchanted hours that passed us like minutes. Then, resuming our adulthood, we handpicked favorites from the plump orchard of the dollar shelf, slim hardbacks with prices penciled onto the flyleaves like henna. We grabbed coffee from across the street. I purchased an iced chai tea swirled by a thick cirrus cloud of soy milk; he had a small cup of something sharp and dark. We drank and chatted and drank some more, ordered seconds. We enjoyed being young in a fresh autumn season.

Instead of this, I ordered an overpriced but marvelous vanilla panna cotta and a pumpkin soup that did not quite live up to my expectations (pumpkin was, after all, a personal love of mine. This was as much for the romance of it as for the taste – the fairytale of cinnamon breezes and rust-tinged leaves that dotted the ground like pretentiously intricate polka dots. Pumpkin also reminded me that my birthday was coming soon, and thus, I would no longer be quite as poor. I was looking forward to that) and ate outside. I snuck glances through the shop window at the would-be object of my affections. He was a beautiful man. Recklessly tossed butter-blond curls and glasses with thick rectangular frames. The fact that he worked at a French café certainly helped. There was a certain romance to that, a little bit like my pumpkin love – just as beautiful for the concept as for the material itself. Who wouldn't want to fall in love with a butter-blond French café clerk with glasses? It was artsy. And I was wearing a scarf that day, so I felt artsy. I was an artsy girl with an artsy scarf ready for an artsy bespectacled love. The idea lent me just enough confidence to smile at him, lend a bright thank you, and proceed to the bookstore alone. I was fine with this. It is a personal belief of mine that love is much better left to the mental faculties. From what I've heard, romance in person is a touchy, difficult thing.

On Sunday, almost two hundred miles from my Monday location, my best friend and I had discussed this touchy, difficult thing, among other subjects, on the concrete steps of a Methodist church in Old Louisville. It was a perfect place to feel misunderstood, she had told me. She was right. Together there we shared a long-needed existential crisis. We sat on those cold, beautiful steps in that cold, beautiful neighborhood on that cold, beautiful October afternoon and discussed everything of which we were currently afraid. And God, were we terrified of the future (but isn't it a scary thing? This great black abyss hurtling towards us. It is infinite and it is here. We think of it and we are in it, and it is no longer what it is. Slippery as soap). It was very easy to fear the future while sitting in Old Louisville; everything there appeared so perfectly stable. Families wandered in and out of two-story brick houses, walked dogs along paved sidewalks, smoked cigarettes on



UNTITLED

Julia Ordog

the porch, raked piles of copper brown leaves. A child no older than three sat at the base of a tree no younger than seventy-five, flipping the thick paper pages of a storybook (when she is seventy-five the tree will still be there, God willing. When she is one hundred and fifty it will still be there, breathing in this ancient air, and she will not be. Sad, but sane). Would we ever be as picture-perfect as these people? Half of me dreaded the thought. How dull it sounded, day in and day out, the same endless cycle of stability, waking up, going to work, sleeping. Hello husband, hello children, hello pet. Goodbye all, hello again. Good God. Who could stand it? Still, the other half of me yearned to someday reside within that painfully average brand of madness. The perfect family, nuclear as Hiroshima; an internal structure as flawless as the outer. Half of Megan hoped for it, too. Neither one of us have known picture perfect families. I am not even sure if those exist. I wonder if even my bespectacled love, pretend though he may be, could grow jaded, disloyal, cruel. Maybe that is just what men do.

On Saturday, we watched romantic comedies at her sister's house. Her sister is a videographer; she was roaming Appalachia at that moment, taping a mission trip in the magical, desperate, violet-misted mountains of east Kentucky. Her husband of a year was with her. Megan and I were watching her dog and thoroughly enjoying the fact that we did not have to spend another night in a dorm room. That morning we had sat in her clean country-style kitchen eating soft eggs and wheat bread, feeling entirely more domestic than we were comfortable with. Soon enough this would be life. Waking up, making breakfast for myself and another, walking the dog, cleaning up. I would be heading off to work, though, which I did not do that morning, and I would be eating breakfast not with a friend, but with a partner. What a strange thought. I wasn't even sure what that word meant, "partner." I liked using it, though – it sounded so spontaneous, so elegant, in the way it rolled off the tongue, the soft breath of the p, the lazy t, the curling final r. Much better than "husband." Husband was a frightening word to me; a pair of handcuffs without a key, a jammed doorknob. No way in, no way out. Someone like stone, someone to whom I was obligated. I detested the concept of obligation to other humans. I was a firm believer in not owing anyone anything. If I wanted to be taciturn three days a week, then damn it, I would be taciturn. Cheerfulness should never be expected from me – though I would be lying if I said that I did not usually expect it from others. I don't think that's a crime, though. I believe that is just how people work.

On Friday, I rode a Greyhound from Nashville to Louisville, Kentucky. On the bus, I somehow befriended an ex-con who had been let out of prison not even twenty-four hours before the moment of our meeting. He was unusually cheerful given his situation – but then I suppose the fact that he had been let out of prison at all was something to be cheerful about. He did not tell me what he was in for (once he learned that I was seventeen, he seemed more reluctant to offer information. I suppose he had a fear of corrupting me; he had a daughter that was only a few years younger than myself. Five children total, two ex-wives. For his youngest son, barely six, he loved to make ice sculptures and model airplanes), but roundabout I inferred he had been unemployed and had fallen into drugs, using or selling or perhaps both. I didn't understand how he could ever have been unemployed – apparently, he was a certified welder, barber, cook, and waste water manager. But he was from Miami, and I guess anyone could be unemployed in Miami. Florida had always sounded like Hell to me – brimming with an endless variety of man-eating creatures, eternally hot. The latter aspect somehow seemed more detestable than the first. I couldn't imagine a land without fall and winter, without the native majesty of October-stained treetops and the pensive

silence of December midnights. What is any place without December? It would be December in Nashville soon enough – the black velvet curtain of it was already falling; Orion was striding into the lengthened nights with hands tying and untying his firestorm belt. I would be eighteen on the head of it. An adult. I was sliding headlong into the future, hoping to God I wouldn't crash, hoping to God that I could figure adult things out – love, finances, trust, fear, how to speak to handsome young men at French cafés, how to concoct a perfect pumpkin soup, how to think deeply, how to speak sweetly, how to be harsh as a convict, how to be wise as an ancient oak tree, how to be as relentlessly happy as Brooke's little brown dog. I guess that was all I wanted, really. To figure out how to be happy before it was too late. Was it ever too late? I didn't want to know. It didn't really matter. Either way I would melt into the future, let the future melt into me, morph into a present I could hopefully be satisfied with. Smoothly, smoothly. Like the smell of old books, like the taste of pumpkin chai, like the crisp air of a bright new December. Satisfactory was all I needed, really. Something with which I could be reasonably content. I don't think that's too much to ask of life. I pray to God that it is not too much for life to ask of me.

P O S T A C I

Michael E. Woods

More of the same? I ask,
shuffling the letters around.
Not today! He grins, teeth saturated with a gleam,
I think your son sent you a postcard.
Well, hot damn! That is good news.
Glad to see you're still in good spirits
on this hellish day. What is it? one-oh-one, one-oh-two?
Just under a hundred, he laughs and points to my glass,
it appears you're also in good spirits, as to be expected.
Yeee-aaahp, no work today, takin' the week off,
not wantin' to fry in this little car of mine,
I point to the dark blue Oldsmobile 88.
Now, you're Turkish, right? He nods.
How do you say Mailman, again?
POH-stah-CHEE? poh-STAH-chuh? He grins,
closer every day, you are.
Well, one of these days, I say,
I'll get it.

LOW EDEN

Bryan Byrdlong

Near Black River Falls,
 Where I imagine the Baku rest their heads,
 The hills slope, their tilt gentle, before turning cheek.

We turn on such streets down a punk road
 With a Mohawk of grass between balding silt strips,
 And pine needles on either side of our sliding doors.

Before long,
 I notice that they are singed
 And that angel blood sits on the wood violets like dew.

We cruise a bit before turning into a gravel driveway,
 The vinyl siding of the house smiling
 Like a lone vamp at the end of a bar.

Aunt Eve opens the screen door in a teal robe
 Dragging swisher ashes across a face
 That has gone up in puffs of smoke.

Donatello pokes out of the house in a diaper
 And nothing else.
 Head strong and handsome
 He four year old chatters to me about Smokey
 From the Friday film,
 Stegosaurus, and staying with him forever.

Inside his sister web surfs.
 Escaping rural edges with Apple,
 Pressing ominous runes
 In chat rooms.

Outside,
 Donte blesses me.
 He giggles, tackles my left leg,
 Threatens to throw a rock at my face.

His mother caterwauls
 Elbows akimbo,
 (His grandfather lives up the road, never visits)

Then a snake appeals
 At the level of Don's heel,
 And D threatens to crush his head,
 calling him (Big Worm).

SOUNDS OF GLASS

Matthew Hawkins

I saw him first online. Pointed west, probably, his red face glowed. He was not looking at the camera. His right foot was propped on the spine of a crooked elk, a black goatee horned his chin, his thin nose burnt high in the air. “This is the one,” I had said to Ellen. “He has 12 years of experience in the backcountry, says he likes Jack London and Vonnegut. I can camp with a man who like Vonnegut.” Besides, there was nothing heroic about his jaw line. “I don’t care,” she said, not looking up from her laptop, “as long as he knows how to make back-country gourmet.”

And now I am belly down on a ridge, looking down an alpine meadow through a high-powered scope at the bloody scene of my first kill—me, finally a hunter. A bloody hole smashed through muscle and bone. It reminds me of my marriage day, actually, and a lesson I learned then: don’t eat raspberries when wearing a white tux. Stick to white wine and apples. Here is the elk, not quite an hour dead, smiling at me in the scope: that day is a raspberry mashed into the fibers of my white tuxedo. Ellen spat: “Be careful god damn it. You just ruined the pictures we have for the rest of our lives.” I stayed silent then. This is three years later, and I am a hunter now. I have a Luxus Arms Model Rifle, and a perch. Now a killer. See the elk smile. Mike the Hunting Guide, smiling. He still has the goatee. He still looks ugly in victory. Even if I yelled he would not hear. Perspective? I see things as they come to me, and the scene plays out 400 yards away, in a field next to a snowmelt river.

An hour ago, Mike The Hunting Guide whispered steady careful steady careful into my ear, I pulled the trigger, and the elk spit streamers of blood. 1,000 pounds of muscle collapsed, blanketing dust over the wildflowers (purple and yellow, Indian Paintbrush). Ellen stifled a yell at the report. She began crying, weeping quietly. “It doesn’t seem fair. It doesn’t seem like the right way to kill such a beautiful thing. From so far away,” sniffing into our guide’s tan, PFG shoulder, scratching his back with an errant hand. She thought I hadn’t seen that. Again, I am beginning to see more clearly.

They—Mike The Hunting Guide, and Ellen My Wife— do not see me in my perch 400 yards up the valley. They are sitting next to the dead beast. An hour ago, minutes after the kill, I volunteered to hike back to the campsite; I told them I would bring lunch, a bottle of wine to celebrate and relax while we prepared the steaks. Mike led Ellen down the steep canyon pass to show the proper way to peel elk skin from elk muscle. We split ways, planning to reunite in two hours. I am not bringing back lunch. I am drinking the Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc. Looking down this beautiful canyon in Wyoming. A gun in my hands, musing on a raspberry. Wishing I had one to mash between my molars, grind small seeds to paste.

I see them now. Ellen with a light blue flannel shirt, lightweight khakis, and new Scarpa hiking boots I bought for this trip, worn this once. Flowers (yellow, red), crushed. I’ll check her

white cheeks later to see if his sharp beard cut her face. Kissing. Mike's eyes, close. I see Mike's eyes. Sweat beads on Ellen's neck. Teeth larger than crosshairs. Larger than cross hairs. Teeth on his sandy face larger than crosshairs. I am a bird of prey, and drunk. I swing the gun to the elk and his antlers look like knives. His glazed marble eyes wink at me.

There are many things that only happen once: a first kill, a first step, a first kiss, a first marriage, wearing brand new clothes for the first time— birth, and death. The first stain on a new white tuxedo and the first time you realize you hate the woman you have just committed your entire life to (careful, careful, god damn it). And I am beginning to see these things clearly now, these firsts, these onces. I am seeing Mike finish, buck and squirm. My wine bottle careens off the edge of the rock when my shoulder moves and splinters into crystal dust pollinating the wild flowers whose name I knew once and I like the sound.



NEW ORLEANS MAN

Caleb Ziegler



OUR SPRING ISSUE

The Vanderbilt Review would like to warmly thank everyone who submitted to this fall issue—we cannot exist without your voices.

In this spirit, we would like to invite the Vanderbilt community to submit to our spring issue. By reading this fall issue, you are partaking in the creative community here, and we want to encourage you to contribute your work to it.

The spring issue is *The Vanderbilt Review's* core publication and is open to any prose, poetry, and art submissions. We will reward a winner from each section with a \$100 cash prize.

We firmly believe in the creative voice and vision here at Vanderbilt and we would love for you to show us yours.

Send your submissions to thevandyreview@gmail.com
by January 8th, 2014 at 5pm.

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