

THOUGHTWELL

SCHS

2015

Welcome to the 2014-2015 edition of the SCHS Thoughtwell. This year, our little publication has grown quite a bit, and includes several short stories, poems, and a themed collection of poems reinterpreting a classic taught at SCHS. In order to reach the widest possible audience, we have gone completely digital. So please, read everything in here. Then, spread the word by spreading the Thoughtwell. Send it to friends, family, and everyone else you can think of, so they can see the talent we have here at SCHS.

Matt Donoho
Thoughtwell sponsor

Poetry

Don't Be You

by Bradley Lindsey

Don't do what you're good at
Just do what they want
Don't know what you love
Just know what they want

You have to get into a good college
Have be a member of society
You have memorize all the useless facts
Homogenizing yourself isn't free

Don't say what you want to
Just repeat what you're told
Don't have your own thoughts
Just fit into their mold

You'll never get into a good college
You'll never fulfill your own dreams
If you don't memorize the arbitrary guidelines
You'll crash and burn and fall apart at the seams

Don't act like you know what
You're doing with yourself
Don't carve out your own path
Put ambitions on the shelf

You have to make the grades to please the college
A+ in math for an English degree
You have to sit and sigh but never wonder why
A happy life doesn't come free

Shut Door Life **by Bradley Lindsey**

Hollowed by the hollow lies
The hollow lives hollowing eyes
Pushed back and forth under the score
Of a blip floored toward a shut door
Future black and past redacts
It's lasting blast of residual happiness

Carving through the blue hued ruse
You get to choose, you don't want to
Caught between the gleaming, screaming
Cacophony, it's painted true
Past is read, the red blood shed
Tomorrow is dead beyond bereft

Being Someone **by Bradley Lindsey**

There are a lot of people here
In cars though, so not really
I wonder how many are watching me
I wonder what they think
I feel a little out of place
Like a cog that was pushed from the machine
I'm sitting here, writing poetry
While everyone else is doing something
Going somewhere
Being someone
I don't really want that
I sort of wish I did

It's okay:
We all suffer terrible loss
Everyone losses someone they love
It's okay..
It's okay to be mad
It's okay to cry
It's okay to hurt
No one can tell you different
Just remember..
Keep your loved ones close
Keep your mind open
Keep your memories going
Never forget them
they shall always be with you
Long as they are in your heart
You will have them by your side forever
Remember the good times
Cherish every moment on Earth
We all need each other
If we all stand strong
Their memories shall carry on

~Sierra Riley

People often dwell on their past, not realizing that living in the past my very well ruin their future. I myself have have a long dark history but, I'm still up and I'm still happy. I just remind myself it could always be worse. No matter what. I found that if you think of all the negativity in your life, you will find yourself going down a dark path. So remember just smile things will get better, one step at a time. :)

~Sierra Riley

"Teen Motherhood"

by Sierra Riley

To have a baby such a perfect thing
To have a baby whom you may rock and sing
To have a baby what a delight
You'll lose a lot of sleep at night
Getting in and out of your bed
Every time you step you hear a pounding in your head
Wake up at five pack a diaper bag for the day
Change their diaper and clothes
Get their breakfast and a bottle to go
Send them to the babysitter
Try and get to school on time
Stay awake in class your falling behind
About a month or two of home-schooling
You've missed all the class discussions
Time to catch up with your friends
You notice that a lot has changed
People who use to talk to you don't anymore
Your still young now you are no longer the queen nor are you even a princess
You are a six letter word that starts with a "M"
A mother
Life is no longer about you it's about your child
As a teen this is hard to deal with
Now you have to watch what you do and who comes in and out of your life
If you are a teen mom though no fears
I will admit there will be some tears
There are numerous places that will help
Don't worry if you feel you can't handle it adoption is a very good option
Babies are fun yes but I promise you they put you through a real test
The "you time" is gone for about seven or eight years
They may unleash some of your darkest fears
They are going to have a fit when there's something they want but can't get
When winter comes so do colds
Now you have a screaming infant in pain
You've tried everything that came to your brain
Now you must go through the blizzard to defeat this storm
Babies are fun but don't have them when you are too young

You will never know true love until you know true heart break. ~Sierra Riley

Words Fail Me
by Alexa Smith

Words are powerful
Words are strong
Words make you feel beautiful
Words bring you down

They lift you up
And slam you down
They make you smile
They make you frown

Words are dangerous
Words are safe
Words are traitorous
Words can chafe

They'll make you or break you
They do not care
You'll feel like you're drowning
Or floating on air

Words fail me
I never know what to say
Whatever happened to timing?
Whatever happened to rhyme?

I can hardly write a poem
I can't even write a song
Words are at my disposal
But I use them all wrong

Here where my pain is ever present
I will lie down my sorrow
To put paper to pen and write my soul
And now forever more sooth my storm
Creating a new everlasting Eden
For my love, my heart, my future
Built atop the desolation of my past
Forgiving the transgressions against me

- **Anonymous**

Falling **by Quinton Metcalf**

We wish from what we dream,
not what we know.
People stick with what they think,
what they know they're stuck with.
The heavens shine for each person,
illuminating their self entirely.
The starry sky that disappeared,
was the same sky I saw with you that night...
A persons' future is gone, so then
a star falls.

We Hear America Singing

As part of English 31, SCHS juniors read Walt Whitman's classic poem "I Hear America Singing." Walt Whitman listened to his America, and this is what he heard:

*I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe
and strong
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plan or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off
work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the
deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing
as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the
morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at
work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day - at night the party of young
fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.*

After studying and discussing the poem, the students were asked to listen to their America. This is what they heard.

Brianna Deadmond

I hear America singing
Those that silently cry at night, singing out for help
The bashful, singing out that they want left alone
The outgoing, singing to be heard
The dangerous, singing that they themselves are terrified
The depressed, singing out that they are lost
The religious, singing out their praises
The repulsive, singing to be noticed
Each singing what they need as loud as possible
They are singing all night every night
Each singing their own song

Payton Schippel

I hear America singing songs of fear and hate
I hear these songs through the halls of SCHS
I hear the songs of ISIS in the United States
I hear the songs of the Ebola virus
I hear the songs of Ferguson, Missouri
I hear the songs of gossip and lies
I hear fighting in the cafeteria
I hear the songs of what someone is wearing
When I go home at night I hear songs
I hear songs of love fill the air
I hear songs what's for dinner and
 the songs of the television.
I hear songs everywhere.

Maddie Golden

I hear America singing, the enemies I hear
The ignorant people singing with stupidity
The media singing with wild exaggerated stories
The parents singing with tears of disappointment
The kids singing with eye filled with fear
The horrifying singing of a community
The authorities singing at night when they could be holding
 their family
The others waste time singing about drugs when they could help
 make it better
As the day gets shorter vandalizing begins longer
 singing about making other feel horrible.

Christian Casner

I hear America singing, the many sounds I hear,
I hear of students despair, as they sit to take a test,
I hear of teachers scolding, as students talk,
I hear of drivers revving their engines
I hear of protesters protesting the protesting protestors
I hear of cashiers cashiering cash
I hear of cooks cooking food
I hear of secretaries typing
I hear of Rick Astley telling me to "never give me up"
I hear a lot of sounds around America
The sounds bounce around my mind and now America sings out loud

Dearria Watson

I hear America singing, the protests I hear.
Those of America, something goes wrong everyday.
The cashier crying as she watches the chaos.
The boss crying as he watches his building burn.
The kid crying because he's overwhelmed and young.
The parents crying as their kids are missing.
The policemen lined up as though no one can get through.
The obnoxious sounds of the upset people, or the
 police doing their job, or the reporter who is live on TV.
Every cry is what no one wants to hear.
The night is the craziest, day comes and it's only
 peaceful protesting.

Alica Wilkins

I hear America singing
The hoodlums rioting in Ferguson for justice
The joyous sound of gas prices dropping.
The teenagers crying over exams and finals
The president ignoring the deadly Ebola outbreak
I hear fast food places, welcoming diabetes to people
The babies crying for their 16-year-old parents
The sweet sound of freedom, even though we're not all free.
The deafening sound of Arby's, and hard work every night.
Each sound more terrible than the other
The day, winding to an end, the sound of guns and tear gas.
I hear America singing, and crying from all the corruption.

Dakota MacDaneld

I hear America singing cheers of Friday night lights
I smell the fresh cut grass
I see the new painted lines
I hear the buzzer go through the cold air
The town is dead silent
The crowd screams as we take the field
In every little town it is the same
America singing a football cheer.
Small towns like ours wait for the Friday night lights
America sings every Friday night
We sing of cheer

Janie Hayes

I hear America singing the sound of girls gossiping
I hear a girl whisper a rumor about her best friend
I hear another girl talk bad about her boyfriend
I hear the lunch table talking bad about the teachers
I hear my best friend crying in the halls
I hear everyone talking about one another
I hear people starting rumors constantly
I hear about a girl committing suicide
I hear people crying at the funeral home
I hear people crying everywhere
I hear the Autumn wind, sitting here missing you.

Nurissa Branon

I hear America singing cheerful Christmas carols
The sound of bells ringing
The sound of reindeer running
The sound of Santa "Ho Ho Ho"-ing
The sound of cookies baking
The sound of presents opening
The sound of mom singing Christmas songs
The sound of myself eating cookies
The sound of families laughing and having fun
At night you hear snowball fights
You hear laughter, cheerful singing that comes
from the heart.

Abbie Siegwald

I hear America singing Christmas songs
The present singing while getting wrapped
The bell ringing for money to donate to charity
The children singing Christmas songs in their plays
Credit card swiping as purchasing presents
Churches singing as they tell about baby Jesus
Pencils singing as kids write Christmas letters
Santa singing as he delivers presents
As night comes upon us, I hear children sleeping
I hear Santa hiding presents and taking cookies
 After all, it's Christmas Eve

Erin Maas

I hear America singing in the
 street and on the sidewalks. Car horns
of the commuters going off.
The cell phones and emails in the office worker's pocket
 going off.
The alarms at a store when someone takes something going off
The bell in school letting students out
 going off.
The timer for the cook so they know the
 food is done going off.
The 911 call for the police officer when they are needed going off.
The teacher intercom calling kids to the office going off.
The sound of the band in the church
 starting up.
The chirp of the cricket as the kids run in the dark.
The at the kids' door telling them to go to bed.
This is how I hear America singing.

Cheyenne Goodwin

I hear America singing
The guns fire
They scream "Massacre!"
Cry out "Murder!"
Yell for mercy
Begging for their son back
So they say "Let's start a riot."
People screaming in pain.
"My baby is gone!"
But when the dust has all settled and the blame has been laid
People will know the facts that
policemen are protecting us and themselves.

Curtis Cambell

I hear America singing while a handyman is hammering on a board
I hear America singing while my car engine starts on the roadway
I hear America singing at the angry drivers by the sidewalk
I hear America singing while I am swiping my floor at my house
I hear America singing at the mechanics working on the cars
I hear America singing at my dad while he starts his truck
I hear America singing when the doors lock on buildings at night
I hear America singing when people walk by

Seth Gooden

I hear America singing, the variety of sounds I hear
The day starts off with the 7:55 bell
I hear the shots and scream of men in the history video
I hear the sizzling of bacon coming from the people welding
The sound of basketballs on the gym floor
The hear daily information on the W I L D news
I hear the sound of pencils racing to get homework done
I see people rushing to get their food
From there I hear the sound of air tools hammering
I hear math equations being assigned
The sound of people reading Whitman
The day then ends by the 3:15 bell
I climb in my truck to hear the engine purr
As the day turns dull the street lights buzz
Crickets start chirping and hoot owls start hooting
The sound of America singing, is always going on

Clay Webster

I hear America singing, the varied resonances I hear,
Those of the cats, meowing as they are being chased,
The dogs, barking as the cat runs up a tree,
The birds, as their sleep is interrupted by the cat,
The cows, mooing as they are being milked,
The farmer, yelling as the cow kicks over the milk bucket,
The deer, grunting as the arrow narrowly misses it,
The hunter, shrieking in pandemonium as the deer runs away.
Each singing the troubles of their lives.
From dawn to dusk,
Singing with open mouths, their laborious musical anthems.

Angel Schroeter

I hear America singing, the many sounds I hear
Tired siblings groan as the alarm sounds preparing for buses rumbling
up, bearing loud children
Bells ring over buzzing students as they rush to class
Teachers begin lectures as students scribble down notes
Friends scooting closer, dragging the chairs across the floor
Gossip and giggles from everyone, really, boys this, drugs that, can't
forget the cussing
Gym teachers bark orders while students play their games
Lunch Bell! Trays and cups dropping, students clap and blast their music
Students open then close their jammed lockers, pack up and are on their way
Teachers and students alike start their cars and drive off
Texting their friends until they finally drift off, preparing to make
the same sounds tomorrow

Katie Daniels

I hear America singing all throughout my day.

I awake and out the window a chirp, a whistle, a hum.

Down the hall a clank, a sizzle, a simmer.

I hear America singing all throughout my day.

Papers rustled, orders announced, assignments handed out.

Lockers slamming, laughing, and gossip.

I hear America singing all throughout my day.

A warm greeting at the door, the slicer sputtering. A Cha-Ching from
the register, elderly women on their merry way.

I hear America singing all throughout my day.

I open the door to four loving arms and two soft voices warm my heart.

I walk out in the cold, a crunch beneath my feet, a whistle in the wind.

I'm welcomed by gentle grunts and low nickers.

When I go back inside I lay my head down to sleep and I think of all
the things that I heard America sing today.

Val Mehmedi

I hear America singing the varied carols I hear
Those of the students each singing through the halls, untamed and demented
The teachers singing in class as they grade and instruct
The janitors singing throughout the school as they sweep and mop
The basketball players singing on the court as they dribble and shoot
The coaching singing robust and powerful as they sit on the bench
The cheerleaders singing vigorously and powerfully as they encourage the team
The crowd singing their chants as they burst into an applause
The parents singing with smiles and hugs as they greet their children
All individuals singing their songs, and only theirs
The calm day belonging to the elderly, and the roaring night belonging
to the young
All singing the same song but nothing like one another's

Chloe Austin

I hear America singing in the soldiers marching cadence in the morning

In the protests of the angry demonstrators on the street

I hear America singing as I sail through the doors of school and I am
greeted by all my peers

In the banging of doors as they are opened and closed in the slamming
of the lockers as we race to class

I hear America singing in the crack of the bat as the ball sails over the fence

In the roar of the crowd as the home team scores the winning run

I hear America singing in the rat a tat tat of the jack hammer as it
breaks up the concrete In the parking lot

In the chuckles of the construction workers as they pave the way

I hear America singing as the shade drops down on the horizon as the
crickets and lightening bugs take refuge in the night

I am grateful and humbled as I lay my head for the many freedoms and
privileges that so many work to give me

Emily Hunt

I hear America singing through the busy streets of Chicago.
And as I walk, the singing of cups of change fill the air.
The waitress's glasses and plates sing as the table is being busted.
The singing of a mother caring for her child in the harsh, cold weather.
Men singing with their drumsticks while they play on the sidewalks.
The singing of barks coming leashed dogs.
Sirens sing wails across the city as the police make an arrest.
The actually singing of street performers just trying to make do.
The blithe of drunks coming from drinks at the local bars is something
you hear often.
The day brings it's singings from all different things.
The nighttime brings it's singings from a combination of CLANKS,
BANGS, and BLURTS throughout the busy streets of Chicago.

Lauren Dodson

I hear America singing, the diverse noises I hear,
Those of lockers, slamming closed by their owners,
The student tapping, swiping on their iPad,
The pencil writing and scratching at the paper,
The eraser rubbing and gnawing at the student's mistakes,
The teachers grading, circling mistakes and flipping the pages,
The boots stomping and sliding, making their way outdoors,
The engine roars to magnificent life, spitting and sputtering along,
The gravel crunches and shudders under the rubber tires,
Each object making its own voice heard,
The day passes away and opens up the sounds of the robust night,
Caroling and rejoicing with their own unique songs.

Mariah Green

I hear America singing the sing of my life
The sound of teachers answering questions
Gossip in the halls about the girl over there
Bells ringing every hour
Stampede of students rising the halls
The sound of cars leaving the gravel drive
The sweet sound of home
The noisy sheep greeting me with a baa
The sound of mother preparing dinner on the stove
Children studying while listening to their iPods
The final goodnight from mother as she tucks me in

Blake Hendricks

I hear America singing all in the country
The big lifted trucks with their loud pipes
The big mud tires roaring down the road
The ducks landing in the fields
The geese honking as they to fly over the fields
The four wheelers riding down the road
The water flowing in the creeks
I hear dogs barking as the car pulls in the drive
I hear chainsaws start to go cut wood
I hear the fire starting
Now all I hear us the sound of night

Kylee Jones

I hear America singing wonderful Christmas carols,
The sound of snow hitting the tin roof
The sound of bells ringing
The sound of laughter and cheer
The excitement of presents being unwrapped
The plows moving the snow off the roads
The sound of church's singing
The joy and love flowing throw in the air
The sound of kids playing with their new prices
The aroma of food, pie and other goodies
The happiness and wonder that fills the air
You hear Christmas carols, laughter, that all comes from the heart.

Kelton Knight

I hear America singing everywhere I go
In town I hear people honking rushing around
I hear trains as they are flying by
I hear big trucks shifting gears
I hear the conversation of people as they walk by on the sidewalk
In the country I hear the birds chirping
I hear tractors out in the field as farmers are feeding their cattle
I hear chainsaws running as people are cutting wood for the winter cold
At night I here crickets chirping
In the the dark woods I hear coyotes howling
At the end of the day I hear my fan running as I go to sleep

Alexis Coleman

I hear America singing through my daily routine
As I hear the loud buzzing from the alarm clock in the morning
The noise of the mother and children jumping up and rushing to get
ready for work and school
As I walk out the door I feel the cold air hit my face
The silence is welcome as my mom drives me to school
I get to school and I hear the footsteps of my friends coming to talk to me
As I hear the bell ring, I hear footsteps rushing to their 1st hour class
In PE I hear the players swooshing the rackets to hit birdies over the net
By the time my day finishes at school it is dark and the cold wind
blows through the bare trees
I walk through the door of my home and the cold wind blows through the
room while my dog barks in greeting
I hear America singing through my daily routine and it is a song I know well

Levi Winkler

I hear America sing with every beat and rhythm
Some peoples words are like poison
Others are like a helping hand
Then those as quiet as a stone
Or as loud as an approaching storm
Or as repetitive as an echo
And lost like the stars in the morning
Then the ground shaking effect of a roaring tidal wave
As the whispers of are past selves
Sing us sweet lullabies and the
night's skies cool wind give us a kiss sending us adrift

James Barcroft

I hear America singing, the many beats of work

Whether the reluctant "click click click" of a bored office worker on his keyboard

Or the clanks and clatters of pots and pans of one in the chaos of a busy kitchen

From the anguish of the conversing between a therapist and his patient

To the ominous KABOOMS of the bloody battlefield

There are deep roars and loud hisses from the dangerous truck driver and his rig

And there are smashes and pounds from colossal, factory machinery

I adore the whirring of saws in the lumber mill

After a while, things start to shut down and there are only a few instruments

Then, at the end of the song, everything goes soft

The hard sounds of work cease to exist, and I am left with silence

Kaleb Barton

I hear America singing, but not with its mouth or voice,

The singing comes from their actions, and the things they use.

The copier sings "Uh-huh" with each paper scanned,

The singing of the cars has a slow and low rumble.

I hear the rioters screaming "I can't breathe" and "Hands up, Don't shoot"

I hear the singing of all the headphones blaring into the ears of teens,

I hear the singing of the frustrated teen, running his fingers through his hair.

I hear the singing of keyboards, clicking as the keys are pressed faster,

The singing of computers humming is as audible as ever.

I hear the ding of each text, game, and app notification,

I hear the America's singing, and its beautiful voice carries.

Clara Jacobsen

For thought well
I hear America singing a song about an adventure
The adventure that I'm on. The song I'm singing.
I hear my family sing another song, a sad and desperate one.
My brain and my heart sings 2 different songs.
The song my heart is singing is happy and curious.
While the song of my brain is thoughtful which can lead to sadness.
The song of my personal, me and who I think I am is changing.
The people around me, the people at home and the rest of the world
Is singing and no one is singing the same song.
In a different culture, in a different country makes me realize that
it's perfectly normal.
America is welcoming me.

Collin Lerro

I hear America singing, so many voices to hear
It sings in the clash of the cymbal as the school band plays
It rings in the breeze that whistles through the trees in the afternoon
I hear it as I drive home, as others play their music as they drive home
It belts out in the passion the teachers show as their voices teach us
It sings out in the bounce of basketballs as we play dodgeball in P.E.
And most of all it sings in my sisters voice, as we laugh and talk
when I pick her up from school
As I listen to America sing its song to me,
I lay in my bed and reflect on the sounds and sights of the day
And am proud that it's me hearing Americas song

Callah Methena

I hear America singing those distant sweet carols
I hear ISIS threatening a once proud country
I hear a deficit growing in a once sound land
I hear people quitting, not working in a once functional place
I hear people yelling in a once joyous country
I hear people crying in a once proud land
I hear abuse in a once safe place
I hear cheating in a once fair country
I hear drugs in a once promise land
At night I hear shooting in a once kind place
At night I hear police cars on fire in a once peaceful country
I wish I could again hear the sweet carols of the America of our past

Cole Phillips

I hear America screaming from Halloween scares.
The sound of people screaming
The sound of ghosts booing
The sound of candy unwrapping
The sound of kids saying "trick or treat"
The sound of houses haunting
The sound of carving pumpkins
The sound of doorbells ringing
The sound of leaves crunching
At night you hear ghosts walking
You see kids walking the streets

Brittany Finley

I hear America singing about the students yelling
I hear the lockers slams
I hear music playing loudly
I hear girl gossiping
I hear boys whispering
I hear boys looking at the girls
I hear heels tapping
I hear teachers talking about students
I hear the bells ringing
I hear buses running
I hear students snoring
I hear crickets chirping
I hear wind against windows

Tyler Williams

I hear America singing it's own special tone
I see the sun shining bright in the morning
I hear my dogs barking in the distance
I feel the cool leather of my steering wheel as I get into my car
I hear the school bell ringing in my ears
I see the teacher teaching us new things
I hear doors shutting as the students leave at the end of the day
I hear the beeping of the machine at work
I see the setting, a beautiful array of colors.
I hear the click of the light switch as I shut the lights off for bed.
I go to sleep, awaiting tomorrow, which will only be a repeat of today's events.

Gavin Rogers

I hear America singing
I hear lunch ladies making food
I hear teachers yelling
I hear parents nagging
I hear mechanics wrenching
I hear musicians singing
I hear rednecks yelling nascar
I hear people in ferguson rioting
I hear people talking
I hear wolves howling at the moon
I hear owls hooting
I hear people snoring

Sierra Riley

I hear America singing, singing in joy and in grief,
Those of the baby, taking her first few steps squealing from excitement
The news reporter singing his as he tells about the Ferguson like the
cop car going up in flames,
The children singing they run and play, or talking about Christmas and
how so it will be,
The ambulance singing as they try and save another life, the medic
singing as he prepares for his next patient,
The teacher singing as he teaches with the class, the students sit and
whisper among themselves
The police officer's song, while they sink their coffee in the
morning, or at noon patrol or at sundown,
The singing of the cook, sharpening her knife at work,
or of the boy sweeping or washing,
Each singing from this not just in words but in the noises that are
rarely heard,
The day of peace to the chaos at night the danger that lurk in the
dark, masters of the mind, the dreams they may find
Singing with open minds their own songs.

Devan White

I hear America Singing!
I hear the farmer singing as he tends to his fields.
I hear the song of a mechanic humming to a perfectly tuned engine.
I hear a teacher passing along knowledge.
I hear a carpenter singing to the beat of his hammer.
I hear a cop helping a civilian.
I hear a doctor treating a patient.
I hear rancher tending to his livestock.
I hear a father teaching his son to fish.
Each singing with wide open mouths their joyest and laborious tunes.

Cody Mix

I hear America singing the songs of country life.
I hear the revved up engines of trucks as the speed down the back roads.
I hear the gunshots as the hunter kills his first deer.
I hear pigs as I bring them their food for the day.
I hear my dog barking in the distance as he chases after a rabbit.
I hear the horses whinny in the fields as the graze.
I hear my dad holler that he needs my help lifting some limbs.
I hear my sister laugh as she plays fetch with the dog.
I hear my friends as we gather around the bonfire.
I hear America singing the songs of country nights.

Eli Smith

I hear America singing about the students under stress
I hear the teachers talk about exams
I hear students gasping like they failed
I hear students saying they can't do this
I hear students sweating about it
I hear teachers laugh like they want this
I hear teachers whispering about the way they're grading
I hear the students studying profusely over their classes
I hear notebooks open and pencils scribbling
I hear students breathing heavily about it
I hear teachers finishing up their exams for the semester
I hear students tossing and turning in bed over exams

Blake Hayes

I hear America saying what happened.
I hear the a car mechanic saying what happened, to all the fast cars
the hot rods the loud exhaust.
I hear the police man saying what happened, to
people with any common sense.
I hear the pastor saying what happened, to the morals of time.
I hear the business owner saying what happened, to the reality of what
things cost.
I hear the babysitter saying what happened, to all of the well raised kids.
I hear the neighbor saying what happened, to all the caring people in the world.
I hear the channel surfer saying what happened, to all of the good old shows.

Megan Booher

I hear America singing, the many resonances I hear,
Those of students, each locker slamming signaling hope for the day,
The athletes singing as they practice hard and long,
The coach singing as he guides his players to victory,
The ill singing his as he sneezes, ACHOO!,
The cars singing theirs as they rumble to their destination, the men
in them singing to their radios,
The dog singing as it barks at a passing vehicle, the cat mewing for attention,
The strenuous singing of a father, or the son, getting off from a hard
day's work,
They are singing the songs that are their own,
The sounds of the day still singing as it turns to night,
Making their resonances, singing their songs.

Kira Engel

I hear America singing, the different voices of this nation.
For the woman who works hard, I hear her singing about her family and
her wishes for life.
The joyful voice of parents who are proud of their children when they
bring home good grades.
The sad boys voice when he loses his dog, his best friend.
The people singing about crushes, riots and weather as heard on the news.
I hear the voice of people who worry about the sirens and such.
The voice of friends who spend time together and share their thoughts.
The different languages of people who don't know each other but yet
can understand everything.
These are the voices and sounds of every day life, You can hear them everywhere.
The voice of silence you hear when lying in your bed to go to sleep.
These are the voices and whispers and the cries from people in our
everyday lives.

Haley Russell

I hear America singing, the different songs I hear
The song of my alarm clock beeping to wake me up
The sound of students chattering, teachers yelling, footsteps in the
halls, lockers slamming
I hear bells ringing, setting us free
The sound of engines revving, mixed with the song of students shouting
ready to leave
Waitresses gossiping, ovens beeping, chairs scooting and glasses clanking
I hear car horns beeping and loud trucks roaring, their owners cursing
at one another
I hear the radio talking about war, death, Ebola, corrupt politics,
and murders. So much hate and wrong it makes me wonder if there's even
any good left.
I hear the sound of a little girl practicing piano, which needs A LOT of work
I hear the soft hum of a furnace as I drift into a sleep.
I have heard America's song

Arylynn Duncan

I hear America singing, the noises of daily life
Upperclassmen girls singing about the latest news
Jocks singing about the games of the night before
Colorguard humming to the songs of today
Students tapping on the desk as they study hard
The singing of teachers and students as they debate
Ringing of bells as the school day ends
Roaring of the cars motors starting
Kitchen timers buzzing as aromas fill the air
The constant click of the tv's turning off at the end the day
I hear America singing, the noises of daily life

Taylor Nibert

I hear America singing, so loud and so clear
The fans cheering audibly to show their pride and joy
The coaches sternly yelling as they direct their team
The enthusiastic cheerleaders chime in with rah rah rah as the sound
ricochets off of the wall
The buzzer piercing your ears as the clock comes to a stop
The winded boys breathing so heavily, trying to catch their breath
The screeching noise from the boys shoes as they run up and down the court
The smacking of hands as the boys tell the other team good game guys
The engines beginning to roar as we start the cars to go home
The quiet, soft music being played that slowly puts us to sleep
Which compares to America who sings audibly and boomingly, and singing so free

Andrew Barnett

I Hear America Singing

I Hear America Singing the very canticles I hear,
Those of pedestrians, walking, going to their unknown locations,
The pilot, as his airplane roars in the sky,
The businessman, as his car sputters on the street,
The janitor, her broom sweeps the dust from the floor,
The teenagers' song, tip tapping on their smartphones,
The students' song, slamming shut their car and locker doors,
The teachers, shuffling their papers ahead of class,
Each singing what is theirs and no one else's,
The sunshine what belongs to the sunshine—at night the soothing chirps
of the crickets and robust croak of the frogs,
Singing with wide mouths their tenacious melodious songs.

Courtney Edgeworth

I hear America singing through my life
Birds are chirping, fluttering
Horses whining wanting their food
Students talking, gossiping, lockers slamming
Teachers preaching their lessons
Truck engines started speeding home
Whining horses wanting their food
Parents cooking slamming pots and pans
Stars bright and shiny in the sky
Darkness is closing around the sun drowning it
Coyotes howling in the distance
Showers running time for bed
Until tomorrow I hear America singing again.

Christian Worrells

I hear America singing songs of sorrow and anger

I hear America singing songs of racial discrimination

But is one singing songs of self defense discrimination

I hear the Browns singing songs of peace

I hear the protesters singing songs of justice

But is the singing of a gun call for such rioting

I hear Michael Brown singing songs of antagonism

I hear Officer Wilson singing songs of innocence

But is the singing of rightful innocence enough for racial prosecutors

I hear America singing songs of innocence

I hear protesters singing songs of inequality

But is the singing of inequality wage for riots and pillaging

Megan Green

I hear America singing, the crazy songs I hear,
Those of politicians, each singing with lust for greed and power,
The broken widow crying out for her fallen soldier,
The jobless clerk screaming as he just lost his only home,
The scared student trembling as gun shots were heard throughout the school,
The beaten son yelling in the abandoned building because it is the
only escape from his own father,
The teenage mother sobbing into her pillow as her friends and family
slowly shun her,
The shop owner weeping as he watched his own shop and home burn to the ground,
The older sister soothing her siblings as the news reached them that
they were now orphans,
Each jarring moment belongs to him or her and no one else,
The night belongs to the night-in daylight people hide their true
feelings, pain, anguish,
Shrieking their true songs that have been trapped inside themselves.

Kelsie Howard

I Hear America Singing...
They sing a mournful song,
They sing for justice, but not peacefully,
Some sing to be noticed, others just for the attention,
They sing as they hold up signs, waiting for answers,
The President decides to sing he wants peace,
After the crowd gets the answer, they sing with wrath,
Most sing because they are angry and upset,
Others sing to show self worth,
America will always sing in times of doubt.

Mackenzie Berning

I hear America sing a song of sorrow
Mothers crying swallowed by the horrors of losing a son to war
i hear the youths shoes clacking as they stumble
Stumbling and falling under the weight of the world on their shoulders
the soldier's gun crackles as he ends the life of another without question
in the flames of war, he is molded and scorched into a weapon
A weapon unrecognizable by family and friends
Homeless fighting to their last breath they learn to despise the
country they once loved
I hear america sing
Singing, is that what you call it?
Darkness and despair falls on to those undeserving and the rest waste
their happiness
We all sleep under the sound of souls shredding in sorrow.

Jessica Van Houtin

I hear America singing, the varied people I hear,
Those of people singing, rioting about the death of a teen who robbed a store,
The bowling fans singing for our victory at state,
The children singing as they jump and bounce around with joy,
The couches singing to their teams to try your best, the team singing
with joy as they win with
 pride and dedication,
The people singing Christmas carols on the streets, the children
singing for Santa Claus,
The teachers singing telling kids to get good grades, the kids singing
for snow days and no
 school or work.
The family singing together and worshipping Jesus, the church singing
praise and worship
 songs and praying for each other,
Each singing with pride and dedication,
The day we all see this is no crime and no wrong while we sing merrily
and proud,
Singing together as a group we do no harm.

Heidi Woodward

I hear America singing, the loud noises in the hallway I hear,
Those of kids, each one singing about homework and class,
The teacher singing as he makes the plan for the day,
The bell singing with its loud ringing as a sign to kick-off learning,
The feet singing as they stomp along to their own beat,
Those of the lockers, each one being slammed closed,
Those of the pencils, each one clicking, eager to write with
astuteness and diligent thoughts,
I hear the singing of books being opened peacefully ,
The song of coaches singing with devotion,
The song of car engines joyfully starting to make their way home,
The quiet singing of silence at night.

Jillin Williams

I hear America singing and it makes me want to dance.
I want to turn and leap to the beat of the sounds.
I hear the music at the studio blaring loudly.
I hear my instructor counting.
I hear the breaths I take and the brushes of my feet as I glide
across the floor.
I hear the beat of my heart as I walk onto the stage.
I hear the whispers of the crowd waiting for me to perform.
I feel the lights on my face.
I hear the song that I have heard time and times again.
I feel the rush in my blood as my world spins when I do what I love the most.
I hear America singing and it makes me want to dance.

Rachael Ice

I hear America singing, the beach is all I hear
The seagulls enjoying gliding through the air
The children enjoying playing in the sand
The adults enjoying their time off from work
The elders enjoying their retirement
The big families enjoying each other's company
The people at the bar enjoying their daiquiris
The lifeguard enjoying her job, and soaking up some sun
The teenager enjoying no school
Each person enjoying life, the beach is all they hear
Each taking it day by day
The beach is where they'd rather be, and no where else

Victor Milner

I hear America singing
The numerous voices and pleas I hear
I hear the cry for help and justice and vengeance
I hear the plea for retribution towards those of ill endings
I hear the stammer of debate on the morals of what is right and wrong
I hear the murmurs of corruption flowing within the infrastructure of
a once noble nation
I hear the boisterous guffaws of those happy and content
I hear the joyous melodies bellowing from those with pride of a once
great nation
And I hear the solemnity of the twilight, the drizzle of rain and
sleet upon freshly bare branches
I hear the blow of wind upon the walls of a house built long before my
time, the creak of boards
I hear the silence, a thing least common of all, a thing of peace in a
world of despair

Short Fiction

Mr. Linden's Library

by Arylynn Duncan

"Sarah, come downstairs or we're going to be late!" Dianna, my older sister yelled at me. I knew I had to get up and help her clean out our grandfather's library. That man was the most organized person I knew, until you walked into his library. Books were stacked as high as mountains, giving no mercy to any corner of the library. Dead center in this library, devoured by books, was a glass case. In this case was a rather peculiar book. It was large, curled by the corners and the front cover was covered in gems. I've always wanted to hold or even read this ancient book. Grandfather had always warned us about this book. He said it was evil.

My sister and I began to tear down the mountains of books and put them into boxes. As hours passed by, the day turned to night. Dianna said she was going to take some of the boxes to storage and then come back to pick me up. As the car vanished into the night, I walked back inside and began to watch the latest reality show just to pass the time. During a commercial break, I heard a tapping. I wasn't sure where it was coming from so I pretended not to hear it. Moments had passed but this time the tapping was louder. It began to get louder and louder until it sounded like thunder in a horrendous storm. I began to panic so I yell, "Stop! Please! Whoever or whatever you are stop!" After that I was silent.

I began to search the house, checking all the windows and doors. As I passed the library, I heard the tapping again, which turned to thumping, then to a beat of drums as if I was with a jungle tribe celebrating with them. I turned on the light and the noise stopped as if the light took away its mask of the dark. I searched the library for anything out of place or a place for something to hide. I went to the center of the room as if I was drawn to it like a moth to an open flame. I then heard the muffled beat of the drums. I put my ear to the glass case where the book lay. My mouth dropped to the floor as if on cue. The noise was coming from the book!

With steady, but eager hands, I open the case and reach for the very odd book. I stopped before I grabbed the book, thinking twice about my decision. I ignored my better judgment and grabbed the forbidden book. I slowly open the cover of the book and in BIG red letters it said, "WARNING: Do NOT Read This Book!" Yet again ignoring my better judgment, I began to read the book. I walked into the nearest bedroom to lie on the bed and read.

The book took me to this wonderful world where a young girl lived in a jungle, by herself, living day by day to find food and survive. I began to get tired from the hard work of the day about halfway through the book. As I was falling asleep, I remembered my grandfather said never to leave a book open on one page for too long. He had warned me about the book. Now it was too late.

I woke to a loud squawk from an obnoxious bird. Startled, I jumped up and realized I was no longer in my grandfather's house. I suddenly realized I was in the jungle I read about in the book. As I look around at the giant trees taking in my surroundings, I notice the book is gone! I frantically search for the book, but it's nowhere to be seen. I turn over every rock and move every leaf I see, still having no luck.

I begin to walk around in search of the book when I see a glimmer of light catch the corner of my eye to the right of me. I walk in the direction of the light and hear the loud roar of rushing water. The air around me had a refreshing smell from the beautiful flowers and rushing water before me. The flowers were very bright and colorful and had a citrus smell, whereas the water was a crystal clear blue. As I look upstream, admiring all the creatures swimming about, I see a magnificent waterfall. Near the top of the waterfall, I see yet another glimmer of light. As my eyes focus on the other side of the waterfall, I see the book!

I begin to look for a way to cross the river. Further downstream, I see a grouping of rocks that goes all the way across the river. I sprint downstream to the group of rocks. I carefully begin my way across the rocks when all of a sudden a gush of water swoops me off my feet. My right leg gets caught between two rocks and I scream in excruciating pain. I try to free my leg only to bring more damage to my leg and more pain for me to suffer through. My leg is caught for what seems like hours. I finally free my leg and as I feel the throbbing pain I look down and see gashes and tears of skin before my eyes.

As I wonder how to stop the bleeding, I see that glimmer of light again. I know I need to get myself together and get back up stream to the book. But how am I going to do that with my leg in so much pain and the bleeding won't stop. I look around and find some vine that I know I can tie around my leg to help the bleeding stop. I tear off the sleeve to my shirt and put that on the gashes and tears and wrap the vine. I look around for a limb or branch that I can use as a crutch. I find the one I need, I pull myself together and get the burst of adrenaline that I need to get myself to my feet. I see that light flash again, it's calling my name. I just know I need to get there before anything else happens. I slowly start up the side of the waterfall. Inching step by step, I hear my name getting louder and louder. I know the book is there and wants me to find it.

The flashes of light are getting brighter and brighter and more and more I am beginning to see. Suddenly I hear a big crash; I stop to see what it could possibly be. I see nothing, but I still hear the noises. I can feel my heart pounding through my chest. My leg is throbbing, the bleeding has slowed, and I know I need to get to that book. I wished now that I would have heeded my grandfather's advice and never opened that book. I peek through the brush that is before me to see what might lie ahead. I see a small bird flapping its wings, biting the binding of the book. I wonder if that's what the loud noise had been. All I know, I got to get that book from that bird. I look around and see a small path to crawl low on the ground through. I have to be as quiet as I can be but my leg is in so much pain. I have to be strong and get my book from that bird. I slowly inch my way closer and closer.

The smell of citrus all around me, the flashes of light are so mesmerizing. I look to my left and see the beautiful waterfall, the water raging through the jungle. I look up to the trees all around me and tell myself now's the time to take the chance I need. I lunge forward, quickly, and get my right hand on the book. I startle the bird and it drops the binding. I grab the book the rest of the way and do my best to get up and run, forgetting about the pain and throbbing in my leg. I run to the waterfall and decide to take a ride down the fall to get away even quicker. What do I have that can help with the ride? I take the pack off my back; cram the book in my pack as I jump in head first. I swish and swash all around the currents, trying my best to stay above water. I grab my pack and put it under my chest to help me stay up. I hope the book stays dry and that it doesn't get tore up.

All of the sudden I hear my name being called. "Sarah, Sarah, Sarah, where are you?" I jump up, scared, to the sound of my sisters voice. I have no idea where I am at. I look around and realize I am in bed. How did I get here? Where is the jungle, the beautiful flowers, the citrusy smell? My leg, oh my goodness my leg. It doesn't hurt; I jump up and grab my leg. There's no shirt or vine around my leg. There's no gashes or cuts on my leg. How could that be?

All of the sudden Dianna walks in the room. "What are you doing? Have you been reading the book?" I look around and see the book next to me on the bed, closed. I look at the book, I then look at Dianna. "No I haven't been reading the book!" Dianna asks what the book is doing next to me then. I explain to her that I heard loud noises coming from the case and I was curious so I brought the book in here but then remembered what grandfather had always said about the book. Dianna believes what I am telling her and tells me to go to the library to get the rest of the boxes loaded up. I grab the book off the bed and return it to the case in the library. All I can think of is "WOW, what an adventure." The last thing I remember was putting the book in to my pack and jumping in to the waterfall for a fast getaway. I must have closed the book when I put it in my pack and that's why I ended back up in the bed where I began.

Dianna and I finish loading up all the boxes and take them away. That night while I am getting ready for bed I keep thinking about the day I had had; the adventure in the forest, the water taking me down, hurting my leg, stealing the book away from the bird. I can't stop thinking about what fun it would've been had I had more time to do more things in that wonderful place. I finish brushing my teeth and turn around to go to my bed and what do I see. I see the book lying on my bed.

They Are Beasts
Dustin Jackson

Mark Schuulp walked at a decent pace through the overgrown remnants of Time square. It had been ten years since the genetically modified Monkeypox escaped that lab in the Netherlands, ten years and over ninety percent of the worlds population has been killed, leaving the majority of the remaining ten percent brain dead from the fevers and in a permanent bestial/tribal state. That was why he was moving at a 'decent rate'. He did not want to meet any one of the surviving eight hundred thousand animals that still bore an uncanny resemblance to humanity.

Weeds, chief among them ivy and kudzu, sprouted up the crumbling monuments to our technical prowess as a species. Mark glanced at the hundreds of wrecked cars. Some were merely fender benders, while the worst were semi-trucks flipped over, crushing vans and cars with the nearly skeletal remains of their occupants. All the vehicles were rusted beyond recognition from ten years of absolutely no maintenance and exposure to the elements.

The sun was drawing closer to the horizon, causing Mark to double his pace. He continually told himself that it was all going to be okay, and that the infected had all died off by now. He also began to think an indescribable thought that can best be summed up like this; who am I kidding? His worn boots were covered in blood from an encounter outside of the city a few days prior. He knew in his heart of hearts that there were infected people in the city, waiting for darkness to go hunting for any of the wild animals found thriving in the ashes of this once urban metropolis.

He was suddenly startled by the sound of feet clattering on the cement his survival instincts, the ones that had kept him alive thus far made him dive behind an overturned garbage truck. His eyes were gradually adjusting to the all-encompassing darkness that had begun to descend over the Big Apple, scanning the decimated street for any activity.

"Help! Someone please help me!" Shouted a woman. Her voice echoed through the abandoned alleys, causing Mark to cringe at the amount of attention she was attracting to the general area. He saw her form in the darkness. She suddenly shrieked in pain.

"No, no no no! Please have mercy! She shrieked again, this time with more pain laced in her voice. Mark felt the arthritis induced pain in his knees was flaring up again. He grunted and a drop of cold sweat dripped from his greying brow as his aging eyes strained to deliver an accurate view of the scene. The woman turned around, allowing Mark to see that she was carrying a bundle, something about the size of a small child. 'No, it couldn't be...' Mark told himself, shaking the horrid idea away.

The moon was beginning to take a foremost position in the sky and Mark began searching for a way to slip past unnoticed. There were none. He saw three naked men, two of them wielding primitive spears and growling, spittle visibly dripping from their mouths. One of them raised his spear and threw it. It pierced the woman's lower torso evoking a chilling scream. Mark did not really care or sympathize with the woman, she, after all, was the only person that had survived this far without the common sense to keep quiet in the city, but he was curious so he decided to not enact an escape just yet.

There were twelve of them now, all either completely buck bare or garnishing spears and clothed in rags. He heard the scream of a terrified baby as one of the Hostiles.

'I've had enough of this.' Mark thought as he unshouldered his shotgun and aimed it at one of the Beasts. He had a perfect shot. He could have it down in a matter of seconds, but

realized that, if he did, he would not have the chance to get away. He remembered that pre-outbreak there were eight million people residing in New York City. That means, if the last radio broadcasts were accurate, that there were eight hundred thousand Brain dead Beasts in the city. Firing a shotgun in an empty city such as New York would be like literally, for lack of a better term, ringing the dinner bell.

He decided against it, and slipped off into the darkness to find the quickest route out of the city. He tried to ignore the fading shriek of a child in pain.

The door creaked slowly, an inch taken. The empty hall echoed its pained groan, as if the building itself shuddered at what its drooping walls and rotten floorboards contained. The energy of the place was dark enough to unsettle the murder of crows resting on the nearly shingle-less roof, enough so that the night colored birds flew off in a raucous. Black wings beat the heavy air in a dread filled panic to get as far as their light bodies could take them from such a forsaken place. This omen foretold such malignancy that it's difficult to be surprised by the following train of events. Maybe it was the beat of one too many nervous crow wings that gave the chain the last little push it needed, or perhaps it was the greedy, sucking atmosphere of the house itself that did it. Either way, a shift in pressure and a snap released the sign from the chipped door and left it to float ever so gently onto the worn footstep. As an unfortunate chance would have it, or by the very will of the entity lurking within the soggy, old walls, a person was passing by at the very time of these ominous occurrences. It was a boy. An unfortunate boy. An unfortunate boy not much older than an innocent child, hardly into his teens with a bad haircut and a single dark golden lock hanging over his tired eyes. His interest was peaked, whether it be by the deserting avian or by the descent of the neglected sign, and lead him onto a often taken path with an unhappy ending. The outcome of his actions will, however, become very clear. His beaten shoes left a pattern of soft prints as he meandered slowly up the short path to the old building, gliding over the dirt while his ill-fitting pants stained with the fine brown dust. He came to an uncertain yet gentle stop and looked down beneath his shoes to where the sign hid its words in the surface of the porch. For a moment, a moment lost but desperately in need of regaining, his fingers twitched at the sign, as if to grab hold of it and force from its unwillingness the words carved into its frontside. At that last moment however, a gust of wind, most certainly manipulated in nature, blew the boy's shagging locks into his curious eyes. He was distracted and moved to brush the offending hair out of his sight. Then, as if completely void of any remembrance of his previous unfinished investigation of the sign, his long, dirty fingers stretched to reach the door's handle and with a flick of the wrist he twisted. The pressure was too much and with a sudden give he was given access. As he pushed the door open, an uncomfortably hot gust of air blew against him and his foot caught the sign. At the doors closing behind him, the sign flipped once more due to the air and its message became painfully clear. On its surface worn and read by many souls in past days and empty nights were the words:

DO NOT DISTURB

and in tiny careful handwritten letters beneath:

*Beware,
Death Lies Inside*

Following that was a tight scrawl, almost a joke to those who didn't understand the real meaning of it. *-Invitation Only*

It really is quite unfortunate that the boy didn't read the sign. If he had, he may have had the sense to turn tail, run home to his absent mother, and only remember that place in his fitful dreams late in the night when things go bump and then again perhaps as he drew his last breath on his death bed. Too bad, because bad things happen when a boy with scuffed shoes and shaggy golden hair disturb the Devil, especially when he doesn't have an invitation.

HYPNOPHOBIA
BY BRADLEY LINDSEY

I've always had nightmares, horrible ones. That may sound a bit redundant as I don't know that there's such a thing as a *good* nightmare, but to just say "nightmares" would be an understatement of irredeemable proportions.

When I was little, I'd wake up screaming every night, and my mom or my dad would always come into the room and try to comfort me. To no avail, if that's really necessary to add in regards to a five year old. Comforting a terrified five year old is akin to trying to get a door to tell you a story of it's days as a sailor, impossible and you're rendered stupid for even trying. It's *not* like that sorry excuse for a simile in that no one is forcing you to ask a door what it was like to sail the open seas, and you're pretty much expected to *try* your hand at comforting the child.

So, after their failed attempts at comforting me I would sit in my room through the wee hours of the morning, fighting a futile battle against sleep. Eventually, after hours of the tiredness smothering the back of my mind, I'd always succumb.

In the years since then, I've built up a bit of a resistance to sleep. I can easily go days without sleep, not uncommonly getting up around five or six. The longest I have ever went was something like nine days. This was more recently, and toward the end of this stint my parents got me diagnosed with insomnia. Which is fair enough, I guess. Conditioning yourself into insomnia is insomnia nonetheless.

The problem is that, after I went to the psychiatrist and was analyzed and everything, they put on a sleeping pill. This eliminated my choice in the matter, and forced sleep upon me.

.*.*.

My mother came into my room—without knocking, I might add—and tossed my bottle of pills onto my bed.

After the bottle's piercing rattle, the room fell into a tenuous silence, the kind that would come crashing down at the slightest hint of breeze hitting the window.

But there was no breeze tonight, so the silence remained intact.

It was my mom that finally shattered it, "You're going to have to take the pill."

"I'd really rather not," I grabbed the bottle of pills and twisted it around. I found it easier to give the label the brunt of my attention. It made what attention I had to pay to Mother less uncomfortable.

"I know, but you have to. Not sleeping is incredibly unhealthy."

"Yeah," I set the bottle down on the table beside my bed. I had already decided that I wasn't taking the pill.

"So take the pill."

"Alright. I will, Mom."

"Now," she seemed pretty adamant.

"I don't want to go to sleep quite yet."

"Hayden."

"What?"

"Just take the pill. I need to watch so I know you did it. I'm not stupid."

Well, that pretty much did it. She had me cornered.

"Fine," I grabbed the pills off the table and twisted open the lid. Tipping it over, they fell into my hand. My fingers ached under their punishing weight.

I pulled one from the pile and dumped the rest back into the bottle, then turned my attention to the remaining pill. I twisted it around, hoping that if I stalled for long enough it'd somehow become unnecessary to swallow the thing.

For how heavy the pile of pills had felt in my hand, this singular pill was more burdensome than ten bottles of pills combined. It seemed almost sinister, like something made from the concentrated DNA of Charles Manson and Adolph Hitler, then sprinkled in the blood of virgins. That sort of sinister.

It wasn't the pill itself so much as what it promised. I looked at the pill and all I saw was the inevitability of my nightmares. If I took it, an hour down the line I would be devoured alive by my own personal demons, tailor made by me to terrify me.

At 15, you'd think that I would have outgrown being scared of monsters. The problem with that is that it's hard to get over them when they become very real to you every single time you sleep.

"Now, Hayden." My mother didn't take very kindly to my stalling.

"Fine." I threw all rationalities (or, lack thereof) out the window and tossed the pill back.

After almost rejecting it, I managed to get it down.

"There," Mom tried to sound like a mom, "Was that so hard?"

"You know, I would say 'yes' but unlike you, I like to think I'm above defaulting to overused idioms or cliches."

"You're such a teenager."

"Go away and let me die."

"Kay," she stepped out the room, then sang from the hallway. "Have fun."

Fun. Ha.

For awhile, I tried to stay awake. I screwed around on the internet for awhile, I tried to listen to music. nothing worked. Eventually I resolved to play a video game. This is where I finally fell asleep. It was one in the morning, my character—a level 82 wood elf, if you don't mind me bragging—was standing just outside an underground ruin, the lights in my room were as on as the on switch allowed, and I fell asleep.

.*.*.

when i awoke, i awoke in a field. the sky was laced with a poisonous red. the occasional charcoal cloud smeared itself across the horizon. i'd been here before. i knew where to go.

every muscle in my body tightened up, telling me to stay still, telling me to wait it out. in my experience, however, waiting it out did no good. i could stand there all i wanted, i could look around or explore all i wanted, i could even lay down and try to go back to sleep. no good. the dream would not end until walked north, or whatever direction it was. i just sort of decided it was north because it was straight.

so i walked.

as i pushed forward, the usual characters starting showing up. the slinking shadows, outlined in farm attire, all walking opposite my direction, eyes aglow. pushing past them, the knee-length prairie grass grew to overhead length. a long and narrow cropping cut straight through, marching forward into the distance. on either side of the trail, grass walls stretched up and created the perfect canvas for terror.

still, i swallowed my inhibitions and pushed forward into the path. for the initial few minutes there was nothing but the impending something hanging over my head. eventually that something started materializing, at first only as the rogue shadow strolling behind mine on the walls, and soon as faces peering, leering through the grass. there was a wide array of faces to avoid looking at. the emaciated families, all hollowed out eyes and solemn expressions. the red faced, silver eyed men, whose gazes never quite found yours, but never lost it either. the demons, whose birdlike faces stretched into the trail, forcing you to one side or the other. these, among many others, made for a hellish stroll through the prairie.

i just kept my head down and pushed through. if i looked, there was no going back. i couldn't get scared. i had to keep going. keep pushing. keep moving.

step. step. step. step. until the portion of the show where the moaning starts. all of the faces in the walls lit up with an uproarious groaning. this was harder to ignore, but i'd done it before. i could do it again.

step. step. step. step. until the moment before the moment of truth. the long and arduous calm before the brief and tumultuous storm. the small cropping that once cut through the dense forest of prairie now gave way into a large, open space that formed a circular oasis in the midst of the desert grassland.

in the middle of the clearing was a house. a small house. a farm house.

that was the part that was always different. that was the part that i always dreaded.

but that wasn't yet. i actually had to *get there* first. which was unpleasant in and of itself. in the walk from the outer edge of the circle to the middle, nothing ever happened. it was just me and my predictions, and my recollections.

as i made the trek, i thought of the time an old lady had been on the porch. her face had been covered in a shroud, and she had directed me into the house. so, having known better than to defy these things, i went in. upon entering i saw an entire family crowded around the old lady's body, then turning and screaming at me.

remembering such things made it easier to willingly march directly toward what you're remembering. i found that if my mind is caught up in past experiences, it's easier to not get tangled in the present.

the longer i walked, the more the present grabbed ahold of me. it trapped me in it's unholy knots and twisted the bravery out of me, until there was nothing left but fear and blind movement.

by the time i reached the house, i was shaking.

no signs of life on the porch, which was actually mildly off putting. it meant i had to enter the house on my own accord, which was somehow worse. like i was intruding instead of being invited.

the screen door screeched, sending its echo out across the quiet world it resided in. then the door proper opened into my nightmare proper.

the door opened up into a descending staircase. this was the problem. every single time i entered this house, its interiors were different. one night the insides would be that of a grand mansion, with a grandiose foyer in the front and long, labyrinth halls twisting and turning every which way in the back. the next it would be of a quaint farmhouse; a simple kitchen, rooms for the children, a living room with a couch facing toward a TV set to static. tonight it was a staircase, and whatever lied beyond it.

once in, the door shut behind me. standard fair for nightmares, but a bit startling nonetheless.

i looked down the staircase. a singular, nearly useless lightbulb was planted in the ceiling, casting a dull glow over the stairwell. dust was sprinkled in even layers over every step. The walls seemed at once like they could crumble at any moment, and like they would stay erect forever, suspended in perpetual decay.

i held my breath, for what good that would really do, and took a step down. immediately, the step creaked. its sound felt extremely out of place, like a broadcast to all evil things in the vicinity that i was there.

another step down, and another loud creak.

after that process repeated itself over again several times, i reached the bottom.

my shuttering hands reached for the knob, twisted it, and pushed the door open. the room i found myself in was a small, perfect, cement square. the ceiling was only a couple feet above my head and a light hung from the middle. the light was as dull as the one in the stairway, only it was flickering out.

in my first scope of the room i saw nothing out of the ordinary. as i stepped further into the room, though, things started to go awry.

first, the light went out. to be one hundred percent honest, i saw this coming.

second, a child's cry started bouncing off the walls of the room. back and forward, up and down, near and far. the sobbing perforated my disposition, bringing my trembling to a full on buckling at the knees.

third, a percussive scuttling blended itself into the symphony of wails.

finally, the light turned on much brighter than it had before and all noise came to a standstill. despite myself, i looked around. low and behold, a child sat in the corner, facing the wall.

"uhm," i stammered. "what-"

the child sniffled, then started in on a light sobbing.

"what's the matter?"

sobbing.

"hello?"

sobbing.

"uhm."

then, through the sobbing came an uncharacteristically deep voice, "hello."

that didn't do a whole lot to help the knee-buckling situation i had going on.

it took on a voice more fitting for the child's body it inhabited, "what are you doing here."

it obviously wasn't a question, but i answered anyway, or at least attempted to, "i uh, i had to come here to like, wake up."

"wake up?"

"yeah."

the adult voice returned, "i guess i should help you with that."

so here's the thing about the climax. the brief and tumultuous storm almost never peaks the long and arduous calm. around this moment, most semblance of fear began to vanish. i, for the most part, knew what i was dealing with. what my imagination comes up with is never as mortifying as what my imagination dreams of coming up with. so, i replied frankly and simply, "yes, please."

the boy stood up.

i shifted uncomfortably.

the boy turned around, and it's face was revealed to me. it looked like a normal boy, for the most part. it's skin was a bit more olive than what you'd expect and its eyes were pitch black, but it wasn't as out of the ordinary as a lot of the things i had seen.

the boy walked toward me, slowly. each step caused an echo to burst through my ears and around the chamber.

the boy's child voice, "wake up."

"hmm?"

it's man voice, "wake up."

"how do i...?"

child's voice, "wake..."

man's voice, "UP."

the word blasted through my world. the building crumbled. the grass blew over. the red sky turned black, and black clouds red.

as the house crumbled, it dissipated around us, until it was just me and the child standing face to face in the middle of the a large, blank field.

the child voice ate through my ears, "wake. up."

then, the the child walked toward me. it didn't stop when it was directly in front of me. it walked into me, and never walked out the back.

.*.*.

I woke up the way you fall out of love, gradually and painfully. I would come to consciousness, then try very hard to stay there. The first several times I'd always be pushed back into my sleep, but eventually I gained solid enough footing to call myself awake.

I checked my phone for the time. It was 4:27. I only had a couple more hours until morning. I was probably good. I tried to get up to turn on my light, but my legs wouldn't cooperate so I just let that go for the time being.

I was still really tired but as far as I was concerned, sleep wasn't an option. I battled off thoughts of slumber with thoughts of nightmares, until I worked up the energy to get up turn on the light.

I flipped the switch, but nothing happened. I thought that the light must have blown out or something, but I didn't really want to go looking for light bulbs, so I just sat back down.

My video game was still going, and my character was still where I left him. In a lethargic state, I scrounged around for my controller. I didn't find it on my first sweep, and I was asleep again by my second.

.*.*.

when i awoke again, aside from being angry at my poor constitution, i was a bit disoriented. on my back, all i could see was the sky. it was overflowing with dark storm clouds, all rolling over each other and fighting for space, all marching on endlessly. so far, this was unfamiliar.

this happened from time to time, a stray wildcard of a nightmare. these were the ones i most abhorred.

i rose from the ground and looked around. i was standing on a country road, with no buildings in sight. one side was lined with dense forest, the other with wide open field. at a loss for direction, i started walking down the road.

i knew the gist of what needed to happen. i needed to find a place that triggered some crazy event and then said crazy event would wake me up. really, my nightmares were very formulaic.

as i walked, the clouds continued their display of power. they were constantly threatening rain, but never providing. they just relentlessly surged across the sky.

it wasn't until then that i noticed how perfectly still everything was, in contrast to the sky. nothing moved. the wind didn't blow, the leaves didn't rustle, the grass didn't sway, everything just sat in complete absence of commotion. it was almost peaceful, in a way.

the first thing that sprung to my attention as *particularly* out of the ordinary was a man standing out in the field, facing away from me. he looked innocuous enough. he appeared to be just a man, though i knew better. he was a little on the taller side, and maybe a bit skinny. he was definitely standing much more still than any normal human being, but i never said he *was* normal. he just looked normal.

i stood still for a second, pondering the pros and cons of approaching the man.

pros: it may wake me up.

cons: it may not wake up, and he creeps me out.

despite the cons ostensibly outweighing the pros, i decided that the one pro should count as triple. so i started trudging out toward the man.

i tapped him on the shoulder.

he slowly spun around, revealing to me his stark absence of face. the entire front side of his head was just skin, like someone had replaced his head with a that of a very lifelike mannequin.

i jumped back, just far enough so that his now outstretched hand missed my face. for a moment i panicked, screamed, and jumped back even farther. slowly, however, it dawned upon me that he wasn't grasping, or attacking—he was pointing, toward the woods.

"well," i said, unsure of my next words. "thanks, i guess."

he continued pointing, as if he didn't hear me. he probably didn't, in all honesty.

so i made the trek back to the road, and then into the forest.

well, more accurately i walked back to the road, then hovered around the edge of the forest searching for the way in and the courage to take it.

i ended up walking back to where i had woken up, then a bit farther back still, until i found a path suitable for walking.

the path was a bit overgrown. the extremities of bushes and trees let themselves breathe over the path and away from the cramped forest they resided in.

they scratched at me as i began my walk through. i felt a little bad, disturbing them, waking them from their total stillness. like i was breaking some unwritten rule of the forest and they couldn't do anything about it because, well, they were plants.

i kept looking into the forest as i walked, expecting to see some nightmarish faces or ungodly figures watching me. insofar, however, nothing was there.

the lack of reason to be uneasy began to make me uneasy, and i found myself hoping for something to come jumping out at me or to stand eerily off to the side or whatever. it would relieve the tension. sadly, i had no such luck.

after several minutes of being suspended in constant alert, i finally got my payout. the path both slowly and suddenly turned into a road, and the road to a neighborhood.

it wasn't long until i realized that the neighborhood was my own, which brought me to a full stop. as far as i could remember, real life locations had never appeared in my dreams. the locations were always fictional, or at the very least hyper-fictionalization versions of vaguely familiar places. this was new.

once my brain fully traced the outlines of my situation, the next step seemed obvious. i should go to my house. the absurd horror of the thought permeated throughout my body. my house was the near perfect place for my nightmares to grab ahold of me.

familiar settings are so much more mortifying than unfamiliar settings. or, familiar settings *turned* unfamiliar are more mortifying than something that's always been unfamiliar. i would rather go out to the middle of forest and find a satanic shrine encircled by demons than go out and find a version of my home so slightly off that it's more off than anything i would ever see.

alas, that's exactly what i had to do. the back of my brain handled the navigation toward my house, while i wondered what time it was. it had to be getting close to daytime, right? it was 4:27 when i fell asleep so, daybreak would be happening anytime now. i just needed to finish this dream.

after those thoughts fulfilled their job of accompanying me on my journey to my house, they dissipated. my house stood before me, taller than it was in real life, with a darker shade about it. the red curtains were now crimson. the white siding was now a tortured yellow.

i slowly made my way up to the porch, and then to the door. the screen door swung open freely, but the inside door was locked.

i second guessed myself on whether or not this was actually what i needed to do to end my dream. if this wasn't the next step, though, what was?

i contemplated this question as i stepped onto the doormat resting at the top of the stairs that lead to the porch. my step caused the doormat to slide slightly out of place, and i remembered. i bent over and slid the doormat to the side, then grabbed the small, silver key out from under. oddly, the key seemed to be the only thing unaffected by the nightmare's gloom. while everything else was affected with dark shades and dull shadows, the key glistened brightly, almost a glow.

i pushed the key into the whole, turned the knob, and opened the door. immediately, i was greeted by the sickeningly familiar scent of my home.

the first step was the hardest, and the next few weren't much easier, but eventually i got into the swing of things and was able to walk through my house with relative ease. everything seemed to be in place; the living room was peaceful, the kitchen was undisturbed, the hallways

were quiet, but—as is always the case with familiarity in the midst of unfamiliarity—something was slightly off, and it threw everything completely off kilter. i wasn't quite sure where to go, but my bedroom seemed like a good first step.

i made my way up the stairs, my hands tracing the well worn outline of the handrail. i came upon the landing and turned to face my bedroom door.

it was already open. i walked over. each passing step made the next harder to take, until i was beyond myself and in the doorway.

i saw myself laying in bed, with a familiar boy standing at its side.

my feet tentatively began moving toward him. each step sliced through the tension, only for more to come flooding back into it's place.

the floor creaked and all of the tension ran away as the boy turned to me, leaving behind only a thin fabric of fear.

"hello," the boy said, in his young boy voice. the fabric rippled.

"hi," i just barely managed. the fabric didn't even budge.

"what are you doing here?" he asked in his man's voice. the fabric whipped out and hit me in the face.

i couldn't manage words.

"well, it's nice to see you." the boy's voice managed only a small vibration in the fabric.

"uhm," i looked to the ground, nearly paralyzed. "yeah." the fabric stayed frozen.

"well," man's voice, "goodbye."

the fabric tore in two.

.*.*.

Upon waking up, I was at once terrified and ecstatic. The nightmare was over, and I had made it through the night, which was good, but I was still shaken. The boy had never shown up before tonight, let alone in two dreams in a row. I wasn't sure I'd ever had something like that happen in two subsequent dreams.

No matter, though. I was awake now, so it was inconsequential.

I pulled out my phone to check the time.

It was 2:38.

My stomach sank a little. I had to check three times to make sure I was reading it right.

2:38? That couldn't be right. It was past four the last time I woke up.

I thought that maybe I just read it wrong the first time, but I didn't want to believe it. I wanted to believe that my phone was somehow off and that sunrise was just minutes away. When I went to look outside, however, there was no glint of sunlight on the horizon. Just black. There weren't even any stars.

Having begrudgingly accepted that I must have misread the clock the first time, I sat down in my chair.

I picked up the controller and started playing from where I left off. It didn't matter that it was only 2:40. I wasn't going back to sleep. I toyed at the analog sticks, trying to make sense of the motions they caused on screen and to push past the disconnect between my mind and my body. After a moment I started to get into the swing of things, still slightly disoriented.

After playing for a little bit, I looked to my phone for the time. I hoped that somehow in those twenty minutes, four hours would have passed. Sadly, no. It was 3:00.

I returned to my game, and continued walking down the long hallway in the dungeon my character was currently looting. As I turned the corner, I saw him. The boy.

My blood briefly caught fire, then instantly froze over. This hadn't happened before. I closed my eyes and shook my head. Then, like in any substandard horror movie, the apparition was gone.

I convinced myself that I had just been seeing things, only to run into him again a few minutes later. He was perched up on a pedestal in one of the larger chambers of the dungeon. this time, he was speaking. I couldn't quite tell what he was saying until I got the nerve to come closer. He was telling me to wake up.

I unplugged the TV.

.*.*

the tv's cut-off from power signaled the silence to come rushing in. the room radiated it's emptiness. the only substance came from my mind's buzzing back and forward, tracing the outline of the darkness, and weaving itself through the silence, searching for something to validate my fears.

eventually, it came.

i looked out the window to the crimson-and-charcoal sky from my first nightmare. panicked, i ran downstairs. when i opened my front door, i was greeted by the stormy and still world of my second.

i slammed the door shut and ran back to my room.

i threw open the door and stepped onto the floor.

it wasn't there. a nauseous green sky took the place of my room. two stories down, the ground was bubbling with a swampy acidity, and i was falling into it.

when i hit the mud, a burning overtook me. the acidic ground swallowed me into itself and smothered me, drowning me in sloppy, wet fire.

just as i felt the last bit of life being torched out of me, i woke up into a cold, white room. the air smelled of incessant sanitation. the bed scratched at me with its papery blankets, trying to let me know it was a hospital bed.

i slid myself off and examined the room. it was, as the bed had informed me, a hospital room. the TV sat in the upper right corner, and the modern art project that was hospital machinery loomed behind the bed.

there was a blank white curtain along the wall. carefully, i slid it open and looked outside.

the room dissipated, and i was in the middle of a busy highway. a semi's lights glared at me, and stormed in my direction. i couldn't move. my feet were glued to the street.

.*.*.

With a painful jolt, my eyes opened to the sight of my bedroom ceiling. The world felt suspended in half-sleep.

I sat up and looked around my bedroom. Everything looked normal, and nothing seemed out of place. Outside the window, the sky was black and starry. The TV was still on, and the game was where I left it the first, showing no signs of the child.

Just when I was ready to celebrate victory, a small vibration sent itself through my room. The world trembled, as if the core of the earth had been replaced by a giant motor, and a gun came tumbling out from under my bed.

I grabbed it, then flipped it around in my hands, ostensibly examining its aesthetics. As it twisted and turned in my hands, I saw a promise, a promise of peace.

I pulled it up to my head and shot.

.*.*.

i woke up to the sunny sky blasting in through my window. the house smelled like breakfast and the house felt like tomorrow.

the world had made it to a new day.