The Platypus

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Welcome to the first issue of The Platypus Journal, the brain spawn of The English Society—Kent State University-Ashtabula’s gaggle of over-read deviants, nerds, and ne’er-do-wells, prone to fits of creative tomfoolery.

The Platypus is...

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Amanda Frazier
Patrick O’Brien
Sherri Quirke Bolcevic

Jordan Rimpela
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Briana Lea Toukonen
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The Harbor Perk
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Shakespeare platypus drawn by Brian Miskowich.

Cover photo by Kendra Bopp.

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And Pictures...

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Call me Email.

mobydick.blogspot.com :)

Tara Neely
Debut

David A. Clayman

...The day after, like
all the others,
after. Except, this one—
filled with pain—not the pain
insisting you return to where the day
before ended, No.
This is refreshing...
Alive.

I drift on yesterday—
recollecting the events,
flashes of delicate bliss
entangled with a daunting discomfort.
I am in disarray,
Brimming with an embarrassed pride.

Was it all real?

...You did actually see me smile?

The answers are so obvious, but—
real?
I suffer the pain.
I recall with a haunting precision the acts to which my body has surely contributed.
And yet a tranquil sensation; like a cigarette after sex,
has gently settled upon me.
So peculiarly real.
Alive.

I can’t wait
for tomorrow.
Dance

Abigail Frazier

Breathe in, breathe out
My feet leave the ground and for a moment I am weightless
For just a moment, life is suspended in the air
Dance happens no longer in a studio,
But anywhere, in any place that can be dreamed of
Movement is no longer confined by space or time or convention
It is free

Breathe in, breathe out
Hands cover a face, and emotion is pure again
Where once a body was worn with worry,
Real life takes over
There is a place where blood and spirit mix
Where all that is physical and all that is intangible become one

Breathe in, breathe out
"...Barbaric?! The Parade? Oh that's just bull!" Mr. MaKenly shouted through a mouthful of half chewed popcorn.

"I know, I know." His old friend John Mayzer said. "But it's true, that they say that I mean. Bloody foreigners."

"Well how do they choose their wives then?"

"Apparently they fatten them up with chocolate, and then when the woman believes that the man will keep her fed forever, they get hitched." Mayzer checked his watch, impatiently. Bleachers were always hard to sit on.

"They just freely choose who they want?" The very thought baffled MaKenly.

"I guess so, I'm not sure. I mean, all the good 'uns would be taken pretty fast, I'd think. And wouldn't there be a lot of people who don't get married?"

"Well, they're stupid."

There was a great roar in the crowd as a few women came walking out into the sand-filled stadium, leading a large amount of black blobs with white masks, who each vied to be in the front near the gate.

"My little Reth is in there this year..." MaKenly said with a hint of both pride and sorrow.

"Reth?" Mayzer choked on his beer. "No way! She's what, eight, if that?"

"Nope, she's seventeen this year. The numbers finally worked out, she got a spot."

"Seventeen..." There was a long sense of bewilderment and longing. "My, where did nine years go?"

"Out of a bottle and into your gut!" MaKenly laughed loudly.

"So which one is she? Can you tell? Parents are supposed to be able to tell."

"Oh that's bollocks and you know it. The only ones you can tell are the fat'uns. They're bigger'n the rest."

"True... true. Oh, remember last year?" Mayzer's stomach grumbled lightly. He raised his hand to a vendor walking by, who handed him another hot dog.

"Last year...? Oh, you mean the Lauden boy?" MaKenly eyed the hotdog greedily, compared it to his popcorn, and got one for himself.

"Ayup, that's the one. Came in last and got stuck with that thunderous monster of a woman. Fell to the sand crying he did."

"I remember." He chuckled. "Whatever happened with them?"

"I hear she ate him."

"... No! You're shitting me!"

"You're much too big for that! And what am I, a public servant? I don't keep tabs on everybody!"

"Still, his own fault for that. He shoulda got here faster! Everyone knows the good'uns are in the front."

"Yes, but the mothers of the ugly sons hide in the streets, holding the fast boys back so theirs get a shot."

"Aye, I know. I got hit in the face by Mrs.Benafis when I ran. Hurt like a-"

"Oh? What'd she hit you with?" Mayzer checked his watch again.

"I believe it was a large sausage."

"...Sausage?"
"Aye. Not sure where she got it though, least not one that big. I had a nice red bruise on my face during the honeymoon pictures!"
"Your face is always red."
MaKenly started to make a comeback, but there was the sound of a large buzzer and many men screaming in excitement.
"It started!" both cried in unison, turning their attention to the monitors located above them, across the open field.
The gates opened somewhere across town, and young boys, from fifteen to twenty, dressed in naught but white shorts came barreling out at full speed, tripping over each other. Various cameras placed all across the road filmed the action as the boys each pushed, clawed, and screamed their way towards their victory.
"Oh-oh!" Mayzer cried, dropping his half-eaten hot dog. "Look out boy, look out!"
His words obviously didn't reach the ears of the child, who was suddenly caught by a tripwire placed by the mothers of the uglier boys. The rest, those not on the ground, jumped over the wire with a laugh.
MaKenly changed from the monitor to the black sheep-like blobs in the stadium. They were excitedly buzzing, trying one last desperate push to get into the front.
"Still trying to figure out which is Reth?"
"Oh shut it!"
The gate started to open after a few minutes, rising slowly. The black blobs did as they were trained, and remained within the stadium; leaving would result in disqualification.
The fastest, or rather the luckiest, boy came round the corner.
"Well whadd'ya know! It's the Zassis boy! He's got the honor this year, heh!"
The crowd roared violently, the black masses began to start pushing even more violently.
The Zassis boy came running, other boys nipping at his heels. He passed the gate, and ran at a random black blob in the stadium. Then he reared back, delivering a swift punch to the white-masked face. The audience roared, and MaKenly spilt his popcorn. Zassis then reached down, pulled off the mask, and raised the hand of his bride, trying to get out of the way of the rest of the boys.
"Why, it's Reth!" Mayzer cried. "Reth was the first pick!"
"My God!" MaKenly jumped up and down. "My God, my God! Her mother's going to be so proud!"
The rest of the boys came spilling in, socking the first girl they approached in the Springtime Wedding Parade. Women fell, hitting the sand with violent thuds, and their betrothed gently brought them back up after their first binding touch.
"Oh!" Mayzer jumped up now alongside MaKenly, who was crying a few tears of joy. "We got a runner!"
MaKenly followed to where Mayzer was pointing, and by God he was right.
"She won't get far!" MaKenly cried. "Look! She's already got'im on her tail!"
A young boy broke from the pack, running full speed towards her. The sand kicked up from his feet and glittered the air, and the girl's shriek could be barely heard over the cheers and jeers of the men in the crowd.
The boy leapt forward with a reckless blow, knocking the mask clean off the girl.
"Feh." MaKenly laughed. "And they call this barbaric?"
The Escape

Jennifer Meyer

I never should have married you.
I should have seen the signs.
I was too young.
You were too... you.
I didn’t know me.

when you asked me you didn’t even care
that I was tired and wanted to go home
and the ring was exactly the opposite
of everything I had ever said that I wanted
and it didn’t even fit and you
didn’t even bother to think about me that night.

I should have known when you were having
all those anxiety attacks and
I lost all my respect for you and
I thought you were weak and
I knew that you would never be
able to take care of me and that
I would always be the stronger one but
I always wanted to be taken care of and
it was all backwards.

I should have known when you were mad
that I wouldn’t take you to the hospital AGAIN
because of one of those attacks and
you punched me while I was driving
and the bruise was so big and
it took weeks to heal but
the wedding was paid for and
it was only a month away and
it was too late.

I should have known when you were so lazy
and I had to do everything and even when
the tire in the car blew I had to change it
because you couldn’t loosen the lug nuts
but somehow I could and I knew that
you weren’t trying just like you didn’t
try with anything else.

So I had finally let it go too far, and
Then when you were a little late coming home
I hoped that you had gotten in an accident and
I wished you would die so that I could be
released from my vows and not be at fault.

So I left,
and it was better that way,
because otherwise I would have killed
either you or me
and I was dying
and I needed to live,
and I couldn’t care about
anyone but me anymore
because I was just too fucking tired.
Untitled
Mary Mastromatteo

One,
Single
Heart slowing,
Slows through the night,
Night of many thoughts,
Thoughts consumed, darkening.
Darkness from the empty half,
That half of the bed that gapes, feeds
Feeding on all the dears and sadness.
One, single heart slows—while night’s dark thoughts feed

Divorce
Briana Lea Toukonen

can’t sleep can’t cry can’t breathe can’t scream
and I look at you while you sleep peaceful
with your serene expression and faint smile
not having a care like all is right in the world
and we are not getting kicked out for not paying
rent on time while I stir and twist and my stomach
aches as if I haven’t eaten in days I know your
paycheck won’t cover the overdraft charges
you snore in your blissful abyss I get up and
get no rest you wake up refreshed and tell me
that it will work out like it always does but
don’t you know it’s because I’m the one
who fixes it I can’t fix this
A Peer Counseling Session at Jacob Grimm High School
J.M. Romig

They sat across the table from one another. One girl staring at her notebook. The other's eyes fixed on her classmate. On the broadside of the table sat a dark-haired woman, the only smiling face in the room. The shy girl's crimson hair hung out from under her hooded sweatshirt as she sketched axes on the front of her notebook. The other girl's golden locks hung in curls around her face. Her beauty was undeniable, as was the disdain in her eyes.

"So, can one of you two describe to me what happened today on that stairwell?" asked Mrs. White, the guidance counselor at Jacob Grimm High. Despite the gossip floating around the school about her, a smile was always plastered on her face. Most of the children found this unbearably creepy.

"Nothing ma'am. We were just having a friendly conversation, when that pig came along and insisted, very forcefully, that we come here," the blonde said, sarcastically, her eyes never letting go of their gaze on the other girl.

Mrs. White chuckled "That's not how it happened, Goldie. C'mon, tell us your side of things."

Goldie rolled her eyes. "Well, Mrs. White, it's like this: my bio class was just letting out, and I was heading down to calculus. She comes flying UP the DOWN stairs, like a maniac, slamming into my shoulder. I hit her, she hit me back. Now we're here."

"Is that true, Ms. Ridinghood?" asked Mrs. White, turning her head to the other girl.

"Not entirely," she answered, finally joining the conversation. "Ms. Princess here was going up those stairs before I even got to them. To be honest, I was zoned out, just following the sheep. I'm not having the best day, so a friend gave me something to take the edge off this morning. I was following her up the down stairs, apparently, and she turned around and started coming at me, shoving my shoulder as she walked past, then got offended - like I did something wrong - and hit me. So I punched her back. We wrestled for a minute before the cop came and broke it up."

"Hmm." Mrs. White turned to Goldie, who was looking down the floor. "Goldie, why were you going back up the stairs?"

"I don't wanna talk about it."

"So you did go back up the stairs and come down a second time?"

"It was actually my third time," Goldie admitted, embarrassed. "The first time I went too fast, the second time I went too slow. That time would have been just right. I have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Go ahead, laugh it up."

"No one's laughing," Mrs. White assured her. Although Red was a little, until Mrs. White turned to her. "Can you tell me why it is you needed to be 'zoned out' today?"

"None of your business, that's why," Red snapped.
"I have read your file, I know what day it is."
"Then why did you have to bring it up?" Red was now agitated.
"For Goldie to hear. So you can better understand one another."
"Bullshit! What kind of understanding am I to get from this preppy bitch with a silver spoon up her ass? I've spit puddles deeper than her!" The two girls rose up, over the table. Mrs. White was able to get in between them.

"Now, both of you need to just calm down and talk this out like civil adults. Keep in mind, this is your only alternative to expulsion."

Once everyone regained themselves, Red spoke again, this time directly to Goldie.

"Six years ago, today, my grandmother was murdered." Goldie began to see Red with new eyes. "Remember The Wolf?"

"That guy who went around vandalizing houses?"

"Yeah. He was hiding out in the woods. I was going to visit my grandma, who lived out that way. I saw him. He'd shaved so I hadn't recognized him from the news. I told him I was going to my grandma's place, dumb idea -- I know. He suggested a different route, said it'd be shorter. By the time I got there, grams was gone. He was in her bed, dressed like her, waiting for me. His eyes...were so...big. If it wasn't for Larry, a woodsman working nearby, I would be dead too."

"I heard about that! That was you? Wow...I'm sorry." Goldie shook her head in amazement, then added, "Didn't the woodsman chop off his head?"

"No. He shot him. Larry carries a gun when he's working in that forest, because of all the dangerous things that happen there."

"No doubt, that place is freaky. I got lost in it once, when I was six. I ended up at this cabin. I thought it was abandoned. Imagine my surprise when the family came home. I was sleeping in the kid's bed, and I'd eaten their food too. I think I even broke something."

"How'd that play out?"

"I did some time in juvy for property damage and theft."

"Wow...that's so messed up. At least you learned your lesson, right?"

"Oddly enough, no. When I turned eleven I started breaking into people's houses. I mean, I didn't take anything, just slept in their beds, or watched TV. I never got caught again." Goldie sounded mildly disappointed.

"You know," Red interjected "we are a couple of freaks, aren't we?"

"Yeah. Hey...where'd Mrs. White go?" Goldie said, finally realizing that Mrs. White had made an escape somewhere in the midst of their discussion.

"I don't know."

"Oh well...did you hear she has seven midgets living with her?"

"That's just a rumor," Red said.

On that note, the bell rang, and the two girls left the room giggling like old friends.

~ 13 ~
Banshee
Jacqueline Rexford

quite...still...
Night smothers the land
Shadowy figures stagger towards an absent dawn
But hours still separate the desperate night
From the golden rays of the sun

Alone on a knoll, near a knotted old tree
A ghostly figure moans, wails,
She laments a life.
Banshee, Please! Not this night!
Not this house! Not this night!

His children, eight in all,
They gather 'round his bed.
On their knees, night-capped heads bowed,
Their ruddy cheeks are streaked
Tears track down their wee faces while small red noses run

His last rights have been read.

The clergyman kneels.
With the eight children he prays.

Still she laments this life,
The Banshee on the hill.
Gnarled fingers twisting in her ghostly veil
Moaning, Wailing, the moment comes near

Ragged, raspy, shuddering breaths seep from his cold lips
Through his cold, cold lips life escapes
Eight children cry

He gives up the ghost
While the spirit of his wife waits to lead him away

Eight orphans cry
Inconsolable in their grief
Eight alone, no parents, no protection, no guidance
Nowhere to call home
No more does the Banshee weep and wail
The old knotted tree stands alone on the knoll
While shadowy figures stagger towards and absent dawn

In another place, another time
Another Banshee moans and wails
Another family pleads
  Banshee, Please!
  Not this night!

Jordan Rimpela
Winds of Evil
Michael Ball

A gentle afternoon breeze carrying the scent of new growth and the promise of spring blew across a wide rolling field behind a small farm house. The trim little cottage sat nestled by a large much repaired barn. A small boy, his brown hair tousled by the same breeze, sat on the ground by the barn, playing with a black ragged-eared pup. The boy smiled to himself as the pup tugged on the stick he was holding. Today was just too nice to be doing chores.

“Colson!” The boy’s smile disappeared when he heard his mother yell his name. “Colson! Where’re you at, boy? Did you feed them chickens yet?”

Colson frowned at his mother’s question. He hated having to feed the family’s flock. They always pecked his feet and ankles. Colson grabbed the pup and stood up. There wasn’t any way he could get out of feeding the chickens, but maybe he could put it off for a while.

“No yet, Ma. I gotta find Nipper first. He’s run off again.” Not waiting for his mother’s response, Colson tucked Nipper under his arm and ran for the field behind the barn. Once in the field, Colson had to slow down. Walking through the knee-high brush grass took more effort. Even though they had only seen the last of the winter weather just two weeks ago, the brush grass was already greening up and growing nicely. His father would probably want to start the first cutting in a week or two. Colson was actually looking forward to that. His father had told him that he was big enough to swing one of the cutter blades this year. That would leave his two sisters stuck with the task of gathering and stacking the grass on the wagon.

Colson turned and looked back at his house. His mother wasn’t in sight. With a smile, he set Nipper down in the grass and sat down next to his pup. Nipper’s small black nose immediately went to work as he investigated the new smells in the grass with a rapid fire series of snorts. But when Colson tapped the stick on the ground, his attention was immediately diverted and the pup jumped back into their interrupted game of tug-o-war. As the duo played and lost track of time, the breeze rippled the grass in random flowing patterns around them.

The sun was just brushing the tops of the still winter bare trees to the west, when Colson heard a faint sound. It was a low, barely audible moan like the wind rushing over the open top of a large jug. Never tiring of his favorite game, Nipper continued to pull on the stick while Colson looked around trying to identify the source of the sound. The sound came again, this time trailing off like a living thing. The hair on the back of Colson’s neck stood up, just as a sharp gust of air smacked him in the face. The air carried a dank smell with it. The smell of old dirt, corruption and dying things. The stick forgotten now, Nipper cowered against Colson’s leg whimpering, his nose quivering at the vile odor carried by the wind.

Colson scooped up the frightened pup, holding him close as he sat up on his knees for a better view of the field around him. Just as the haunting sound reached his ears for the third time, Colson spotted something at the north edge of the field. A dark
smudge, like smoke or dust, seemed to be hovering over the grass. As he watched, the
smudge appeared to grow and then accompanied by the moaning sound, it swirled into
a funnel shape. To Colson it looked like the dust devils that chased the wagons down
the dirt road during the heat of high summer. As he watched, it continued to grow.
The thing was easily the size of his father’s best wagon now, its shape morphing back
and forth. And it was starting to move across the field now.

As it moved, the grass below was brushed by the lower fringe of the thing,
turning brown and withering away as though dead. A chance gust of wind brought the
smell to the pair again, stronger this time. Colson was unable to stop the sound of
disgust that came from his lips and to his horror; the thing turned toward him and
began moving faster. Fear filled the young boy and he jumped to his feet, turned and
tried to run. The thick brush grass pulled at his legs and after a short distance, Colson
tripped and went down hard. His wind knocked out of him, Colson struggled to his
feet. He made it back up, but at a price. The frightened pup squirmed out of the boy’s
weakened grasp and ran through the grass to Colson’s left, yipping in fear.

“Nipper, NO!” the boy’s anguished scream followed the pup. Colson turned to
chase his dog and a fresh wave of the terrible stench washed over him. Looking to the
north, the terrified boy saw the monstrous thing bearing down on him, a pair of
malevolent glowing red eyes staring at him from the center of the thing. Panic
overloaded the horribly frightened boy’s brain and he turned again toward the farm
house and ran screaming with a fleetness born of overwhelming fear. The monster
followed the boy almost to the edge of the grass and then veered to the east, moving
erratically through the field.

Colson ran full tilt into the farm house, scaring his mother into dropping the rolls
she was removing from the oven. After his parents succeeded in calming the
completely terrified Colson; Mahlon, the boy’s father, went out to the field to
investigate. There was no sign of the monster, but the field was crisscrossed trails of
dead, desiccated grass. And in the middle of one of those trails, Mahlon found the body
of Nipper. The energetic pup was gone, leaving behind nothing but a pitifully small
corpse that resembled a mummy left to the mercy of the driest desert.
Runaway Poem
J.M. Romig

As you lay next to me, sleeping
I trace the outline of your face
I kiss the brim of your collarbone
and explore the world of You.
I find myself searching for the words
to a runaway poem.
I suspect it's hiding around here
maybe it's in the way that you kiss,
on the tip of your tongue
or in the movement of your hips
as you attempt an escape from
the body prison we playfully wove together
late last night.
Or is it at the bottom of that ocean in your eyes?
There's no way I could know, for sure
so I start at your tippy toes
and investigate every inch of you
hunting down those words, so elusive.
I make my way to your lips once again and you stir
your eyes slowly widen and you smile
there it is.
Cheers
Kendra Bopp

“The dick is optional.”
I heard this as I passed a group of women exiting a bar at what must have been a very happy hour. It stayed with me—spinning in a mind now startlingly aware of the opposite sex. I wondered at the conversation preceding; at the group of words needed to illicit this phallic response. I imagined it salacious, whispered in a vodka-loud voice as girlfriends giggled and the bartender looked on, amused.

Or maybe it was asexual, the new feminist manifesto, soon to appear on pastel t-shirts and button covered jackets; or be chanted as querulous women march on the national mall in power suits and stiletto heels.

I wanted to follow these women, to ask, but I knew no answer would sate an imagination so fully engaged, so I contented myself with speculation, and a tumbler of scotch raised as they drove away.
Running with Scissors
Jessica Stewart

Maddy is six years old. She goes to school. She is in first grade. Maddy has a little brother. His name is Davey. Davey does pesky things to Maddy. Sometimes, Maddy fights with Davey. Their mom does not like it when they fight, but sometimes Mom fights too. Mom fights with Dad when he does not come straight home from work. Maddy and Davey do not like this.

At school, Maddy does not fight. She listens to the teacher. But sometimes when Maddy thinks about Mom and Dad, she forgets to listen. This makes the teacher very mad. The teacher puts Maddy in time out. Maddy cries because the other kids laugh. They say she is too dumb to listen. This makes Maddy angry.

One day, when Maddy comes home angry, Davey wants her to play Power Rangers. Maddy does not want to play. She tells Davey to stop pestering her, but he does not listen. Maddy sees a pair of sharp scissors on her mom's desk. She picks them up and snips them at Davey to make him go away. Davey screams and runs into the living room. Maddy thinks this is funny. She chases after him, snipping as he screams.

Maddy thinks that now she is pestering Davey. Now she is getting back at him. She chases Davey into his room. Davey climbs onto his bed and scrunches down in the corner against the wall. Maddy follows him, laughing and snip-snip-sniping. Davey puts his hands over his face and Maddy snips.

There is blood on his hands and his face. Maddy stops and sees that Davey is scared—scared of her. She looks at the blood and Davey starts to cry. Maddy is not laughing now. She starts to cry and cry. Davey won't pester her now because he is afraid of her.
Arms Wide Open
Sarah Schindler

It must be raining in North Kingsville.
I can feel the chill in her bones,
her small body shivering underneath a pink umbrella.
The rain is coming down harder now.

Waiting for the bus she wonders
why her mommy can't be there to pick her up.
She doesn't understand the ways of the cruel adult world.

When the bus pulls up she closes her umbrella but before she can get through the door a raindrop falls onto her forehead and rolls into her eye.

She falls into her seat still shivering as she tries to escape the damp cold air. I can almost hear her stomach rumble as she digs through her lunch box looking for anything to eat.

As she impatiently watches the others running up their driveways, her mind begins to wander. Wondering if I'll be there to pick her up.

The bus seems to be moving slower now. As it approaches her house she sees it, mommy's car in the driveway waiting there just for her.

I can see the joy in her eyes and as the doors close behind her she runs to me with her arms wide open.
Yesteryear
Heather Martin

Summers ago, more than I can recall
another era of another year
growing weaker now. But,
still so strong a perception
I'd say, of days so long retired.

The sticky heat of
the sun's vengeance stuck
solely to my legs. Pulling me
down
onto the vinyl, infusing with my skin.

The metal, boiling hot
from the rays shining in
through the windshield.
Growing humid from
being sealed.

Faintly I can remember the
strong scent of cigarettes.
Not what you'd call pleasant, but
to me it was.
A calming, familiar smell

that brought back the feeling
of childhood memories.
The nostalgic comfort of
time gone,
in a summer's buzz.

The tunes of another generation,
filling my eardrums.
I sing along so loudly,
the words I grew up on.
Windows down and a cool breeze
drowning out the heat. I feel
so safe
in this old truck
I belong
with my daddy in the driver's seat.
Ohio Winter
Patrick O’Brien

Round and Round I go
Where I stop, no one knows.
Two hundred dollar tires,
Five hundred dollar car.
Hazard lights, simply a distraction.
Trip to the hospital imminent
Insurance is worthless in winter
Eight months of snow.

The car halts half on the road
Halfway in the ditch
A stranger stops to help
My car is roadworthy again
I kindly gesture as I leave
Slowly accelerating toward the next drift
Eight months isn’t terrible
Round and round I go
Where I stop only I know.

Sherri Quirke Bolcevic
The Wonderful Aspects of Life
Briana Lea Toukonen

I woke up feeling heavy. I was still exhausted, it took me hours to fall asleep. I didn’t want to be awake, but there was a knot, it wasn’t really in my stomach, it was more like in between my chest and my stomach. Also there were hundreds of thoughts running rampant around my skull. All of them thinking about the many different outcomes of my current situation. I wanted them all to shut up, I didn’t want to think about it. I wanted to sleep. I tried to focus on the sound of my own breathing and just for a second I could feel my body start to relax a little. Then a hunger pain ripped through my abdomen adding to the already very uncomfortable knot. I curled up into a ball thinking that it could somehow make the pain stop. It didn’t help. I got up, now a little angry, and went to get a bowl of cereal.

I had to dump almost half of the bowl, as it was I had already forced down the last few bites and my stomach was hurting in a completely different way. The knot was still there, but the hunger pains were replaced by a tight, constricting pain that would not allow any more food in.

I couldn’t stand feeling this way, just sitting around, going about my daily business, trying to act like nothing was wrong when I was just waiting for the floor to drop out from under me. The crazy thing is that I knew that when the floor did drop out, it wouldn’t even be all that bad. I had been through worse and would very likely go through something much more terrible again, but the not knowing, the waiting around without being able to do anything about it was some kind of new torture. I couldn’t stop thinking about it, hoping that everything would be ok, knowing that it wouldn’t. I wanted to cry, no I wanted to scream and yell and make him feel pain. I wanted a fight, I wanted get all of my pent up emotions out. I was so confused, not sure what I suppose to feel.

I had to go to work, that was even worse. I would have preferred to lie in bed all day doing absolutely nothing. I put on my make-up and tied my hair, I put on my uniform and my fake smile and I walked out the door. All I could think was that maybe it would be busy enough to stop the rampant thoughts from overwhelming me. But nobody better give me any shit because I would probably jab their eyes out with a soup spoon.
Seaweed
Amanda Frazier

There are no tides as unpredictable
as the ones that tug my self-confidence away from me.
The oceans have the courtesy to mold themselves to the will of the moon.
So that everybody knows
    when the water’s going to go rushing out,
or rushing in,
and can figure out where the fuck to build the sandcastle.

But not my tides.

There I am, sunning myself with life
when all of the sudden I’m spitting out saltwater
    and I can’t keep my head clear.
Or worse, when everything pulls away,
leaving me with the bare brown sand and my fear
    that I will never accomplish the things I think
    I ought to have done by now.

I want to be more like the moon.
I want to have her will,
    and her light,
    and her calm, clear face.
I want the ebb and flow to answer to me.
The Life and Times of a Non-playable Character
Jordan Rimpela

I thought I was in luck when my grandmother informed me of her terminal cancer; I gleefully waited for day she died, hoping to inherit her estate. Oh yeah, I’m John by the way, I’m 33 years old, almost broke, and I’m dying of cancer, too - at least I think so. I hope so. Well, not dying; I’d like to recover after all. I was born and still live in Anytown, Ohio where I lived with my grandmother. It seems as though no one has ever heard of Anytown, but I assure you, it is on your map somewhere near that state of ambiguous dreadfulness. You probably have a town just like it near where you live. Hell, maybe you live there. Nothing really ever changes in my world; things are the same day after day, after year.

The sky is always a hazy shade of gray here in Anytown, and the air reeks of broken dreams and hopelessness. It’s truly morbid here. I live a pretty boring life. I have no special qualities about me; I can’t play any musical instruments, I’m bad at sports, I can’t dance, I most definitely cannot sing, and I have no opinion on anything, really. Abortion, I don’t care, it doesn’t affect me. Global warming or gay rights can honestly go fuck themselves as I have no use for them. It could stand to be warmer here in Ohio, and I’m not gay so what do I care what or whom they do? I’m as neutral on politics as beige is dull.

To make matters worse, I wasn’t blessed in the looks department, so I’m not exactly what you’d call a ladies’ man; or a man’s man for that matter. I have never been with a woman, in any way, shape, or form. Pornography has shown me what goes on when guys and girls fornicate, but that’s all I know, and I know it well. It’s kind of a hobby. Masturbation either takes the edge off of my loneliness or exacerbates it. I have never had a female friend, and definitely not one I would call a girlfriend. I honestly do not think that a woman could love me.

My mom and dad died when I was three, and so I spent the rest of my childhood living with my grandmother Agnes who could not care less about raising a child. Thankfully, my parents had left some money behind for me in a trust fund, which I received after graduating high school with a C average. Prior to graduation, I had to get a job to support myself, something my bitch of a grandmother made me do. Teachin’ me to fend for myself or some bullshit like that she always said. So I worked at the local Mega Mart which is literally the only store this town has, after they ran everyone else out of business. I believe they call that progress or so that’s what the store referred to it as. I absolutely hated it there, and made damned sure to be fired for insubordination the day after I graduated; for after all, I did have my trust fund. That was fifteen years ago though, and now I’m a bit worried as to what I’ll do for money. I have no college degree and am definitely lacking in the skills department.

Cue my grandmother dying of terminal cancer. I was foolish to think that the bitch would leave me her estate after she bit the dust. Agnes died alright, but the decrepit old hag left me nothing. She even had the fucking nerve to state specifically in her will that I get nothing. Said I was worthless and that she wished my parents would
have aborted me as originally planned. She was worthless even in death, the bitch. All was not doom and gloom for me though, as I picked up on something during her illness: she went from rarely having a visitor (she was a nasty woman, after all), to requiring a guest book. People she hardly knew gave her cards, (some of which were ironically of the get well soon variety), flowers, hugs, gifts, and gross amounts of sympathy. Some even sent her money, even though she was quite rich herself. These people seemingly came all hours of the day, every day.

Luckily for me -- and quite shockingly to be honest -- after Hagnes died, people flooded me with the same attention. The only way I can figure it is that no one knew her disdain for me. I was after all her only remaining relative, and she had no friends. Anyway, they showered me with cards, food, flowers, and thankfully, money, as now I had to find a place to live. Soon after, the people stopped calling, and the ones I called that had extended the offer for anything I needed stopped returning my calls, except for one: Ariel. Weird name, but she was cute and really nice. I’m not sure what possessed a smart, hard working girl like Ariel to be there for my grandmother to begin with, but I did not care. I wanted to be with her every day, but I knew that just wasn’t possible. Ariel would eventually find me boring or just stop being nice; it was only a matter of time. I was running out of time and I needed an edge. I got one alright.

You can probably imagine how happy I was the day I was diagnosed with lung cancer. My body was breaking down, but no pain no gain, right? Besides, I caught it early. A little radiation and I would be set. I could barely contain my happiness as the doctor told me the news. She probably thought I was crazy. The timing was perfect; I had contemplated faking a sickness, but I would not know how to even begin faking. Now though, I was legit. I could cough up blood to prove it. I knew everyone would love me now: I’d make friends, marry Ariel, and win the battle with cancer and live happily ever after with my somewhat above average life, my working wife, and sail this one through. I was set.
Machine
Brian Miskowich

As I sat on a bus that went to nowhere and circumscribed the Nothing, I looked and I saw that a Man sat across and looked down. And he looked up At me with a look that said Run! And he said “We are we are we are we are we are.” And I Wanted to say WHAT ARE WE?! but he was looking down and his words Were silence so I responded

In kind together As part of the biomass and sat Coddled by the machine-mother in that cradle of Non-inquisition fed by the Answers To my not-questions.

And he listened to his iPod And I listened to my Sandisk And I left.
Goodnight

Jennifer Meyer

We feel like a statue, after we make love.
Our blemishes are gone.
Our skin is soft white marble,
firm and smooth.
Our pose is perfect,
my hair all in tangles
like our bodies,
with the sheets just barely
covering us.

Then we are a painting,
the flush of my cheeks and breasts
and every rounded part of me
glowing like fire.
Your eyes bluer
than the cold ocean or
the warm summer sky,
contradicting perfectly the
dark of your unshaven face.

But the spell is broken
when you smack my ass
and say,
“That was great babe, g’night.”
Fell and Wrath

Amanda Frazier

It all came down to deniability. He had no alibi, and even if he had, this was the sort of thing that had his name all over it. Though there probably weren’t too many, even knowing his reputation, who’d have thought he’d have the balls to pull something like this on her.

As Robin Goodfellow’s jaw met the dove-colored stones before the queen’s throne, he tried to imagine exactly what it was that might have persuaded Oberon to think Titania would find any sort of humor in the donkey episode, and suspected the king must have been drunk.

“Well met, Puck.” Her voice was a bell in a soft rain, and it made his spine twitch beneath his skin. He pushed himself to his knees, a task made interesting by the fact that his hands were still bound behind him, and lifted his gaze to meet hers.

The Queen of All Faerie smiled down at him, petal pink lips parting. He wondered how she managed to show quite so many teeth and still keep the smile from coming anywhere near her eyes, black as a new moon night. She sat tall but easy in her throne, like a willow when there was no wind, and to one who did not know better, she might have looked serene.

He swallowed to moisten his throat and smiled back at her. “Your Majesty is looking particularly effulgent tonight, if I may say.”

The smile grew, and a silvery little laugh spilled out. “Oh, stars,” she breathed. “You are a singular creature, Puck. I see why my husband enjoys your company so.”

“He does fancy my foolishness now and again,” Goodfellow noted agreeably, the muscles of his face beginning to ache from holding their geniality. “Though His Majesty has a talent for jesting, himself, as I’m... certain Your Bright Ladyship knows.”

“Indeed I do. No doubt my Oberon has taught you a trick or two, hobgoblin.”

Sweat crawled along the skin of his wrists beneath his bindings. “Now and then, Your Ladyship,” he said, his own voice sounding thin in his ears. “Now and then.”

Something over Puck’s shoulder suddenly caught the queen’s attention. “Ah, here he is,” she observed mildly, and for the first time, Goodfellow’s awareness, which had thus far only had eyes for Titania’s presence, made abrupt and ominous note of Oberon’s absence. “You’ll have to forgive his tardiness this evening, Puck. But I’m afraid my poor husband suffered a most unfortunate accident today.”

There was movement beside Goodfellow, though he dared not turn towards it, dared not look away from Titania’s dark eyes, which held his until the figure being led towards her throne came between them.

The two faerie women guiding the king drew his hands from their shoulders and let him sink to his knees at Titania’s feet. The queen combed her fingers gently through the black waves of Oberon’s hair, and he lifted his head.

“We were walking in my garden,” Titania went on, “and he fell into my roses.”

Goodfellow felt his insides twist. “My lord...” he managed, and then wished he hadn’t, when the sound of his voice turned Oberon’s face more fully towards him.
“They were dreadfully cross with him for the intrusion.” Titania stroked him like a cat. “My faeries have brought the Puck to join us, dearheart,” she told him. “I thought his company might lift your spirits.”

“Titania...” Oberon choked out. There was something wrong with his tongue. “Tania, please...please...” He coughed, speckling his chin with scarlet.

“Shushh,” Titania murmured, catching up a bit of the blue silk of her skirt and wiping the blood away with it. “Just sit quietly, my love. Your hobgoblin is going to amuse us.”

Oberon’s dark lashes fluttered on his cheeks, and the dizzying realization that there was nothing beneath the lacerated, purpled lids gripped Goodfellow.

“Tania...don’t...”

Titania stood, and Oberon slid down her legs as she rose, crumpling to his belly on the floor, clutching at her as she stepped past him, his hand sliding off her ankle as if his grip were no more than water.

“That is why you’ve come to join us, Puck,” she said, coming to stand over him. She reached out to him with one slender hand, tipped now with claws like rose-hued scythes, and ran the backs of her fingers down Goodfellow’s cheek. Her touch was like spider silk; soft, and light, and full of the promise of fangs. Goodfellow shuddered underneath it. “You are going to entertain us tonight. And since my dear husband cannot see the night’s amusements,” she murmured sweetly, tracing the tips of her claws across his cheek and back to the nape of his neck, “we must make certain he can hear you.” She leaned close, putting her mouth beside his ear. “Do you understand?”

He did. Oh, he did. Goodfellow stared at the stones beneath him, and wondered, perversely, who would be cleaning them come morning. If he was very, very lucky, it might be him.

“Of course, m’lady.”
What makes you smile
could very well be your destruction,
see, I met a man
Who said he works construction.
Off work for awhile cuz of rain or snow,
after awhile I didn't even know...
Is it cuz of the weather... Is your name on the list?
Cuz bills are pilin’ and i’m gettin’ pissed!
Rubbin’ my back won’t pay for the gas,
neither will kissing or grabbin’ my ass.
Bumpin’ and grindin’ and reachin’ my peak...
I guess I'll keep him another week.
Things We Don’t Talk About in Rape Therapy
Kendra Bopp

It has been two years, four months, three weeks, and five days since the rape. I know this because little Suzy counselor, who calls me every two or three months, just told me. It disturbs me that she has done the math, and it worries her that I haven’t. “Suzy” thinks that the only way to lead a normal, healthy life after rape is to revisit the rape daily and have a breakdown, or ten, if necessary. I think Suzy is insane, and every few months I have to tell her this when she feels the need to call me to try and force that breakdown. This just proves to her that I need her desperately and the game continues. I spend about forty-five minutes trying to convince her that I am actually not desperately seeking Suzy, and, when I realize once again that my words mean nothing, I hang up and breathe a sigh of relief because I know that I have a good couple of months before the next round.

I first met Suzy two weeks after the “incident.” I had gotten the number of the crisis center she worked for through a professor at school who was tactful enough not to press for details. In those early months Suzy kept her insanity in check and was, both thankfully and sadly, quite helpful. I had called to talk, but when it came down to it I couldn’t. I suddenly did not want to tell anyone—I just wanted it to go away—but I also couldn’t hang up. She waited with me, and didn’t seem to judge me when I told her of my life pre-rape. How I felt that I was maybe somehow responsible because of my sexuality, my openness, my many lovers. She told me that it didn’t matter, she just listened as I told her about the day it happened. I tried to avoid talking about the actual attack because, really, does one need details? But Suzy assured me that if I did not talk about everything it would “eat a hole through my soul.” Yes, those were her slightly corny, but sweetly poetic, words.

So I talked, and talked, for close to a year—to survivors, friends, family, the dog, and one particularly brilliant therapist. And I talked to Suzy until her neuroses broke through—long past the point where she, and her overly sentimental commando healing bullshit, was helpful. I talked until talking itself became the reason that I was not getting better.

I wanted my life back. I wanted my kinks back. I wanted my sexuality to once again be one of my defining characteristics. So, I started fucking. Men, women—the sex meant nothing because I felt nothing, but I couldn’t stop. I needed to fuck until it felt good again. Eight months into this sexual odyssey, during a mid-afternoon tryst with someone’s easily forgotten friend of a friend, it did.

Now it is almost a year later and Suzy just did her hit and run call. I should leave it alone, I know this. But I call her back to tell her what I think she should want to hear. I am happy, I have a very well-adjusted sex life, I have put the rape behind me, at least as far behind me as it will ever get. It isn’t enough for her. So I tell her about the man who tied me up last night, and that I am finally able to enjoy it as much as I did before the attack. I know she is shocked, but I want that shock. I want to push her over the edge, to
force her own breakdown; to make her say what I know is there in her judgmental little
brain.

When it happens it is brilliant. The accusations come fast as she uses my kink as
a weapon and details all of the ways in which I am dysfunctional. She works herself
into a lather as the Suzy mask starts to slip—“Perhaps you put yourself in this situation,
perhaps you should have known better, perhaps you were hoping to be raped, perhaps
you deserved it.”

And there it is—the one thing you never say to a rape victim. I feel a twisted
sense of pleasure at forcing these words from her lips. I know it is pointless to attempt
any sort of explanation because she is well beyond her ability to listen. I could tell her
that no one deserves to be raped, no one wishes for it, but I worked too hard to reclaim
my sexuality to start apologizing for it. So I let her rant, and I smile because I know that
once her passion is spent I will no longer have to dread her misguided calls. I have
finally pushed her too far.

Suzy is gone.
The One that Got Away
Mary Mastromatteo

He may not have been the biggest
But was a beauty all the same.
I studied his ways,
His paths in the lake land,
Watched the sun glimmer on his lean body.
I wanted him
    For my own.
I tested the waters
And threw in my baited hook
For I had a plan to make him mine.
    He bit,
    I reeled,
    And drew him into my world
And Oh!
Those beautiful eyes,
Blue as the world from which he came,
Were insights of what was
    And what could be.
I traveled far in those few seconds.

But those few seconds were all that were.
He pulled free
To be wild and elusive once more
Among the others in the sea.
He’s gone
But I remember
    Day in, day out.

I still case the lake land
Looking, waiting
For the one that got away
Because I want him
    For my own
Though he may not have been the biggest,
He is perfect all the same.
The Affair

Kendra Bopp

The gloaming steals
into the room and
we lie there
lightly tangled,
spent.
Shadows form
as dwindling light
filters through the window and plays
over bodies
unblushing,
unbound.
Your fingers travel my skin
and remembered pleasures
make me tense
just a little in
anticipation.
I have never been so sated,
and still,
when your hand moves,
I hope.

Soon—
too soon,
darkness displaces
the shadows and passion
gives way
to desperate languor.
We cling
to moments stolen
from alternate lives
and hide in a rented cocoon
disregarding our others
and cursing
premeditated fates
cold, relentless,
that drag us back
to adulterated
life.
Birds
Brian Miskowich

The house was red. The guest house brown.
I repainted both.
The guest house needed to be sanded.
Toxic grit
flung from the paneling.
I wore sandals and it stuck in my toes.

Packing the pottery. Crumpling the paper
to pad the pots.
I crumpled until I was sure the next piece
would slice my hand.
And I crumpled still.

Then, with hands raw but whole,
I walked to the guest house.
It was empty.
I heard speech from inside but don’t remember what was said.
My mother and brother.
I stopped on the steps.

Turning about I looked.
Looked at the bark of the great eucalyptus.
Looked at the vines on the hill.
Looked at the shining mansion across the canyon,
the one that had always shined.
Looked over my small home at the pine tree.
The two-trunked standard bearer.

And looked up.

Up at the top of the tree, a bird sat with two birds beside it.
Large birds with great wings. I could see only silhouette.
One turned its head and the others followed.
Small heads with thin beaks.
Strength and weakness at home, it seemed,
with one another
in each bird.

I looked away.
The mansion no longer shined.
The ivy smothered the small tree on the hill.
I saw that the eucalyptus was missing two great boughs.
The houses were newly painted.
The furniture removed.
The floors and ceilings swept and cleaned.

I sat and looked at the red house.
And did not weep.
On Poetry And Poverty

J.M. Romig

Grab the spare change from your pants pocket
and toss your two cents in.
These days we need as much as we can get.
We got a small fortune at our feet
but there are kids on your street who still need to eat,
So grab your coat and join us outside, on the front lines.
Pick up a pen and toss your two cents in.
These days we need as much as we can make,
so get off your apathetic ass and own a soul of your own.
Wear it on your sleeves, shamelessly, cause there is no place like home.
Except maybe over there, where the grass seems greener,
maybe we can collect the cash to catch a cab and find out someday,
'till then we need to re-build this house, and claim it,
Rename it, and work on changing it instead of blaming it.
We need to get the Fighters to love,
and the Lovers to fight for their love, like they used to.
We need to change how we view the situations we are facing.
We need to fix the mess that we've been carelessly creating.
We need as much as we can get,
so toss in your two cents.
We got a small fortune forming at our feet,
but people are still drowning in New Orleans,
pick up your pen and throw your two cents in,
cause if our generation is going to have a heart big enough to make a difference.
The change must come from within it.
The Undying Generation

Jessica Stewart

Live forever--
You can!
with the miracle
of healthy
eating, living,
vegetables
whole grains
whole minds
fish oil
mineral, vegetable,
vitamin packed--
nutrient infused--
antioxidantally,
you can look young forever!
Feel young forever--
ever die--
age, wrinkle
freckle or
whither dry
as crushed leaves.
No!-- you are supple,
young--
SPF protected
and moisturized!
The undying generation!
That's you--
us
Never carry the weight of age
never stoop--
shuffle to death's doors
not you--
not us!
Michael Ball lives in Conneaut, Ohio and is both a student of KSUA and a member of the IT department. He is a self-proclaimed computer geek who enjoys reading and writing Sci-Fi and Fantasy. His first book, The Stone Men, was published in 2008 by Red Dragon Publishing. For more information, please visit: http://reddragonpub.intuitwebsites.com

Sherri Quirke Bolcevic is an English major who might also be pursuing a history degree (if she is not first crushed under the weight of her academic goals). She has a towering multitude of unread books awaiting her at home, should she ever find free time for them, and hopes to one day find a career which allows her to always have an unread book awaiting her at the end of the day.

Kendra Bopp is not at all concerned that the questionable Kent State individuals she often harbors in her home will have a negative effect on her professional writing career—but she is pursuing a degree in English with a minor in sociology just in case. Her current plan is to spend two years with the Peace Corps before returning to the States to continue her education.

david a clayman
is existentialism
triple letter score

Joe Detnerski is a 36 year old Cleveland native who now resides in Jefferson. He is in the Human Services Tech degree program and is working in a Psych minor as well. He is a hobbyist photographer and artist with the dream of eventually publishing a coffee table book highlighting the beauty of nature and weather.

Abigail Frazier is a Theatre major and dance student who is usually thinking about, with, or on her toes. When she can be coaxed away from the stage, and isn't studying, sleeping late, or watching naughty British comedy, she's quite good at writing, too.

Amanda Frazier is an English major who spends a little too much time thinking of ways to disturb people with words, and way too much time thinking about words with people who are disturbed. She plans to pursue a Master’s degree in creative writing, which is just as well, because people like that shouldn’t be trusted with anything pointier than a pen.

Katrina Harris is in the pre-nursing program at Kent State. She has been in the healthcare field since she was a little girl, having been inspired by her grandmother. Her goal is to own a group home or facility for handicapped children—what she really wants is to make a difference.

Heather Martin’s Major is English and she plans on getting her masters or Ph.D. and becoming a creative writing teacher for High school. She’d also like to have a big family of about 8 kids.

Mary Mastromatteo is an English major who has dreams of eventually being a published author, but since the writing scene is like acting (you make it or you don’t), she plans on double-majoring in Geology, and hopefully one day, she will be a doctor of volcanology, walking around in active craters, looking like the nut she really is.
Jennifer Meyer is a former KSUA student and founding member of The English Society. She is currently lost at sea.

Brian Miskowich is a founding member of The English Society and was, until recently, its resident artist. He has now deserted us to pursue his art degree at Kent Main. He leaves behind several unhappy members, a couple of people who don’t know who in the hell he is, and one very lonesome platypus.

Tara Neely is a book-loving English major who one day aspires to be a librarian. Her random hobbies include reading, doodling, walking, playing solitaire, and pretending she knows something about computers. She may also be a proficient writer someday.

Patrick O’Brien is an aspiring writer commonly found lost in thoughts of his own science fiction. After graduation Patrick hopes to complete and publish his work to become a well-known author such as his idols Piers Anthony and Robert Jordan.

Jacqueline Rexford has an HST degree from KSUA. She is currently a History Major who is about to make the leap to English major. She loves nature and animals, and in her spare time you can find her either reading or writing.

Jordan Rimpela is rude, bombastic, esoteric, and uses the wrong words quite frequently despite the fact that he is an English major. We honestly do not know how he got in The English Society, or, for that matter, how he became president.

J.M. Romig is a poet, artist, and all-around idea man. He began writing creatively in 5th grade and does not plan on stopping until he dies or gets crippling arthritis. He is a freshman here at KSUA and can be found at www.quarterlife.com/the_catalyst.

Sarah Schindler is majoring in Psychology and Justice Studies. She has two beautiful children, Lillian and Isaac, that inspire much of her writing. She plans to work in a field where she can help people better their lives.

Jessica Stewart is an English major at Kent State who aspires to be a pampered castle wife—in Florin.

Briana Lea Toukonen will soon be graduating with a degree in English and a minor in business. She will be spending the summer in Germany earning her TEFL certificate before heading off to the world. She has no real plans for the future besides wanting to write, act, travel, and have fun.

Jamison VanLoocke is a 21 year old Technology student who masquerades as an English major. His future hopefully lies within the video game or film industries as a script writer. His hobbies include reading Japanese (簡単でしょう？), taking walks in the woods, and running into strange misfortunes that could happen to nobody else.