Editor's Note

"Better to illuminate than merely to shine, to deliver to others contemplated truths than merely to contemplate." — Thomas Aquinas

I was walking across campus a few days ago when I heard a visiting high school student make a comment to his friends about some of the artwork on campus. “What the heck,” he said glancing at the outdoor art. “That’s really gay.”

Ah. Classic case of the Juvenile Amoeba-Brained Art-Phobe. This type generally spends his or her time in class reading a Twitter feed or staring out the window. This is the type who copies from your test in high school Music Appreciation because he or she won’t learn the difference from a flute and a saxophone.

Now I’m not here to say that he should have loved the art. I’ll admit, the art was rather, shall we say—abstract. But I have to admit—I did kind of wish that a bird would poop on his head or that he’d trip on the sidewalk after making that comment. And unless further down the sidewalk a heaven-sent bit of bird excrement really did land on his head, I’m guessing he didn’t give his criticism another thought.

Before you get all up in arms thinking I’m rude or ridiculous, hear me out for just a second. Aside from his uneducated choice of words, the Juvenile Amoeba-Brained Art-Phobe made one capital sin as far as I’m concerned: he didn’t even give it a chance. He didn’t even really look at it.

Here’s where you see the relevance to this issue of the Canon. I really doubt that you’ll find every bit of art in this issue to your liking. Maybe you won’t even know how to respond. But I do hope that you’ll make an effort to appreciate the talent and work involved in each piece and recognize that art is full of interpretation, a window to illumination.

So before you dive in, take a moment to let go of your own Art-Phobe past, if you sense it lurking in your far-superior, college-student brain. Love it or hate it, let the art do its job. And let’s not be high schoolers about this, shall we?

Danielle Richards
Editor

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How Great Thou Art
An adaption of lyrics fitting the original tune

By Hannah DeVries

I hear the wind, it whispers ever gently
Then turns to roar, across the sunswept plain
It speaks your name, sweeps from my lips the words,
In whispered awe, "My God how great thou Art."

Chorus:
Then sings my soul, my highest song to thee
Then sings my heart, how great thou art
Then sings my soul, my highest song to thee
To God how great, how great thou art!

I see your mount, my eyes are fixed upon it
The snowcapped heights, are gazing down at me
I stand in awe, Lord of this awesome wonder
And feel so small, My God how great Thou art

Chorus

The stars above, they reign the highest heavens
And spin their tales, across the evening sky
I see the moon, a king in glorious splendor
It gently shines, to light the night below

Chorus

The ocean tide, the currents swiftly flowing
Draws me along, to grace bright heaven's shore
I feel the strength, the ocean's rising fury
Your mighty hand, I stand in speechless awe

Chorus

Where are the words, to show the sunset's color?
As you turn, this world from green to gold
The wind your brush, the sky your endless palette
You leave your mark, the universe displayed
Kiss the Rain

By Aubrey Pasker

Photograph
My boss lied to me. I distinctly remember, on my first day of work, her telling me: “it’s stressful at first, but after awhile it’s actually really fun.” Well, I fully understood the stress, but I never quite figured out where the fun came in.

During my last year of high school I took a part time job at Canada’s favourite coffee shop, Tim Hortons. Tim Hortons is the place where Canadians go—all the time. We go there for breakfast or lunch or to pass the time when we are bored. We go there to warm up during the winter and to cool down in the summer. We go there for business meetings, interviews, and casual dates. We go with our family and with our friends, before and after school, during free periods or breaks during work and on road trips and vacations. Tim Hortons is a place Canadians love—it can’t go wrong. Unless, of course, you work there.

I absolutely hated my job at Tim Hortons. I dreaded every shift. I hated waking up early on Saturday mornings, and when I had to work afternoons, I spent the day wishing I didn’t have to go. I hated how customers were impatient and unfriendly—the way they got upset with me when service was a little slow, or when the showcase wasn’t stocked with the particular kind of muffin they wanted. I hated the way they mumbled their orders and slapped their coins onto the counter without even making eye contact, and I hated the way they seemed to expect me to know exactly what they wanted. I even hated the smell of Tim Hortons. This was the greatest blow.

Before working at Tim Hortons, the smell I associated with the place was a really good one. It was the smell you could sense while walking past one of the coffee shops on a sunny spring day, the smell of freshly baked donuts and hot coffee. It was a smell which brought back memories of times when I was younger and my dad would take us to Tim Hortons on the way home from school. We would get fruit punch in glass bottles, or small cups of hot chocolate. If it was “Roll up the Rim” season we could get medium-sized drinks in order to take part in the contest. Sometimes, we would get a snack-pack of timbits (donut holes), and my brother and I would fight over the chocolate ones. Other times we would get a box of six donuts, and we would split the last one between the five of us.

That was the good Tim Hortons smell. But now, after working at Tim Hortons, there is another smell that I associate with the place. It is a smell which can probably only be smelled after spending eight hours behind the counter, and it is a smell that, no matter how many times you wash your hands or hair or clothes, will never quite go away. My brother, who also did his time at Tim Hortons, tells me that it is the smell of donut glaze and paper cups. I think it also has something to do with the brown sludge that iced cappuccinos are made of, and the blue cloths that are used for cleaning, the ones that are saturated with coffee spills, cream dribbles, and whatever else gets wiped up off of the counters, coffee machines, and tables. It’s pungent and rancid, and it made me hate my job.

When the summer ended, I quit my job and was ecstatic to do so. I vowed that I would never go back, and a few of my coworkers who resented the job as much I did looked longingly after me as I left. They told me they hoped I never had to come back. I was certain this would be the case.

That year I started my first year of university in the States. Now I was surrounded mostly by Americans, and I, along with the other Canadians on campus, began to notice all the things that truly are different between the two countries. The Canadians began
to miss things about home that we never thought were possible. Most of all, we missed the ability to go to Tim Hortons at any given time of day to get our coffee and pass the time. We knew that the nearest Tim Hortons was a mere eight hours north, in Manitoba, and we saved our Canadian coins for the moment we crossed the border at Christmas break and could get a coffee and bagel to sustain us for the remainder of the drive home. In May we were almost more excited about the prospect of going to Tim Hortons than we were about going home to our families. A few insightful guys even stocked their cupboards with large cans of Tim Hortons coffee and started a Saturday afternoon coffee time in their apartment, during which they served the Canadian coffee to anybody on campus who showed up. We missed our coffee, and our fellow Americans could never understand what all the fuss was about.

My time in the States, besides educating me in the differences between Canadians and Americans, also rekindled my fondness for Tim Hortons. I nearly forgot about all the things that I resented about the place; I even kind of missed it too. And when I came home for the summer, I needed a job. At first I decided that I should leave Tim Hortons as a last resort. I really didn’t want to work there, no matter how fond and nostalgic I was for the place; I even kind of missed it too. And when I came home for the summer, I needed a job. At first I decided that I should leave Tim Hortons as a last resort. I really didn’t want to work there, no matter how fond and nostalgic I was for the place—I couldn’t completely forget how horrible that year at Tim Hortons had been. I needed to do something different. I brought resumes in to restaurants and stores all over town, but nobody was hiring. When I found out that there were kids who had already been home from university for two weeks and didn’t have any potential jobs, I began to get a little worried. I needed a job; there were no jobs available. I reached the last resort point earlier than expected. I swallowed my pride and went in to the Tim Hortons shop where I used to work.

As soon as I entered the store, the manager knew why I was there. He smiled a big, friendly, and annoyingly smug smile, and said, “You need a summer job.” I took a breath, screwed up my face a bit, and said, “Yeah, you hiring at all?” He told me he would have to talk to the other manager, but that he thought they could get me in. He told me he would call me on Monday. I sighed in relief. It was Tim Hortons, but I had a job.

Monday passed without a phone call from Tim Hortons, and I began to worry again. They told me they would call, and they didn’t call. What was I supposed to do when even my last resort wouldn’t hire me? I looked through some classified ads in the paper and online, but there was nothing. I was certain that for the next three months I would be unemployed, bored, and penniless.

What a waste of brain power and worry. They called on Tuesday. I had a job.

The night before my first shift, I was irrationally nervous. What if I told people the wrong prices, or messed up their orders? What if the customers were rude and the managers were impatient and my coworkers were obviously unhappy to see me? What if this was just as terrible as it was the last time and I was stuck with it for the next three months? I had a hard time getting to sleep that night, and 6 AM rolled around far too quickly.

What a waste of a sleepless night. When I walked into the back room that morning, everyone seemed pleasantly surprised to see me. There was a chorus of, “oh, you’re back! I didn’t know you still worked here!” and other such things. I think maybe there was some secret disdain in these statements, as if they recognized that it is all too difficult to escape the clutches of employment at Tim Hortons. But there was also hidden joy; I, too, was unable to really escape. I, too, was forced to return. Whatever it was, I was back for the summer, and we went to work.

This time around, it was different. Maybe because I worked more often, maybe because I was no longer a high school student, maybe because I grew up and matured—somehow, I didn’t dread going to work every morning. I was resigned to the fact that I had to do it; I told myself I would have a good attitude about it, and I really didn’t mind. Besides, I
knew that I was only there for 3 months, and each shift I worked brought me closer to being able to pay for my schooling and never having to work at a place like Tim Hortons again. Along with my attitude change, my coworkers somehow seemed to accept me a little more; we had friendly exchanges and conversations. And even better, somehow, even the crabby customers didn’t seem to be nearly so crabby or so numerous. Somehow, working at Tim Hortons wasn’t so bad after all. In fact, it was, as my boss had promised from the beginning, actually pretty fun.

Of course, there were still those days. There were days when my feet and shoulders hurt. There were days when I was exhausted and couldn’t seem to do anything right. There were days that seemed to drag on and on for hours. There were days when the people I worked with were tired and sore and crabby. There were days when our conversations only consisted of complaints about our bodies and lives and other coworkers and customers. There were days when the customers seemed abnormally impatient and cantankerous. There were always those days, but those days were just part of the battle, half of the fun. Because as it turns out, Tim Hortons is about a lot more than a summer job and a town full of people who are unhealthily addicted to their “timmies” coffee.

I had a teacher in high school who was one of those unhealthy addicts. He drank a medium coffee with a small cream, and he made sure that everyone who took any of his geography classes knew it and would never forget. He was the kind of person who stopped in at Tim Hortons on his way to school in the morning and chatted with the retired men who frequent the coffee shop at early hours of the morning to sip their double-doubles and discuss the weather and the results of last night’s hockey game. My teacher would also go for a coffee during most of his free periods and at lunch. He’d go after school, probably before and after basketball practices; basically, he bought coffee whenever he passed a Tim Hortons, and he gladly accepted coffees offered to him by other teachers or students who had just made a coffee run (hence insuring that we all knew what he drank). This teacher loved his coffee, but more than anything, he loved his country, and he too, recognized that there was more to this coffee than caffeine and liquid.

Mr. B was born in the Netherlands and immigrated to Canada when he was young. Despite his heritage, however, he proudly proclaimed to be a Canadian. His favourite example of his own patriotism involved the fact that he drank so much coffee at Tim Hortons. He loved to tell us that, when he went to get his coffee he usually passed a McDonald’s in order to get it. He drove past McDonald’s despite the fact that coffee is cheaper (sometimes even free) at McDonald’s (this would normally be a major selling point for any Dutchman). He drives to Tim Hortons, not because he likes the taste of this coffee any better, and not because of any convenience or service preferences. Mr. B drives past McDonald’s several times a day on his way to buy his Tim Hortons coffee simply because, as he proudly puts it: “I’m not Dutch; I am Canadian!” Call him crazy—many people have—but I really think he’s on to something.

The thing about Tim Hortons, the thing that Canadians love, the thing that truly makes it ours, is the fact that, honestly, Tim Hortons really isn’t all that great. It is what it is: coffee and donuts. There aren’t a lot of fancy, unpronounceable words and complicated options. You can come and go within 30 seconds, or you can stay and eat lunch or have a meeting. You can bring your kids or you can bring your boss. Tim Hortons is simple. It’s open. It’s constant. Tim Hortons is kind of like Canada itself.

Within my last few years of high school I began to be faced with a lot of discus-
sessions and questions about what it actually means to be Canadian and whether or not I felt any personal attachment to that piece of my identity. The question eventually led to a rather heated debate when a lot of my classmates had to admit that being Canadian didn't necessarily mean much. The problem with Canadian identity is that we aren't entirely sure what that means. The problem with Canadian identity is that "Canadian" encompasses a whole lot of things. People around the world have ideas about what it means to be Canadian: Canada is a frozen wasteland where the people live in igloos and have pet polar bears. Canadians say "eh" and "oot and aboot." Canadians are polite and friendly, they all play hockey, they speak French, and they love Anne of Green Gables. Their police ride horses, their healthcare is free, and their military is virtually nonexistent. There seems to be a view in the world that Canada is a quaint and simple place and people. And rather than defend ourselves or debunk the myths and try to make others understand that there is more to Canada than ice and mounties, we laugh about these stereotypes and myths, and we embrace them as pieces of our identity. It's true that Canadians aren't certain about what it means to be Canadian, but somehow, all of these ideas and images do play a role in Canadian identity.

There's a guy who comes into the Tim Hortons where I work quite regularly who always orders the same thing. Because of the frequency with which he comes in, and the way in which he places his order, his is the first order that most employees are able to memorize. This man, Ray, comes in and drawsl, "Extra-large coffee, two milk, two sugar; extra-large tea, two milk, two sugar; one bag in." He always knows what the exact price will be and how much change he should receive for any denomination of money. He grabs a take-out tray for himself, because, as he says, "you all work hard already," and then he thanks us and goes on his way.

There are other regulars too. Some of them are tradesmen who come in before work and during their breaks to order coffee. Others are ladies who get coffee and a bagel in the morning and sit in the store to enjoy it. Sometimes we are able to have customers' orders ready and entered into the till before they even reach the counter or have a chance to open their mouths to speak. We are able to chat with these customers, to ask them how their day is going and to genuinely wish them a good day. These customers brighten our day when they come in, and we brighten theirs by recognizing them and serving them well.

Part of this is small town life, part of it is normal for any restaurant or coffee shop, part of it is just good customer service skills. But all of it is also very Canadian. It's simple, it's friendly and welcoming. It is what it is. Quite simply, Tim Hortons, Canada, is all about community. It's about having and making connections, about being friendly and polite, and about service. It's about involving everybody, and it's about brightening somebody's day. It's about being able to forgive a mistake. It's about being able to laugh and offer an encouraging smile. It's about being friendly and familiar and simple. There will be stress and frustration, but ultimately it's about the people. It's about the old men who come in at 6 AM to drink their coffee and talk about the game. It's about the fathers who bring their kids in after hockey practice or figure skating. It's about the people who need an early morning wake up or an afternoon boost. It's about people like Mr. B, who are loyal and excited about the prospect of a truly Canadian experience. And it's about people like Ray, because no matter what happens and no matter what changes happen, some things will always remain: "Extra-large coffee, two milk, two sugar; extra-large tea, two milk, two sugar; one bag in." And you know, even the smell really isn't all that bad anymore.
Sugar High

By Kelli Durant
Photograph
Claymen

By Carrie Goff

Photograph
DEVOTIONAL 1:

In 1665, Robert Hooke, an English physi-cist, looked at a small piece of cork through a microscope lens. He noticed tiny holes, which he believed had served as holding containers for the “juices” produced by the once-living cork tree. Hooke called these holes “cells”, since they reminded him of the cells in a monastery. Hooke reported observations of cells in numerous types of plant material; cells weren’t discovered in animals until much later. This image, taken from Hooke’s Micrographia, depicts what he saw. Here is what was written in reference to the image:

“...I could exceedingly plainly perceive it to be all perforated and porous, much like a Honey-comb, but that the pores of it were not regular. . . . these pores, or cells, . . . were indeed the first microscopical pores I ever saw, and perhaps, that were ever seen, for I had not met with any Writer or Person, that had made any mention of them before this...”

Today, we know much more about cells. The cell is the smallest unit of life that can be classified as a living thing, since some organisms, such as bacteria, consist of only a single cell. Because of this, it is often called the building block of life. Humans have close to 100 trillion cells. The longest cells in the human body are brain cells, which can reach from the toe to the lower tip of the brain! Each cell contains its own metabolism, as well as genetic information that is necessary for regulating that metabolism and transmitting information to the next generation of cells. The cell is nothing short of a tiny miracle. Robert Hooke was undoubtedly overjoyed at his discovery. As Christians in the world of science, the joy we feel at scientific discovery is deep-seated. It is rooted in the knowledge of a loving Cre-ator. Solomon experienced similar joy. 1 Kings 4: 29-34 tells us the story:

“God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wis-dom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezra-hite—wiser than Heman, Kalkol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.”

I like the New Living Translation of Proverbs 25:2. It says, “It is God’s privilege to con-
celestial things and the king’s privilege to discover them.” Like Solomon, we have the ability to learn and discover God’s Creation. My pastor defined joy this way: “Joy is the sense of inner cheerfulness that comes from the assurance of spiritual realities.” Science is exciting because it tells us more about the Him. I get the sense that the Father takes great joy in allowing us to search and discover His Creation because it reveals His love for us. Let us take joy in learning about the God of the Universe and His Creation!

DEVOTIONAL 2:

Our body is made up of many different cell types. There are skin cells, brain cells, cells that secrete hormones or mucous, muscle cells, and even cells that move throughout the body, such as blood cells. Unfortunately, some of us also have cancer cells. This fluorescent microscope image shows HeLa cells in culture. “In culture” means that they are taken from the body, and allowed to multiply in a petri dish under certain conditions. Cells in culture require (among others) carbon dioxide, nutrients, and an incubator to provide a warm and moist environment. The word “HeLa” refers to the origin of these cells. The story is captivating: On October 4, 1951, Henrietta Lacks died from cervical cancer. Cells from her tumor were isolated for testing, and proved to be very successful at growing in culture. They grew and grew, and even contaminated other cells in the lab! After Henrietta’s death, the cells were freely given to any scientist who wanted to use them, and were eventually commercialized. They were termed “HeLa” after Henrietta Lacks, taking the first two letters from both her first and her last name. HeLa cells are famous because they are very hardy. While most cells require specific levels of each growth component, HeLa cells will continue to grow even when conditions are less than ideal. A scientist once described it to me this way: “You could splatter them on a wall and they would still grow.” As I was reflecting upon this image, I thought about the negative connotation associated with cancer cells. It struck me that sin acts much like cancer. It crowds out the godly things in our lives and uses up spiritual resources, like time, that might otherwise be used in service of the King. In 2 Samuel 11:1-15, David’s lies wind up killing Uriah. One lie leads to another, and begins to grow into something totally unexpected, similar to the way that HeLa cells grow. Despite all of the discouragements, science gives us hope that cancer is treatable. The story of David gives us hope as well! His sin was treatable with God’s grace. In a recent sermon, the senior pastor at my church in California talked about grace in a fresh way. When Jesus returns, he is bringing grace in all of its fullness. We wait in eager anticipation, we can taste and see His grace on the horizon. Diseases like cancer will soon be eradicated, and medicine gives us a taste of a cancer-free eternity!
The cells that make up the tissues and organs in our body are designed to recognize when there is something wrong with them, much like we feel feverish when a pathogen has invaded our immune system. Cells have their own immune system. They have repair mechanisms within their DNA that detect and fix mutations. When something goes wrong and is seemingly beyond repair, the cell commits suicide so that it doesn’t damage the rest of the tissue. This “programmed cell death” is called apoptosis, and is initiated by enzymes in response to a stress factor, such as viral infection. Apoptosis offers many benefits to the organism as a whole by preventing the spread of infection, and assisting in development. In fact, human fingers and toes are a function of apoptosis. During development, a baby has what we would call “webbed” hands and feet. The cells in between the fingers and toes undergo programmed death when signaled by the body to do so, resulting in a separation of the skin between the bones. This image illustrates the progression of apoptosis from left to right and top to bottom. The cells appear to be slowly exploding. The contents of the cell are spilled during rupture of the cell membrane, but apoptosis also produces cell fragments that are engulfed and quickly removed, before the contents can spill out onto surrounding cells and cause damage. Apoptosis has a neat connection to our faith-walk. The Holy Spirit acts as an immune system; His convictions bring our sin to light. God loves me enough to take away anything in my life that may become an idol to me. It’s almost like a “programmed death”. The moment that I place a person or an activity above the Lord, He takes away its ability to satisfy me. David Crowder puts it this way in his song, How He Loves: “He is jealous for me. Love’s like a hurricane, I am a tree, bending beneath the weight of His wind and mercy...how He loves us, Oh, how He loves us!” The God of the Universe is jealous for our affections, and He loves us enough to take away our idols, so that we may live with all the fullness that He intended!
NYC Motion

By Jordan Edens
Photograph
Untitled
By Hannah DeVries
Photograph
Listen to the wind, its breath the sound of a million tiny waterfalls, invisible, pouring pouring through the grass.

The old oak tree creaks, grumbling at the gentle wind's teasing provocation.

Its broad arm in futility trying to suppress the young maple, and the wind chafes the wound.

Listen, too, as windmill's tink of rusted blade, broken above the well, lolls forgotten against the peeling paint.

It hangs defeated by glistening white wings dancing slow grandeur in the wind. And the wind chafes the wound.
A recent survey of Dordt students revealed simmering discontent with the news channel regularly played in the Commons dining hall. Despite attempts to choose a channel that makes everyone happy, students still aren't satisfied.

“I want more real news,” said Kelly, a sophomore at Dordt. When asked for an example, she responded thoughtfully, “Well, like, when they kept talking about Tiger Woods’ breakup, that was great. It was all about Tiger Woods during finals week in May, and I came back to campus this fall and it was still Tiger Woods. But now it’s like they’ve forgotten about him.” Kelly added that she’s hoping to form a student body to picket the Commons with signs like “We Want Tiger Woods” and “Give Us Real News.”

Sarah, a sophomore from California, chimed in. “Yeah, most of the time they just talk about stuff like the war in Iraq or hurricanes or Obama – that gets boring fast.” Sarah recommended that Dordt switch to college-age-oriented news, like “The Bachelor” or “American Idol.” Then, she says, students could save time while eating instead of being forced to make other time commitments in their busy schedules to watch the shows.

Along the same lines, a recently engaged junior, Hannah, called for more dating and engagement stories. “Everybody knows that’s the only thing college kids care about,” she stated matter-of-factly. “I mean, c’mon, what’s Dordt all about, anyway?”

A studious engineering student, Kyle, summed up the issue. “It’s time we deliberately step away from topics like national politics and world concerns. Dordt needs to realize that those kinds of things are irrelevant to students at a small Christian school in Iowa. We need a news channel that will keep us in touch with the special, cute moments of life.”

Students indicated a few recent headlines that demonstrate the kind of news they do want. “The lady throwing the cat in the dumpster was pretty funny,” said Matt. “Paris Hilton and drugs,” Christina chimed in, her friends nodding in agreement. Jared added, “Oh, and the lion biting the trainer in Las Vegas -- that was awesome.”

Student opinions in a nutshell? Dordt students like the non-disruptive, easygoing atmosphere they expect from attending a college in the middle of nowhere. They don’t want the news channel they watch over lunch to disrupt that peacefulness with topics that force them to think about controversial issues. International politics, religious conflict, legislation? Too unrelated to Dordt life. Cancer-faking bridesmaids and unclothed taxi thieves? That’s more like it.

The head honchos’ response? Although an anonymous administrator sympathized with students, she dampened their optimism. “We value students’ desires to avoid unsettling topics, but we’ll have to wait until they stop raising controversy to make changes.” She was heard to confide to a colleague, “I’d like to see ‘The Bachelor’ in the Commons too, but we don’t want them to think that voicing their opinions or protesting will have an effect. Part of college is learning to let other people make decisions for you.”
Angles

By Jordan Edens

Photograph
RUSH
By Kelli Durant
Photograph
Where I’m From

With gratitude to George Ella Lyons

By Kelli Durant

I am from close-knit ties,
from comfort zones and leave me-alones,
I am from the Mozzarella cheese nestled safely in the back of the fridge.
(White, smooth,
an aroma too hard to disguise.)
I am from the most neatly mowed backyard in town
with three pine trees lined in a row,
one racing the other two to outgrow.

I’m from dozens of Packer hats and old clothes dusting rags,
I’m from the “I’m never wrong’s”
and the “I’ll spread the word”
from “Go to your if room if you’re going to cry!”
and “Don’t worry about it, You’ll be fine!”
I’m from stuck in the muds who are always right
with a Bible in hand
and hands too fearful to rise.

I’m from Harold and Carol’s Branch,
brisk Mountain Dew in an ice cold glass,
and warm, moist crumb cake right out of the oven waiting for open mouths.
From the working jeans my grandpa still wears
to the constant sweeping of the broom,
passed along to the hands of my clean freak mom.

I’m from humid summers spent on Grandpa Field’s farm,
from towering forts stacked up in the haymow.
I am from the days of building muscle by pulling stubborn calves
that shockingly stopped once they arrived at the fair.
From late night swims in the puddle, we called a lake
and toasty pudgy pies oozing forth goodness.

I’m from bubblers, brate, deep fried cheese,
and ice cream that you just can’t beat.
From accents that don’t seem to exist,
and words that only fit our vocabulary.
Crazy cheeseheads, racing sausages,
and don’t forget those Badgers.
From a place locked behind prison gates,
and too many farms to try to get around.
Rolling hills and forest trees
make where I’m from the only place to be.
The Organ In The Cave

By Carrie Goff

Photograph
Onions

By Jordan Edens
Photograph
Ghosts of Grand Central Station

By Aanna Stadem
Photograph
I was part of it all, from the very beginning to the utter end. Now here I sit, on this pitiful throne, a dark lord of a dead world. In my own folly I have consumed all that was beautiful and good; in my lust I have destroyed any hope for life or joy, both for myself and all others. All happiness is gone from me now, and the thrill of dominance and control has turned to sorrow in my heart. The once fulfilling taste of victory and power has turned to ash and blood in my mouth.

I remember it all, as if but a moment had passed. I cannot forget it. It burns within my mind like a hot spark on bare skin, the long dark path that has led to this bitter end.

It all seems so obvious now, that my fate was sealed from the very beginning. Though it was so long ago, I can still see it clearly. Fire and smoke filled the air, and the sun glistening on the bared spears of the forces of truth seemed like a river of fire flowing slowly down the valley into the midst of battle. Before the gates of The Dark One's fortress they met—the servants of evil and the armies of freedom and truth, every people, every tribe represented. The battle raged for days, but hope grew brighter as the Enemy retreated towards the inner walls of his bastion. Then on sixth day came victory.

Would that I had known the depths of my own heart as the Enemy did on that day, I should have fled for my life and the lives of all those I once held dear.

The clamor of battle was in the air, and all of us were united as brothers against our common enemy. Man, woman, and even the beasts of the land stood side by side in defiance of The Dark One. It was all so clear to me, what we fought for, what we died for—up until that one terrible moment.

In the midst of battle the mighty lieutenant of our enemy drew up to our flank, Uthraune the Great Old Wolf, a fell hound possessed of a spirit of great malice. As the war raged, our gazes met, and it all changed in an instant as the power of that fell spirit came upon me. Though it was brief as a heartbeat, it seemed like an eternity. The world faded away around me, and strange visions swirled before my eyes. Dark voices spoke to me of my desires and my lusts, whispered omens and glimpsed futures flooded my mind. Words cannot fully express what I truly saw, save that the sorcery of the dark spirit showed me visions of a future in which I might protect all those I loved and held dear, a future made manifest by a few simple slights, insignificant sins for the greater good. It was temptation at its uttermost, purest intentions and just ends with but the smallest and most harmless of indiscretions. That moment, brief as a heartbeat and terrible as the storming night marked the drop of poison entering my heart.

The flood of visions caused me to falter for a moment, and Uthraune bore me to the ground in his ferocity. My life would have been forfeit if not for the swift action of one of my fellow captains who leapt upon the beast, driving his sword between its great shoulders. He was cast aside in the beast's fury, but his act gave me the time to strike, and I drove my blade deep into the vile creature's throat as it howled in pain and in the throes of death. With the slaying of the Great Wolf the Enemy's south front was lost and our victory assured. But my heart was troubled by the visions of Uthraune, and something changed within me that day, a subtle twisting of my heart nigh imperceptible even to the most insightful observer.

Had I known the fate that would ultimately come of that chance meeting in the midst of
battle, I should have been glad to have been numbered among the dead on that day.

The Dark One was in full retreat, he and his forces disappeared into the depths of his mountain fortress. Some of the more brash leaders among us declared that we should pursue the Enemy into his lair and seek to wipe out him and his slaves utterly. Yet those with greater foresight knew that, though the Enemy's army was broken, in the deep places of his fortress he held untold terrors and dark secret machinations of destruction; to pursue him into his final bastion would be to fly blindly into a trap.

Thus ended the Old War. So it was that for a time the world knew peace. And for a time, I knew peace as well, the dark visions of the Wolf fading from memory.

It was a full fifty years before whisperings of dark creatures and foul beasts in the night began to spread once again.

The rulers of men had grown complacent, as ever the hearts of man are wont to do. Fifty years seem so long to ones who bloom so briefly on the face of the earth. Oh the bitter irony, the knowledge of the brevity of life works in the hearts of man to blind them to the past and the future as well, yet it is in the past that knowledge lies, and the future hope. So blind and foolish they are—just as I once was. I would now trade my crown and all the treasures of the world for the peace of eternal sleep.

I was but a captain at the time, respected among the Nine Kingdoms as a champion of the Old War and renowned as an advisor and counsellor with fealty to no single country. When rumors spread from the north, I heeded the warnings knowing the Dark One was stirring, I went forth with two score of my most trusted men, skilled trackers and deadly with a bow, deep into the northern mountains, seeking for a sure sign that our Old Foe had returned. Ever we found wild beasts, great and feral tormenting the peasant folk; yet no sure proof could we find that He had returned. Further and further north we wandered through fen and field, ever watchful for some sign of the stirring of the Enemy. At last we despaired of our task and returned southward to our homes. The road back was long and slow, for we had ventured far into the wilds in our search. A full five seasons had passed from our departure when we at last saw our homeland again. Yet it was not to beauty and peace we returned—oh no indeed, but to fire and war.

We could have known it not, but even as we set out upon our search, the enemy drew the noose of his trap tighter. He had withdrawn all those he sent out to harass the northlanders but a few days ahead of us. We sought and did not find because he had emptied his northern holds and hidden places and set all his servants upon great black ships and sailed down the western coast in the shadows of the mountains. The rumors of trouble in the far-northern lands were but a diversion to draw all eyes northward and prevent us from seeing the threat from the sea.

No word nor tiding could reach me in my wanderings, for his strike was so swift and brutal that no messenger could be dispatched; or if any had been sent, they were surely cut down by the roaming hosts of his horde. I see now that these were the first fruits of my poisoned pride. I was so sure that the Dark One was revealing himself in the Far North that I stayed overly long there hoping that I might return with proof and justify my actions. I could not bear to return empty-handed. Perhaps if I returned sooner, I might have prevented much of the damage done by the Enemy's assault.

The swiftness of his blow had thrown the lands into disarray. Amidst the chaos, every lord and kingdom had forsaken oaths of fealty and friendship and thought only of protecting their own borders. I took my men and we made our way in secret across the plains to the halls of Aventale, the north-
ernmost king of the free lands. He makes his abode in the southern foothills of the far-northern peaks and thusly was the nearest lord from whom we might seek knowledge.

I held council with Lord Aventale and learned there of all that had happened in my absence— of The Enemy’s secret assault from the sea and the division and tumult of the allied armies.

“Much has transpired since thou departeth, Wolf Slayer,” he said to me. “The Enemy struck swiftly, some four seasons after your departure to seek for his armies in the far-northern lands. His forces took us by surprise from the sea, and so swift was his blow that we were thrown into chaos. I fear that our disorganization may be our undoing. Thou art wise and a champion of the Old War, what would thou suggest we do to strike against the Dark One?”

To him I said, “If we are to rally a defense against The Enemy then our foremost concern is to reunite those kingdoms that we may. Send thy messengers to thy neighbors to the East and to the West and beseech them to unite with us and make strong our northern front. I shall take my men and, since we are small in number, we may avoid the eyes of Our Enemy and learn what we might of the more southerly kingdoms.”

Though in my searching I had left the kingdoms overlong and much had transpired while I sought for a sign of Our Enemy in the Far North, we had hope yet to mitigate the damage of the Dark One’s assault. After we held council for a time, we made ready to begin our counter offensive, a two pronged strategy. Lord Aventale would attempt to unite the northern line and bring a stroke southward against the Enemy, and I was to take my retinue and make raids under cover of night to harass the enemy camps and seek to learn of the state of the lower kingdoms that we might see if they could rally their defenses to meet with Aventale’s advance.

My side of the offensive went well in the beginning. We struck every encampment we came upon, burning them in the night and sewing chaos among their ranks, though with each skirmish our numbers grew thinner. The Nine Kingdoms were in chaos, yet ever the numbers of the Enemy seemed less than was needed to overrun the defenses of the land. The confusion wrought by the swiftness of their assault seemed to be the only reason they had proven victorious thus far. This boded ill with me, for the Dark One was not one to rashly reveal his power, but forever patient— willing to wait an age for the sure victory.

All too soon I learned the purpose of his plans. When Aventale’s strike came, it was not to our aid, as we had planned, but it was under the banner of the Dark One. Our council was undone before it even began, for in those fifty years the Dark One had sent spies and workers of subversion into the kingdoms. No unity could be forged between the Nine Kingdoms for many of them had fallen sway to his lies—each promised mercy and wealth when the storm came, each kingdom believing they alone had earned his favor.

It was then that I took another step towards this bitter fate that tortures me now, though I could see it not at the time. I drew together those few I could find who were unmoved by the Enemy’s lies, and I met Aventale’s advance in battle. I personally led the vanguard deep into their ranks and struck for their heart— Lord Aventale himself. As I drew upon him in my might, I cast aside his guard and subdued him in combat. He begged for his life, saying “Mercy, I beg of thee. I sought only to protect my borders. It was a mistake, and I was a fool.” But in my fury I could see no mercy or compassion, and I struck him down. With their king slain, his kinmen lost their will to fight and laid down their arms.

I then took up Aventale’s blade, the symbol of the king’s authority, and I stood before them declaring that their lives belonged to
me in repayment for the innocent blood they had shed. Though I held no true right to kingship, in my self-righteousness I took the mantle of their ruler nonetheless. I sought to reunite the Nine Kingdoms against the Dark One by force, for the sake of my love for the innocent people and my hatred of the Enemy. In my heart I believed that my motivations were pure, and perhaps they were for a time—but this unjust claim to kingship would be the poison of my pride.

I then took the army of Aventale’s men over whom I had declared lordship, and moved first against the Enemy, clearing his minions from the border between what was once Aventale’s land and the neighboring countries to the south. Next I held parley with the king therein, Lord Spalder, an old comrade of mine; I had oft visited his land to hold council with him in the years following the Old War. He was one of the few still loyal to the cause of the Nine Kingdoms, a man of discernment and not taken to heeding the council of warmongers or weavers of lies. It was thus that we formed the First Alliance. It was decided that I should take my forces northward and attempt either to convince the eastern and western kingdoms of the North to unite with us, as at first Aventale and I had planned, or ready defenses against their advance if they too had heeded the lies of the Dark One. Lord Spalder would secure the passes to the east of his kingdom to make sure our rear holdings that we might only face the enemy on three sides, not four.

I held true to the plan, though I told not my fellow lord of the means by which I would secure the northern front. I journeyed to the western kingdom first, under a flag of truce to see if the lord therein would be willing to forsake the offers of the Dark One and unite with us. However, when he refused, as I guessed he would, I struck down the king in his very hall and set fire to the capitol. His armies were thrown into chaos at the loss of their king, and after a brief battle they surrendered. Just as before—I took lordship over them, in the name of justice for the fallen. And thus was a second kingdom added, another weight on the chains of my pride.

When I came to the land to the east of what was once Aventale’s kingdom, I feigned no treaty at all but marched upon the capitol directly and demanded surrender. I told them of my ally to the south and showed them the great host that now followed me, and they quavered with fear. Thus were the three lands of the North come under my command and the foundations for our true retaliation against the armies of the Dark One laid.

Yet the seed of my downfall now had fertile soil in which to grow, a fresh taste of authority and the thrill of victory.

I took my great host southward and met with Lord Spalder, and we began to clear the servants of the Enemy from our lands. We pushed ever westward and southward, towards the coast and those lands that lay below the meridian. Great turmoil we found in the other nations, kin fighting against kin, and the slaves of evil pillaging whatever lands they pleased. One by one we fought to cleanse the lands of the Enemy’s armies and bring peace to the infighting nations. It appeared that the Dark One had grown aware of our strength and the threat it posed to his comparatively small forces, and so his minions began to flee—to the South, and to the North and to the western coast. Though the Enemy was in retreat, he was not defeated as he had been in years prior.

He withdrew his forces for a time, and peace was again restored. However, it was during this peace that the greatest wounds were dealt to our future. After the Enemy retreated we were forced to reconcile with each other for our actions.

Council was held by the lords of the Nine Kingdoms to settle disputes and grievances in the aftermath of the chaos. My fate was the subject of great debate amongst
them, for I had taken, without due right, the kingship of three of the lands. Some called for me to lay aside my authority, others demanded exile or death as the only fitting punishment for my actions, and yet others claimed that I should retain my rule as payment for the swift defense rallied by my actions. The Lords of the lands bickered over grievances and trespasses against one another, for each land had in the desperation of those times looked to their own safety and forsaken oaths and treaties.

I offered to surrender my lordship to the rightful kings of the lands, but I did so insincerely. In my heart I knew that the people would be safer were I to be king. Yet I offered to return kingship to those whom it was rightfully due, making a great show of my humility that they might see my graciousness and think that I might be a wiser lord, more humble than those to whom it was owed. My ploy worked, though two of the lands were returned to their original lords’ line. It was agreed, at the suggestion of Lord Spalder, that since Lord Aventale had no heir and had openly marched under the flag of the Dark One that the lordship of his land would be granted to me.

It sickens me to think of my deception—the lie within my own heart that blinded me to my own true intentions. I believed in my mind that I would be a stronger lord, a better guardian of the people; yet in deepest recesses of my heart I had tasted the wine of power, and I savored it. Pride and love of power had taken root. I wonder now, if they too wanted to believe in my benevolent lies—if my comrades and countrymen saw the darkness in my heart yet ignored it, choosing to believe that my rise to power was an omen of hope and not the spellbinding will-o’-wisp drawing the unwary into the darkened moor of folly.

The council granted me the kingship of Aventale’s lands and the Nine Kingdoms returned to a state of peace for a time, but grudges and bitterness would exist between them forevermore. The trust and faith that had once united the kingdoms was shaken to its very foundations by the rash and selfish actions during that Second War with the Enemy.

It was nigh twelve years before the Enemy revealed himself again, and I took another step towards my bitter fate. His dark servants had been of minor nuisance in these times of relative peace for his force had not been entirely broken as it was during the Old War, but it was not until the twelfth year that his army marshaled once again under one banner. However unlike the Second War, the Dark One did not assault all of the kingdoms at once but instead focused all of his might upon the southernmost kingdom, the land of Lord Rondel. Slowly he had gathered his scattered forces in the hidden passes of the mountains and then crashed down upon the Rondel’s land as a floodgate releasing the waters long held back.

Lord Spalder and I held council. It was determined that he should take his forces and join with his neighbor to the west, and they would bring aid to the southern lands that they might halt the Enemy’s advance. However it was not to victory they rode, but to slaughter, for the Enemy came forth with sorcery yet unseen. Strange siege works he had forged—firing great missiles like catapult stones that worked by strange means of sorcery and dark fire such that they shattered lines and sundered fortifications with ruinous ease. The armies of Spalder and his allies were broken even as they charged, and their aid was turned to rout in a moment.

When word reached me of their loss, I was greatly disturbed. The greater force of two kingdoms had been unable to stem the Enemy’s advance, and his conquest progressively reached farther. The southern kingdoms fought desperately, but with each passing day, they lost ground. No tactic or craft of war could be found to face the
might of the Enemy’s sorcerous engines of war. Soon one of southern kingdoms pledged fealty to the Dark One, rather than face utter destruction at His hands. Every day brought another victory for the Enemy and his reach crept ever northward towards the remaining free lands.

The kingdoms not yet under his sway held council, and it was decided that we should stand together or fall alone. So it was that the second alliance was forged. The remaining kingdoms, including mine and that of Lord Spalder prepared for what would no doubt be our most desperate hour since the final days of the Old War.

However, even amongst our unity, the lies of the Dark One had weakened our strength. The southern kingdom defected not only out of fear but out of old grudges against the middle kingdoms. And of the northern kingdoms, I was the only one to send my full strength to do battle with the Enemy, each of the others instead holding back a measure of their might for defense of their own borders. So it was that even in our feigned unity, we were divided and weakened.

We met the Enemy on the field of battle—the slaughter in those days would be the subject of lament for generations. The battle was great and terrible, each side losing uncounted numbers of men. It lasted for ten days, and with each day hope faded slowly from mind and heart. The new weapons of Our Enemy wrought in dark fire and fell sorcery were simply too powerful to overcome. However, though we were losing ground inch by inch, the Dark One too was taking great losses of troops and thus was our last hope kept alight, the slightest chance to stem the slaughter. Though bitterly may it have been called hope, for on that day was my fate truly and fully sealed.

As the slaughter on both sides continued to mount I took aside Lord Spalder and held secret council with him. I said unto him “Lo, the field is lost and the sorcery of The Enemy has utterly undone us. I beseech thee old friend, say not that I have succumb to madness or some fey spirit but hearken to what I say. The Enemy is suffering great losses at our hands just as we are at his, let us hold parley with Him and see if we may not stem the slaughter.” He pondered my words for some time before speaking.

To me he said, “Were any other to suggest such a thing, I would surely renounce them as mad—but I trust thee, my friend. You were the only one who could unite us during the Second War. You are the slayer of the Great Wolf, and I know you harbor no love for the Enemy in your heart. You are my most trusted friend, and if you believe that treaty with the Dark One is a wise choice, then I shall do all that is within my power to help you.”

Oh what bitter fate, to put one’s trust in such a fool as I. Though indeed I held no love for Our Enemy within my heart, I lusted for power. Where once my intentions had been pure to protect the lives innocent—I now sought to gain power for myself that I might rule over the lands as I saw fit. In my mind I swore to myself that my intentions were pure, but in my heart I knew that darkened was my desire.

Thus, Lord Spalder spoke to the men, saying that to fight any longer would only bring about our end and that we must sue for peace with the Enemy. Our one hope lay in the chance that he might seek to preserve his dwindling strength and not utterly spend his forces in such a war of attrition. In their weariness and despair, few protested our council, save for some of the other lords among us; but they were the minority and their words went unheeded.

So it was that I marched forth under a flag of truce to hold parley with our oldest and greatest foe. He appeared in the shape of a man, twice as tall as the stoutest warrior and clad in great armor forged of blackened iron and scribed with runes of malice and destruction. Darkness wrapped about him like a cloak, and the very fires of the un-
derworld seemed to light within his eyes. When He spoke it sounded as though the earth itself were crying out in pain for the malice of his words. “Ah, come to hold parley with thy most hated enemy I see. Pray tell what hath brought thee to such a lowly state, Wolf Slayer.”

When he looked into my eyes, I could feel his gaze penetrating me, piercing between bone and sinew, seeing into my very heart just as Uthraune had those many years ago. I took a great measure of my strength to summon my resolve and reply. “Surely thou know what we seek parley, Dark One. Our forces dwindle with each passing day and hope of victory is gone from us; but we see that thou also art waning in strength and that thou loathe to expend thy army utterly in our defeat.”

It is said that the sky grows dark when the Enemy smiles, and it surely did on that day as he replied. “Ah, thou know my heart well indeed, Wolf Slayer. What little luck is apportioned to thee is surely with thee this day, for the Dark Lord of the Earth will grant thee mercy. I shall cease making war upon the remainder of the Nine Kingdoms, but in return thou shall grant to me the unchallenged rule of the lands I now possess.” It was then that he spoke the words that forever doomed what hope remained in me. “And thou must pledge service to me, in recompense for the slaying of my general Uthraune. These are my terms.”

I knew no other course of action that would spare further slaughter, and thus I agreed to his terms, though bitter they were. So it was that I swore fealty to the Dark One, speaking that ruinous oath. “I pledge my service to the Dark Lord of the Earth, both in body and in spirit; to heed his every command till the final parting at death, when spirit shall forsake flesh and make the Long Journey beyond the uttermost ends of the world.”

I returned to my fellow generals and none save Spalder looked upon my choice with approval; “traitor” and “fool” they branded me, but I had chosen my fate nonetheless. Thus did the Lightning War end, called so due to its brevity and ferocity, with the Treaty of Darkness.

There was peace for a time yet again, as the machinations of fate ever continued to march forth, like the crushing wheels of a great weapon of war, ever revolving yet forever moving forward. Yet this peace was not so fair as the peace that had come before, but was ever fraught with ill ease for the Dark One now had lawful dominion of the once fair lands we had long fought to protect.

In my service to Him, I counseled him in ways of war and in the ways of those I once called brother and kinsmen. Just as he had seen the chance for darkness to take root in my heart those many years ago when the Old Wolf had tempted me, he now saw the icy hand of greed and lust for dominion within me. He nurtured my lustful pride, giving me command over a full third of his forces, promising a fair and just rule under his name were he to succeed in his plans. I believe his lies not, knowing that his heart held only hate and malice beyond measure. I wonder now if his pride at turning a once shining paragon of truth and justice as I had blinded him to the fate before his very eyes. For it was but a short time before I would be his undoing.

The very secret of his downfall was the utter difference in our very natures. Though he was the Lord of Lies and King of Cunning, I held within me a spirit for winning the hearts of my fellows. His minions and slaves had no loyalty for him, for ever he ruled by force and pain; yet I was a fundamentally different being from he. As I still held some measure of light within my heart, some glimmer of distant redemption, so too I had the capacity to win hearts in good faith and loyalty.

What cruel irony! For all his cleverness and wisdom he could not see the fate that
awaited him. Though I was bound by the ruin-
ous oath I had sworn, I was still permitted a
measure of freedom, and thus I held secret
council with Lord Spalder, my old and dear
friend. I proposed to him a plan, a trap of
such cunning that even the Dark One would
be undone. He was to strike against the Dark
One, thereby giving him due right to retalia-
ate and make war upon the Nine Kingdoms
again. Spalder would then rally the armies
of those kingdoms that remained and make
war upon the Enemy. The final stroke of our
plan hinged upon my knowledge of the heart
of the Dark One. For in all his wisdom and
foresight, he had known the utter depths of
my heart, yet in all my years of opposing him
I too had come to learn the workings of his
innermost secret thought.

And so it began, the final reckoning of
the Dark One. Just as foreplanned, Spalder
made war upon the Enemy. Those that re-
mained of the nine Kingdoms joined him,
seeing a chance to renew their fight against
the Dark One after the peaceful years of
complacency, their hatred for my treachery
in joining the Enemy redoubling their resolve.

The Dark One sent forth his hosts to
meet them on the fields of battle, just as
we had planned. He knew of my love for Lord
Spalder and sent me to make war with him
in particular, seeking to torment my con-
science and test my resolve. He knew I could
not break the oath I had sworn, even in ut-
termest need; yet it was in this very oath
that my hope lay.

When the battle had reached its apex,
with the full host of the Dark One arrayed
for battle, the Dark One came to me and
bid me “Go forth, Wolf Slayer, meet thy old
friend in battle and bring an end to this war
once and for all.”

Thus I rode forth to meet Spalder in bat-
tle, yet in our meeting there was no battle
but unity. For just as the Dark One had
commanded me to end the war once and for
all, I would surely see his order through to
the very end. I and my forces met with Lord
Spalder and his, and we united upon the
eastern hills and struck the Enemy bearing
upon the eastern flank of his army. With a
full third of his force turned against him, he
could not stand against our assault. And I
had control over the East, wherein lay the
only safe route of retreat for the Dark One.
Thus they found themselves caught between
the hammer and the anvil, the remainder of
the Nine to the west and Lord Spalder and
myself to the east, and they were broken.

I wonder now where His thoughts turned
in those final moments of battle. Did he re-
alize the bitter irony of his final words to
me? Or in his ever inwardly turned mind of
evil, did he perhaps wonder if I had by some
deeper sorcery undone the oath I had sworn
to him? Perhaps it matters not, for in the
end he did fall. His army was cleft by the
ferocity of our assault, and his minions were
thrown into utter chaos.

We encircled his final guard with a great
number of our hosts. Even in all his might he
was not without limit. His voice could not
reach me, for I stood some thousand paces
from where he was encircled. From our dis-
tance, he could not undo his final command
to me. It was I who ordered the command
to let forth the terror of those sorcerous
siege-works he had entrusted to me. I con-
fess that I took a great measure of satis-
faction as I turned his own sorcery against
him in the end. So it was that the reign of
the Dark Lord was ended, consumed in the
very fell fires he had used to overcome the
Nine.

It was in that moment, however, when
at last our oldest and most bitter foe had
been undone that I brought about this evil
that torment me even now. I caused my
siege-works to be brought to bear upon
the gathered Lords of the Nine. Even in
their celebration their very hope was stolen
away, destroyed by me and my blinding lust
for power; for my heart had grown yet more
twisted and dark over the years.

Lord Spalder was the only lord to survive
my betrayal, for he was at my side when I gave the order. He protested my action. His misplaced trust in me would not let him oppose me with force. He stood beside me and watched as the great missiles rained down upon the gathered lords and brought them to ruin.

Thus, I said to him, "Behold, the Lords of the Nine undone. No more shall their petty grievances and grudge-mongering bring about discord. I shall rule all the lands as lord and ruler, a hard but fair king. Spalder, my old and true friend, whilst thou be my favored lieutenant? My right hand as I bring peace to the lands forevermore?"

I could see his heart was torn, for he saw great darkness within my heart and knew the evil of my actions; yet his love for me could not bear for him to oppose me.

And so it was that even on the day that our Old Foe was brought to ruin, a new tyrant was crowned. Without their Lords to lead them, the armies of the Nine, though greater in number than my force, could not withstand me. The victory was mine, and I set about establishing my rule in all the lands once held by the Nine.

In the beginning I was a fair lord, albeit harsh upon any dissent. However, as the years performed their terrible dance, my pride and lust festered within my heart. I began to take joy in cruelty, in needless displays of authority and dominion. Lord Spalder must have seen the decay of my spirit, for some fifteen years after my rule had been established, during an especially brutal silencing of an uprising, Lord Spalder came to me.

He entered my throne room with two score of his most loyal men and said unto me, "Oh thou I once called friend, I see now that my trust and love for you has been the damning of my fate." Tears welled within his aged grey eyes as he continued. "Once Thou were fair and just, seeking truth and loving mercy, yet now I see that thy heart bears no longer any semblance to that of my old friend. I name thou thus, Black Heart, and would ask thee but once to give up thy throne and, perhaps in humility, thy spirit may yet be healed of its woeful state."

I think Lord Spalder knew me better than even he thought. For in that moment there was a stirring in my heart, the faintest longing to be free from the weight of the icy hand of pride and selfish greed that had held of my heart. Yet the darkness hung about my heart too heavily to be shaken off even by an old friend such as he. And thus I stood and drew my sword, that old blade of Aventale that I had taken in my pride those years ago during the Second War.

To him I said, "Thou wilt see me unseated only so that thou may take my throne. Step forth cowardly assassin and see if thou and thy men can take me."

He and his men could not defeat me in my strength, for even in the olden days I was a champion in the art of war, yet I had also grown in strength as I delved into dark sorcery and forbidden arts. And so it was that in my very court was the blood of my old friend shed. Oh what cruel fate—a man deserves peace in his old age yet Spalder died in combat with his dearest friend, his love and pride broken. To this very day I count the betrayal and slaying of Lord Spalder amongst the greatest of my sins.

Ever I grew in evil and lust, becoming more cruel and brutal in my reign. Where once there had been some measure of freedom under my reign, there was now my ever-present taskmasters and overlords. I walked in the ways of the Dark One, continuing to breed the fowl creatures of his army, setting them as wardens over the men of my lands. Fell creatures and vile beasts were my servants now, unclean spirits and dark specters my lieutenants. One such spirit, a demon of darkness and fire, known as Flammbard became my most trusted general, my right hand, as Spalder had been.

Years passed and generations lived and died under my rule, as ever I expanded my
kingdom. I extended my reach far beyond the encircling mountains of the Nine Kingdoms, bending all I encountered to my will, both man and beast. Soon I had power many times greater than ever the Dark Lord had in his prime. Small uprisings and rebellions would take place every few years and I would crush them utterly, wiping out all those foolish enough to defy me. No kingdom nor people could hope to undo me.

One day, some hundreds of years after I had become king, my lieutenants returned to me with strange tidings. "Black Heart, Your Majesty, we have ventured far and wide as was your bidding and delved into the deepest places of the earth—yet some thousands upon thousands of leagues from here, we have found the uttermost ends of the earth and have met the ends of the earth below in that Inner Fire. We sailed beyond the most distant shores of the forgotten islands and came to a place where the land and sea doth utterly fall away into the great nothingness beyond. Truly you are the Master of All The Earth now. No people, nor land, nor power exists within the world over which thou dost not hold dominion."

And so it was that I became the Master of All the Earth. Upon hearing whispers of my lieutenants' reports, the people of the earth succumbed to madness in their despair. In their uttermost loss of hope, all those men that remained took up arms and rebelled against me. They were hopelessly outnumbered and were utterly destroyed within three days of their uprising. How strange it is, when the last of men were utterly destroyed— to walk the ways of this world no more, the only songs left to be written are ballads of triumph by evil beasts and fell spirits. So it was that nigh a thousand years after my dominion had begun, that man left the world utterly.

What happened thereafter is perhaps the only thing more bitterly ironic and unguessed than the End of Man. For a time the world grew stagnant, with no men to rule over there was no need to grow the numbers of my minions. Worthless is the dominion over such creatures, fell beasts without will or desire save cruelty and malice. The lesser of my servants tarry but a short time in this world to begin, and soon none save the undying spirits and demonic specters I had brought into the world remained. Those more clever and cunning of my lieutenants realized that there was nothing more to hope for, no lands to conquer not even mortal man to rule over. Slowly but surely discontent arose in my servants, like a ripple in the once perfectly unmoved surface of the water.

Thus it was that the Final War began. Each great spirit sought to rule over what was left of the earth, to claim what little prize was left to them in this present world. Slowly but surely those few left in the world dwindled. As each made war upon another, they were killed in turn and departed from this world forevermore.

Who could have guessed even in their most fanciful dreams that the world would come to such a peculiar fate. I the Black Heart and Master of All The Earth stood with the sole other inhabitant of the world, Flambard, the Prince of Dark Fire. A paragon once of all that was good in the world fallen to the depths of utter ruin, and a fell spirit of darkness and fire, ever burning torment were the last two creatures to bear witness to this world.

We did not even speak as we drew our blades and took place in that final confrontation that the world should ever see. How pitiful—the final two souls within the world and we did not even speak on that day! Oh, how I wish I had heard his voice but once more those many years ago, to hear some memento of the final soul to share this world with me. Fiercely we fought, sorcery and fire, darkness and malice assailing each other within that old throne room. However, in the end even the mighty Flambard could
not overcome me—too great was I to be bested even by such a great and malign spirit.

Thus it was that I, the Black Hearted King of Fools came to this bitter end. Many long years have I had to weigh and ponder my deeds and path, with naught for company but these weary, empty halls and a land blanketed in utter silence. I am the sole inhabitant of this dead and darkened world. In my own folly I have consumed all that was beautiful and good; in my lust I have destroyed any hope for life or joy, both for myself and all others. All happiness is gone from me now, the thrill of dominance and control has turned to sorrow in my heart. The once fulfilling taste of victory and power has turned to ash and blood in my mouth. Now that it is all over I can see it clearly, that single instant, that terrible and ruinous moment when Uthraune saw into my heart—was the seed that has grown into this dark and miserable thicket, strangling all that was beautiful or true.

What did I accomplish? What did I trade my joy and love for? Even in the end I am tormented by my own bitter fate; the icy grasp of lustful pride has released my heart only that I may now fully realize the emptiness of the world—the emptiness of my heart. Power and strength bring not happiness but rather sorrow and despair unending. So long ago I lived, truly lived, seeking first the joy and safety of others. Yet I died many years ago on that day when I slayed Lord Spalder, when I truly forsook any glimmer of hope to take hold of the real joys in the world.

Please forgive me, Sword of Aventale, thou servant of the hand that wields thee, slave of an evil and foolish master, for the innocent blood shed on thy blade. Oh Blade of Betrayal, taken unjustly, how I long to end this pitiful husk of a life and leave this empty world forevermore. Yet this last measure of justice have I—to shed not a single drop of blood more in this world weary of death and darkness. Here I must dwell forevermore, till the world be utterly unmade at the end of all time, or some fate un-guessed and un-dreamt befall me.
Winter White

By Jordan Edens
Photograph
A Native American Girl’s 
Letter to Alcohol

By Brandalynn Buchanan

Insidious demon in a shimmering bottle
Wretched beast of man
Drawing like sirens the weak and naive
To the heartbreak and pain locked in a simple can
Accomplice, abettor of Satan
Villainous and sweet
Calling leagues of young men
To kiss your clawed feet
Killer of my grandmother
Through the hands of another
At the wheel by a drunkard
Once a husband, once a brother
You would steal my grandfather
For days upon weeks
Another victim barely escaped
So another you seek
You found his strong son
My father, your prey
And made him a stranger
Thinner and grey
And before he was gone
His dark skin turned white
A ghost before his time
Curse of his Cherokee plight
Persuader, sweet crooner
On my blood you pounce
I refuse to open my gate
I’ll have not an ounce
They say every Native
Will die by your sword
Sinner or saint
Fall down to your horde
Not one day can pass by
Not one night I can sleep
When the fear of your hold
Into my conscious won’t creep
Has my fate been sealed?
It will take all of my will
In the Dark
(A psalm of lamentation)

My Lord, my God
Why does your golden kingdom appear to me as a mere reflection from a muddy pool?
My tribulations pierce me deeper than any needle or blade and Blessings of vivid color have faded to shades of gray.
My pain-born apathy dims the fire in my soul to pitiful embers, But they are not extinguished.

So why then, God, must I continue to traverse this monolithic crag:
That which mankind has been climbing for generations,
To only find a new peak at each breath of rest.
A new peak so colossal that its very presence is reason for eclipse.
Blotting out Apollo, in metaphor, and the hope of his rays.

No light.

Lord, I hear the people say that the pale hand grasps you when you stop seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. If this is true, I assume I have been dead for some time. Dead, without the self-honesty to address my zombie-like state. Until now.

My God, if I am some spectre, some ghostly apparition, then Revive me.
I wait on the splendor of your life-giving breath,
Chilling to the bone, yet inherently beautiful,
Like the eternally splendid rays of sunshine glistening like precious diamonds on a snow-covered expanse.
I wait on that splendor because in this moment I have

The Heart’s Voyage
(A psalm of confusion)

“Home is where the heart is.”
   My Lord, my God
   If that is true, I must be homeless
   As my heart has not yet found its place of true rest.

Is it foolish, Lord, to be discontent when I have received such great treasures?
   Are the in-born needs of the heart so great that simple gifts,
   like food, family, and shelter are made obsolete by comparison?
   My mind says no, as I am witness to atrocities worldwide, which my problems pale
   in comparison to,
   but the heart is a different ship entirely.

   The heart is a vessel made to bear the darkest and stormiest of seas
   But even the most grandiose of ships can be cracked upon the rocks.
   Mine still sails, but even in the calmest azure seascape, it allows the cool waters
   through its fractures.
   I can’t help but wonder when it might give way entirely.
   To keep it afloat, the captain has had to pitch several notable cargoes:
      Contentment
      Fulfillment
      Purest love
   Treasures of unparalleled worth, now a sacrifice to an ocean of glass.

   The true question then, my God, is whether the captain should continue the voyage,
   showing false signs of being undaunted
   Or should he return to port to let you, Lord, the true shipwright, repair the hull.
   I believe the best course of action is quite clear.
   Now if only my navigator could find the route back to port.
The Power of Nature
(A psalm of wonder)

My Lord, my God
In my sweetest dreams do I find a place
Where earth and sky meet as the ocean to a beach.
A simple field, perhaps a hillside
A sea of emerald dotted with the pristine violets and blues of various wildflowers
Wild, free, majestic, yet of utmost modesty.
It is like this pasture that I wish to live my life.
It's every moment is based on your whims.
It fits its role in your creation, yet it is happy to do just that and no more.
You can see this happiness in the gentle waves that roll through it due to a soft breeze,
heeding to your powerful whispers.

Sometimes I lay down on this fertile ground and am made witness to another of your wonders.
At night, I see a canvas of pitch-black scattered with an army of holy lights.
The pale glow of this celestial fireplace is but a glimpse of your power,
As I realize how infinitesimally minute my own existence is in this creation.
Multitudes of human lives will appear and fade in the time it takes to extinguish the light of even one of those great suns.
Yet, in light of this fierce display of your power, I am reminded of your love for such an insignificant thing as me,
And this is truly where I find comfort
Because a God who is capable of loving and elevating something like man,
In lieu of all of the other beautiful things in the universe,
Is truly worth my tongue and mind's every praise.
The Mountain
(A parable of God's imminence)

In my journey to find God,
I wandered upon a mountain and decided to climb it,
That I might be alone with my Lord at the precipice and gaze upon His majesty.
At the foot of the mountain was a great stream.
Fear grasped my heart with its dark claws at the mere thought of fording such an angry torrent,
But still I crossed
So I could see my God at the peak.

I overcame it and began my ascent through the foothills,
But a mighty storm set upon the mountain and a bright spear of lightning set the brush in my path ablaze.
Regardless, I tore through the scorching wall
So I could see my God at the peak.

I soon began scaling the sheer, foreboding walls,
But after I had climbed to a considerable height, the mountain began shaking,
And a terrifying wind threatened to cast me to the menacing earth below.
But, with the peak in sight, I used all my might to continue
So I could see my God at the peak.

I reached the very top, burned and bruised, and cried out,
“God, why do you try to separate us so fervently?”
I waited for an answer, but there was nothing.
Why would God forsake me after such immense trials?
As my heart broke at this thought, a gentle, warm breeze lightened my soul's darkness as a mere whisper said to me,

“My foolish child, you have been looking for me so hard on this peak
that you have missed me in the water, the fire, the wind, and the very tremors of the earth.
You wait upon my soft voice,
but refuse to awe at my evident power. Now,
descend the mountain and look for me
in the valleys, the storms, and the flames. I am in the quiet
and in the loud. I am in the pain
and the pleasure. I am in all before you
and will remain thusly until the day you return to the molecules from which I formed your very being.”

Without words, I descended into a new world, in awe of a God both loving and para-
lyzingly fearsome,
Eyes opened to a world completely deluged in an eternal circle of miracles,
Waiting for the next elemental wonder to grace my presence.
Prairie Grasses

By Liesl Scholten

Photograph
The Dying House

By Benjamin Hofland

So clean and bright
in defiance of the night;
Long quiet halls
muffled, as evening falls;

Set, waiting as if to be filled
with children and laughter spilled.
Like a great inn, with rooms all around
to house the sojourner, heaven bound;

Walls watch shadows ebb and flow
as bodies clinging, come and go.
Spruced, sprigged, dashes of color and light
just to hide its death from sight;

A mirage of summer's glories
to ease the pain of fading stories.
Welcome to the Outback

By Carrie Goff

Photograph
That I love myself is certain truth,  
    Liar that I am.  
    My love for lies lies in my love for gain.  
And gain I have indeed from the fruit of deceitful seed  
    Sown in malice and greed without a mite of pain.

It's true that lies have never done me wrong.  
    I swear they strike my hearing like a song  
        And that I ver'ly love to listen long  
    To verbal, artful arson stoked with agile tong.

    How wonderful, with no remorse,  
    To watch the flames go leaping high  
        As frequent practice works divorce  
    Between the shame-blush and the lie.

It's true that lies have always done me good  
    And led me into friendship – brotherhood!  
    Believe that all I want or ever could  
    I can build for myself from finest stolen wood.

My ambition is to build up to the summit of the best,  
Stand with those master liars, whom greed most ardently inspires.  
    For then I will possess as they possess,  
    Liar that I am,  
    The ability to fool myself.
"Some of those girls are really broken," I said to Rob, reclining my leather seat in Rob's beat-up Tahoe and snuggling deeper into Rob's over-sized Wheaton College sweatshirt. "I'm completely exhausted."

Although I normally stayed home with the kids, my husband put me in charge of small-group discussions with the high school girls attending the weekend retreat this year.

"Look at our small town, though" he said, "Brook Falls becomes more and more broken every day. We can rejoice that those broken people are still attending church and allowing their kids to escape from the brokenness to a relaxing, spiritual encounter like this retreat. The Spirit's hasn't forgotten about Brook Falls."

I considered his optimistic comment for a minute. "Two of the thirty did commit their lives to Christ this weekend," I told him. "And with countless others recommitting their lives to one consistent with those Christian values we discussed from Romans, maybe there's still hope for Osseo. But, I guess, who's counting?"

"One new brother or sister is worthy of endless rejoicing," Rob said.

He always had been the more positive half of our marriage. I blamed my pessimistic personality on God's refusal to save my parents. They'd both passed away in a horrific car crash a few years ago, still rejecting the church and all it had to offer.

"True, but some of their parents certainly don't give them the best model to follow," I said, thinking of Janie Harris.

Janie had only begun attending Grace Reformed a couple months before, but her parents still refused to support her decision. She'd raised the fifty dollars necessary for the weekend retreat by picking up a few extra hours at Gary's Grocery. Janie was one of the two new Christians the spiritual weekend had produced. Although she may not be the first girl I'd trust babysitting Chelsey, I did appreciate her lively character and servant attitude.

"I was meaning to ask you..." Rob began and sat up straighter in his seat and determinedly blinked a couple times. I knew he was struggling to stay awake on the dark roads. "...do you know if there was an argument or anything between Jim and Brad?"

I secretly cringed, thinking of the conversation Dana, Brad's wife, and I had just had. Jim and Brad were both long-time members of Grace and currently served as members of the session. They had grown up down the street from each other, married their high school sweethearts, and settled down in the same town that raised them. Most of the folks in Brook Falls thought they were the perfect model of the American Dream.

However, Dana's recent confession had blown that idea out of the water. "I'm simply not in love with him anymore, Tanya" she had said, embarrassed yet serious.

Brad and Dana had been that perfect couple in the church. They were a few years older than Rob and I and had led the youth group for over a decade before Rob and I moved to Brook Falls and agreed to take over.

The couple has four children—one in her undergrad at Bethel, one studying at Iowa's Carver Medical School, and two Harvard Law grads. All four had graduated at the top of their class from Brook Falls Christian, and all four served as great Christian leaders in their communities, families, and churches.

When a potluck needed planning at Grace, Dana was quick to bring enough food for several families to enjoy. If our parsonage had a squeaky door or leaky faucet that Rob simply couldn't fix, Brad would be right over. The basket of goodies they delivered to our front door...
every Christmas Eve lasted through Easter. Most recently, Brad and Dana served the church by leading the small group that Rob and I both attended weekly in their beautiful and modern home.

However, clearly that idyllic life of theirs wasn’t all it seemed to be.

“Dana—” I started, not sure how to respond to Dana’s unexpected confession.

“Don’t, Tanya,” she interrupted. “Things aren’t going to get any better. Now that the kids are all grown up, our life together is basically complete.”

“Ya...ya...you guys are so great together, though,” I said, still struggling to grasp the reality of what she had announced.

“We’re not,” she said. “We really aren’t. We made us work for the kids. They had so much potential; we couldn’t ruin that because of our failed marriage.”

As if letting me know her marriage wasn’t working out wasn’t enough of a blow of reality, Dana continued, “It’s over, Tanya. I’m in love with someone else.”

“Who?” I quietly asked.

“Jim,” she said.

“Jim, Jim Burton?” I asked, hoping I was wrong.

“Yes.” Reality came crashing in. Whatever was she thinking? How could she be in love with Jim? What about Jim’s wife, Sarah? What about their kids?

Please,” she begged, “don’t tell anyone, though. We’re not ready to deal with this yet.”

I wasn’t ready to deal with the mess either. “Does Brad know?” was all I could think to say.

“No, of course not. At least I haven’t told him. Not yet anyways. I’ll tell him. Soon.”

“Dana,” I said. I can’t remember if I had said anything else. I had nothing more to say. I couldn’t believe this was happening.

Dana continued, “Heck, maybe Brad even suspects something. I don’t know.” Her flip-pant tone turned more serious.

“Tanya, promise me you won’t say a word to anyone, not even Rob. In this small town, I’m sure that when one person finds out, everyone will know, but I’m just not ready for that yet.

Promise me.”

“I promise.”

And so there I sat, on the way back from the retreat, with nothing to say to my husband. I couldn’t lie to him. I just couldn’t.

But I also couldn’t tell him the truth. Dana had been my first and best friend in Brook Falls. I wouldn’t have survived that first cold winter if it weren’t for the weekly coffee dates with her. So I waited for Rob to say something more.

“It’s like they have some unspoken problem going on,” Rob said. “At the last session meeting, Jim was a few minutes late and took the last seat open next to Brad. He scooted away from Brad and sat as close to Gary as possible. It was like he couldn’t stand to be next to Brad.”

Rob said Jim acted like that throughout the entire meeting. If only Rob could know why.

“It was stranger still,” he continued. “Brad didn’t seem to get it. He even directed a few words at Jim, but Jim turned and asked Gary about his sons. Gary has three daughters!”

“I’m not sure,” I said quietly. “Maybe they just had a disagreement.”

“Maybe,” Rob agreed. “Have you heard from any of the women about anything? Sarah? Or Dana? You two are close.”

“I haven’t talked to Dana in awhile,” I said, which was the truth because the conversation had taken place over a week before then.

“Maybe I’ll just stop by Jim’s tomorrow afternoon,” Rob said. “If something’s wrong, I should find out how I can help or be praying for him. It’s probably just that brokenness we were discussing earlier, honey. We are all broken anyways; some more visibly than others, sure, but we’re broken just the same.”

“Yes, yes we are.” I said.
Prank Chairs

By Kelli Durant
Photograph
Dark Skies

By Jordan Edens

Photograph
Illuminate
The Canon 2012
Dordt College