Jeremy Vreeken and Anna Visser
Editors

Rebekah Dykhuizen
Graphic Designer

Cover Art:
Splatter Series: 3
by Bridget Rowe
Acrylic on canvas

With thanks to the Dordt College English department for their support, their advice, and their patience in dealing with our incessant questions and pleonastic conversations. To the students who contributed their work to bring this publication to life. And to Tanner Brasser, for his help with the little things.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dangerous Shade</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Jerusha Lynn Pimentel - Poetry</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrath</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Mandy Faber - Visual Art</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splatter Series: 2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Bridget Rowe - Visual Art</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regret</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Emily Postma - Creative Non-Fiction</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When You Pass By</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Elizabeth Riley - Poetry</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaleidoscope</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Katie Griess - Poetry</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Things</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Katie Griess - Poetry</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy Spill</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Caitlin Bronkhorst - Visual Art</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet Taren</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Jerusha Lynn Pimentel - Visual Art</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing with Darian, Breathe Easy Tristen</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Jennifer Allen - Creative Non-Fiction</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arms</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Sara De Waal - Poetry</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Corner of Reality and Imagination</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Amanda Oberman - Creative Non-Fiction</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Choose the Perfect Watermelon</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>by Kim Van der Giessen - Poetry</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Flag I/Three Panes of Glass Above the Plain</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Flag II/Three Boys on the Shore</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squash and Apples</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Love</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facing the Darkness</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahuna</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault and Battery</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Fats, Bad Fats</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faces Unknown</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malediction</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Capella</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is this most dangerous shade
Of love—a living tremor in my bones
A panting heart spraying gold and white colors, as
Soft snow and royalty adorn these moist red walls

Left and Right,
It shifts in fluid motion,
This moving warmth as
A kind of unforeseen breathing
Through the lungs of my life

A gentle touch as I sleep,
As I dream obscure things
Wakened from rowdy slumber—
Morning pricks the fragile sphere
Of floating thoughts whispered sweetly
To me as I dream

I do not know the name
VISUAL ART

Wrath
by Mandy Faber
Latex and Acrylic on canvas
Splatter Series: 2
by Bridget Rowe
Acrylic on canvas
Regret is a red-hot poker that delves into your stomach. It is acid that trickles slowly down your throat and into your heart. It kills happiness with quick precision. One moment you are walking along in a good mood—and the next, a memory of something you did wrong a long time ago pops into your mind and sinks its teeth into your pleasant attitude. This, at least, is how it feels to me.

This feeling of remorse seems to enjoy ruining my day. With its sorrowful voice, it whispers in my ear what I least want to be reminded of—Remember when you said the wrong answer in front of everyone in second grade? When you shoved your brother seven years ago and made him cry? When you wasted time instead of doing your homework junior year of high school? Accompanied with these unpleasant thoughts is the need to lower one’s head and avoid eye contact until the feeling is gone lest someone looks into your mind and sees the shameful act.

Usually, I am able to let go of these petty problems with a wave of my hand and a snack. However, this is not so for one cold memory that leaves me to wallow in regret the rest of the day until I can sleep it off. The real funny thing is that the cause of this burning, emotional pain looks like the color purple and tastes of cookies.

I was maybe six or seven years old when participants in a statewide bike ride were hosted in my small town. My father’s workplace held a meal for the riders in their gym. The great part was that I was allowed to help. I adored helping out at my father’s job. They usually hosting many events and I, being his daughter, was allowed to go. Helping out was never a job for me—it was a privilege. This event was no exception.

The minute I stepped through the double doors, I was taken aback by how many people were there. Hundreds of sweaty bodies in shorts, sneakers, and bike helmets filled the gym. The sound of conversations and laughter filled the room to the peak of its high ceiling. I felt small but no less eager to help. Quickly, someone ushered me to the serving line. I do not remember what they served, but I do remember my job. Cookies—I had to manage the cookies. The person I relieved gave me strict instructions. “Give one cookie to each person,” she had said. I took her words to heart and began my job, thankful for my mother doing her task only two feet away in case I had a question or problem.

Things ran smoothly for a while. People shuffled through the line and received their food. I dutifully offered a cookie to each one by extending my hand and giving a bright smile. They would take the cookie and thank me which made me feel like I had done them a great assistance, but the ease did not last. It happened—the one thing I feared.
“Can I have another cookie?”

I looked up to see a pair of sunglasses and a purple shirt. The grey-haired man who wore them was smiling at me. He seemed nice, but he gave me a moral dilemma with his question to which I had no answer. He had already been given a cookie, and now he wanted another. That was against the rules. I stuttered incoherently before I scooted over to my mother and asked her if I could give the man another cookie. She repeated the instructions I had been given earlier. I am sure we were to consider the amount of food we had and the number of people there, and that, I presume, is why I was not allowed to give out another cookie.

I took my mother’s words as law and went back to the nice man. I heard myself mutter out my answer of “No, sorry.” Instead of leaving to find his seat like everyone else, the man with the sunglasses smiled at me and said, “Aw, are you sure? Please?” I felt my cheeks grow warm. When I was little I always wanted to make everyone around me happy. This might have had a lot to do with the fact I hated yelling, but the need for people to be pleased with me was there just the same. I wanted to give the man a cookie—I really did—but I had my instructions. I shrank away from the man, head down and eyes darting from the cookies to him. My voice was lost in the sadness of having to turn him away, so I simply shook my head and gave him a shy smile. The man jokingly exclaimed, “Aw, man” and gave me one last smile before walking off to find a table with his friend. He was only twenty feet away when he turned and put his hands together, palm to palm, in a begging gesture. I shook my head again, and, thankfully, he let the matter be and sat down to eat.

All this happened within the span of two minutes. At first I was able to brush off the incident. I saw the man on the other end of the gym, laughing and smiling with his friends. It seemed the absence of a cookie did not hinder him. However, that perspective changed when my father came to check on me a while later when the crowd began to thin. I told him and my mother the story of the man, and my dad laughed. His laugh gave me the first hint of my mistake. Being yelled at was the worst possible thing for me, but being laughed at was a close second. My mom said she would have allowed it if she had known. Turns out there was plenty of food left. My dad said something about the riders needing the extra calories and handed me another cookie. He told me to go over to the man who was in the same spot he had occupied since he first sat down.

As sure as I was that giving the man a cookie after I denied him an extra one would be embarrassing, I stuck to my mission. My father had given me orders, and I would follow them like the dutiful child I wanted to be. I weaved
through the people intent on reaching the man in the purple shirt. I was half-
way there when I saw him get up. My heart sped up, but my feet slowed down. He was going to leave. It would be weird if the cookie girl gave him a cookie now. The fear of embarrassment brought my feet from a shuffle to a stop. I stopped in the middle of the floor and watched as the nice man with sunglasses and a purple shirt left while laughing with his friends. My stomach dropped when he disappeared from sight.

I stood there, stunned. I looked at the cookie, then at the door, unsure of what to do now. I turned away with one last unsure look at the exit and returned to my parents. My father asked if I had given the cookie to him, but I silently shook my head. My voice had disappeared on me again—only this time from shame. I placed the cookie back among the others and got ready to head home for the night. My job was over.

It was not until I lay in bed that night that I began to feel the acidic burn of regret sluggishly seep through my body. I chastised myself for my weakness. I could have taken those extra steps. I could have run up to the man and given him the cookie he desired so ardently. My mind created scenarios where I did manage to give the man a cookie. I imagined him giving me another one of his nice smiles and a big thank you while his friends nodded their approval of me. This make-believe situation failed to make me feel any better. I had been a coward. I did not give the man an extra cookie.

I told my parents once about my failure, but they smiled and shook their heads saying that was “just like me” to worry about other people’s happiness. I was not able to brush it off like they did. For some reason, this specific regret has remained with me through the years. I have forgotten most other regrets which usually include my own wrongdoings, but this memory stuck. It stuck because I had convinced myself I had ruined this man’s entire trip simply by not receiving an extra cookie from the cookie girl.

I should let it go. I know I exaggerate with my thoughts on the extent of the damage I had done, but that is the thing about regret—it does not like to be brushed aside. It stays within the confines of a person’s mind until their guard is let down. Then it springs up and attacks out of nowhere. Regret has this memory as its backup weapon for me and refuses to release it to the healing powers of time. I have managed to lessen the stinging pain to a dull throb when the memory comes up, but I do not expect it to disappear anytime soon. That would be very unlike regret.
You’ll notice an odd assortment of leftover candy –
red and white peppermints, breath mints,
saltwater taffy too hard to chew –
just sitting on the shelf outside his door.
The stale candy, the layer of dust beginning
to settle – sticky – on the mints, and the door
opened five inches beside the saltwater taffy in the glass dish,
are just another shelf and entry blending with the oatmeal wallpaper.
When you pass by his door
he’ll sit in his living room on the faded sable recliner,
fabric worn and tattered as his Irish wool sweater,
the TV shining the blue of Wheel of Fortune.
He has the kitchen light on,
yellow light mixing only with the glow of the TV.
He tilts his head at the sound of your step in the hallway
and adjusts the bowl of stale mixed nuts on the antiqued coffee table.
I do not think there is a color to describe you. I used to see you as a blazing red until you spoke and then you transformed into a soft blue. But I have since learned to label you as a kaleidoscope. Once a deep maroon and now a vibrant green, my Darling, you never cease to dazzle me.
Sometimes, when I'm feeling overwhelmed, I just stop. And look around.
And revel
in the little things like
Library coffee
Nebraska sweatshirts
Cool Weather
And I realize just how good I have it.
Energy Spill
by Caitlin Bronkhorst
Watercolor Mylar Print with India Ink
Violet Taren
by Jerusha Lynn Pimentel
Acrylic, Ink, and Oil Pastel
“Forty-seven, forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty! Ready or not here I come!” My youngest step-brother Tristen whispered into the completely silent pitch black three bedroom-two bath recently bought house hidden in the wooded Piedmont of North Carolina. My three brothers (oldest to youngest) Chris, Darian, and Tristen, our neighbor Bradley and I were dressed in all black to play hide-and-go-seek in the house. We had to wait until the sun was completely down for the house to be as dark as possible. We live in the middle of the woods, and don’t get me wrong - hide and go seek in the woods is fun, but hide and go seek in the house - at night - while our parents are sleeping - in the pitch dark - is thrilling. Thump “ssss,” Tristen tried to hold back a sound as he ran into a dining room chair. You could hear all of us hiding trying our best not to laugh and forfeit our newfound hiding spots. My lungs almost explode during this game. Slowly my eyes start to adjust to the low lighting, I could practically feel my pupils getting larger, and I can see the short skinny silhouette of my eleven year old brother sneaking across the kitchen, trying his hardest to find any sign of life. Then, out of nowhere, like the nick of a switch, BOOM - chchchchchchch, as synchronized as clockwork, thunder crashed and as the last crack rang out the rain came down. The “bottom dropped out” as we would call it. It started to rain so hard we could feel every drop vibrate from the roof down the walls, into the floor, and on our feet. The thunder stopped after one crash. Funny how storms work. I raced outside and onto the driveway. My brother Darian was right behind me followed by Chris, Bradley, and Tristen. Darian and I grabbed hands and started to dance in the rain. Tristen soon ran out and with reckless abandon let himself go along side us while the others watched, too afraid to get wet.

Tristen is a twelve-year-old fifth grader at Boiling Springs Elementary School. He loves baseball, hunting, and fishing. His favorite color is red and his favorite food is chicken nuggets. He has striking blonde hair and ice-blue eyes that will cut through your soul like a sleek shiny knife, effortlessly. To the untrained eye Tristen is like any other little boy. But Tristen is different, he has Cystic Fibrosis. Cystic Fibrosis (a.k.a. CF) is a terminal illness that affects the vital organs of the body, mostly the lungs. CF makes it really difficult to breathe.

“Are you sure you want to stay?” my mother asked as we headed for the elevator in Levine Children’s Hospital. “Yes, get some rest.” I told her as we loaded in and started to head up. I really didn’t want to stay. Boop (first floor) I was out of school. Boop (second floor) I didn’t have anything to do. Boop (third floor) and Tristen needed someone boop (fourth floor) to stay with him. Boop
spoon... A lot of people faint at the sight of blood, but we rejoiced in seeing it flow into the IV tube. It felt as though the whole state of North Carolina just let go of a breath that had been hung inside the lungs of Zeus for the past one thousand years. The sigh of relief Tristen was balled up, emotionally exhausted for the rest of the night and I am reminded once again that his life is so short.

As we danced in the rain together, Darian, Tristen and I laughed and sang. The headlights of our neighbors golf cart rode up our driveway to pick up Bradley. Chris laughed and put towels outside for us. We sloshed in the water. We laid in the driveway pretending to swim in the literal three inches of water that flowed down. Nothing but laughter. This is how I want to remember my brother. Smiling. Laughing. Not a care in the world. No hospitals or nurses. No needles or pain. Just me and Darian dancing and Tristen breathing easy.
(fifth floor) Mom needed to work. Boop (sixth floor) well, I wanted to be with him but not under these conditions. Boop, boop, boop - Ding. The elevator reached the tenth floor. “Hello,” friendly faces with a matching smile sounded off to us as we rounded the corner. We are pretty much regulars here. I could hear Tristen simultaneously laughing and coughing as he played with one of the nurses. The tenth floor smells like rubber gloves, rubbing alcohol, and - clean. It smells like a hospital.

This time Tristen’s kidneys and liver are in the beginning stages of failing. I don’t want to be here with him like this. Call me selfish, but it breaks my heart into a million pieces, every time. Thankfully, the Doctors are certain of a recovery. I arrive just in time. The nurse in charge of all things shots and vein related-ickiness is here to access Tristen’s port. His mood B-lines from cloud nine to rock bottom and all hell is soon to break loose. A port is a permanent “IV” (if you will) attached to an artery to the heart, typically on one’s chest. He, like any other person I know, is not even remotely ready for this. He gets really quiet and gets on his bed and rolls into a ball.

“Tristen, I need you to lay down flat for me please,” the nurse who had beautiful long skinny dreadlocks tied in a knot asked with a voice laced with true concern for his well-being. Tristen relentlessly complies and lays down. She starts to prep her tools while tears start to stream down his almost porcelain cheeks. The on-duty staff nurses ask my mother and I to help. So with mom at his head holding his hand and I laying on his legs holding his other, I whisper a short prayer; asking God to make this as not-traumatizing as possible for this little child as the IV nurse begins to prep the injection site on Tristen’s now-bucking chest. “No, no, No, No, NO-NO-NO-PLEASE!” Tristen cried and started to scream. The IV nurse picked up the IV needle and said “I need you to calm down, please.” My mom and I try to soothe him by asking him about some of his favorite things. A blood curdling “NO!” slips from Tristen’s mouth as the nurse touched his chest. His knees start to bend up, so I push down harder. His arms try to break the grip of my mother and another nurse. They too, hold harder. “Let. Me. Go! No, no, no, no, No, NO! PLEASE!” he grits under his teeth as he struggles. “Okay Tristen,” the nurse says. And they both say together “one... two... three!” When the syringe pulls back and blood follows, a successful access has been performed, but for every successful access there are at least two to three unsuccessful attempts. The nurse pulls back. Tristen is crying. I am holding back tears. You could cut the feeling of hope in the room with a dull
I am jealous of her arms,
and that she has so many.
They are whimsical;
they are reaching;
they are strong
yet swayed
by every whisper of wind
and every bird lighted
on extended fingers.
She is not cold
under drifts of
white.
She welcomes
every life
from above and below –
and new voices
chatter from
the dimple in her shoulder.
I am jealous of her arms.
She holds it all
and yet
not as labor
but as existence.
I lay myself into
an upturned hand
and imagine
what I would touch
if I could reach so high.
Youth beckons children to the strangest of places as it is never satisfied with monotony. Dropped off at the corner of a ramp onto the highway, my friend Gabby and I reached our destination. The place exists just outside of a residential area on the edge of a high school. The last place one would expect to find a tranquil getaway. A wooded area, thick and overgrown, all but lost to the people passing by. Not quite a forest, but larger than a typical patch of trees in Sioux City.

Dust from the highway swirled through the air around us. Branches crunched beneath our feet. Trees loomed above us, filtering the sun through the leaves, tinting everything with a green hue and leaving areas speckled with pure, afternoon sunlight. The sound of cars passing by rumbled in the background. With a little imagination, we’d dip into a different dimension, an enchanted forest of some fantasy land.

But this forest’s tale was yet to be told. Before coming here, we had begun writing a story that took place in the fantasy land of Malasare, where odd mixed species, animals that were traced from a large How-To-Draw book, roamed. We had created Malasare to be a forest-ridden land. This day’s adventure allowed us to do research into what our forest world would be like.

Before taking out our notebooks, we wandered this new place. A small stream wove its way through a miniature cavern in the underbrush. Its winding path piqued my curiosity. I could imagine it larger, like the Grand Canyon. Fascinated, I watched a small green leaf float on the water. Sticks no larger than my own finger created bridges across the gap.

The underbrush cut at any uncovered skin. Every small rustling of an animal could be heard: birds flying branch to branch, squirrels running up trees, and even a bunny scurrying through the brush. I watched the squirrels as they ran up the trees, stopping periodically to look around and flick their bushy tails before continuing.

The occasional car passing would jolt us from our exploration. Dazed and confused, our heads turned toward the road, eyes wide. My heartbeat sped up, feeling as if I were Bonnie and Clyde, running from the police. A few more cars would pass, leaving us frozen in place. As the car’s noise softened, we reunited with our fantasy world.

After wandering for a while, we found a fallen dead tree to sit on. Finally, we settled down to do what we had come to do, write. I pulled apart the Velcro on my plastic blue purse, revealing a notepad and multiple writing utensils. Stealing ideas from the inspiration found underneath the rocks and floating down the stream, Gabby and I began to create our world, Malasare. Starting with the basic setting and working down to the emotion our characters would
feel as they entered it for the first time. Eagerly, my left hand made hastened marks, nearly scribbles, on the notepad I had brought.

My hand began to write slower when my inspiration drifted away. Eventually, I stopped writing and lifted my head from the notepad. I looked around, a smile spreading across my face. With a deep breath, I took in the fresh air. The wind didn’t have any distinct scents lingering in it, making an attempt to describe the smell worthless. The crisp feeling as the air funneled into my lungs, however, left a distinct imprint in my memory. This mixture had a different sensation as it flowed through me. Despite the pollution around it from cars, it felt untouched by such chemicals. In fact, the very opposite, the breeze felt raw and youthful. I breathed fresh air, not the same “fresh air” that I could get by merely stepping outside my house.

After taking the deep breath, I continued to search my surroundings for more inspiration. My brain tingled with excitement. Loose, unformed ideas gently bounced in my head, ready to be formed. But the surroundings distracted my mind from forming these ideas. Gabby looked up, apparently finished with whatever she had written, and called for my attention.

In the serene stillness around us, we discussed our writing. For me, the prologue we had set up came to life within the new setting. I could picture the chase and the exhaustion of the character’s faces better as I learned how difficult it could be to run through the thick underbrush. But I became distracted. The secrets within beckoned me with the sweetness of a Siren’s voice. We agreed to continue to explore the place.

Though we had been certain we had explored the majority of the small forest, we found out our assumptions were wrong. To the right, more forest. To the left, more forest. We hadn’t travelled most of it; we had merely made our way to the middle. This realization left me both enthralled at the promise of more adventure and scared, wondering if we would find our way out. How large could such a place be? The wooded area, passed daily by cars in a matter of seconds, we couldn’t completely traverse in a handful of hours. We continued on, climbing over fallen trees and through strange plants.

As tiredness began to eat away at my energy, impatience sunk in. We only had a limited amount of time given to us, which was quickly becoming lost as we continued our journey. I questioned whether or not the allotted time had passed already but was left with no means of checking.

However, curiosity pushed away my irritability and concern for the time. I had to keep going; I had to explore. What more could be here? What strange secrets did this place hold? Every new finding proved unsatisfactory. I needed
more. Curiosity numbed my tiredness and propelled me forward.

My memory here is faded, an hour of my life gone. The emotions I felt are all that remain, even partially lost in time themselves. Like overdrinking, the hangover of excitement left no memory of what I had found, only a hazed feeling of adrenaline and awe. The fascinating small wonders I found within my exploration are only a distant thought. Some intriguing design in the bark of a tree, a deer passing by, a bird’s nest, whatever I saw, lost.

The last of our journey I do remember. The bumpy forest floor began to ascend into a hill, arching steadily toward the slowly setting sun. By this time, my feet had an achy feel to them. My breaths were deeper and louder. I remember my surprise as I spotted East High School on the top of the hill. What surprised me was how close a place like this existed to civilization, yet appeared untouched by any sort of human contact. No litter such as plastic bags, beer bottles, or paper was found in the place. No sign of paths made by a constant trampling of feet. It seemed to remain secluded from its surroundings.

We made our trip back home close to suppertime, our mothers upset with our late arrival. Despite our mothers’ anger, we felt at peace. The place had served as a getaway from everyday life and a chance to dive into our imaginations. For years I have longed to go back, to explore and learn more of its secrets. I seek the passion, excitement, and curiosity once found there in my youth. I desire to get away from my everyday life and retire once more into the sweet embrace of nature and my imagination. It will always be my Malasare.
How to Choose the Perfect Watermelon
by Kim Van der Giessen

Drive to the Farmers’ Market, that one on Ballinger Way. When you get out of your car make sure to lock your doors, even though you can see your car from the market, don’t trust that others won’t try to steal it.

The first thing you will see when you get out of your car are two big wooden bins, one of corn and one of watermelon. Walk over to the barrel of watermelon. You will probably see a couple soccer moms digging through the melons, ignore them, they don’t know what they’re doing.

On the top of the pile you will see one beautiful watermelon, perfectly green with no yellow splotches. Move it aside. Look for the ugliest watermelon you can find, it will also be the juiciest. Pick it up. Make sure it is big enough for all of the people it will be serving. Put the watermelon to your ear and knock on it twice. It will take a couple of tries before you know exactly how a perfect watermelon sounds. The sound is a hollow one, like a tree trunk or an empty trash can.

When you go to the cash register make sure to grab two honey sticks, a blackberry and a honey suckle. Set the watermelon down on the scale and be very kind to the cashier, she has had a long day dealing with tired customers. When you get back to your car make sure to put your new watermelon on the floor by your back seat. If you put it in the trunk it will roll around and if you put it on the seat it will fall off and crack and bleed out on the floor.
VISUAL ART

The Flag I/Three Panes of Glass Above the Plain

by Brett Jasper

Oil and Acrylic on canvas
The Flag II/Three Boys on the Shore
by Brett Jasper
Oil on canvas
Relationships
are certainly
a tiresome necessity
in life.
If I could lay on my back
in a field of colored gourds
soaking up sun
and dreaming
about far-away oceans
for a good long while,
that would be just fine.

Except,
without people
all the stories
would be dull
and the gourds
would take on
too much
sun
and rot
back into the ground
from which they first came.
And we could not bake
butternut squash with apples
and turn the whole arrangement
into bright orange soup
or delight in earth
that brings such sweetness
to a table.

So, on two legs,
we trundle about
trying to make meaning from each
other.
At least we can make soup.
There is then still hope.

Squash and Apples
by Sara De Waal
I can still remember seeing the house for the first time. One could call it love at first sight. With excitement whelming, I charged up the steps of the patio and pushed past the red-painted wooden door. I was immediately swallowed underneath the high ceilings, surprised at how small I felt inside its cozy outdated papered walls. I kicked off my shoes, and took off in a sprint, slipping on the wood floors before coming to the yellow shag carpeted staircase leading to the upstairs chambers: our bedrooms. [Stomp, stomp, stomp, face-plant]...but, I wasn't fazed; I was on a mission. I made it to the top of the stairs and sauntered from room to room until happening upon my room. And there I stood, frozen in the doorway, my lips parting as the smile spread. I can remember plopping down in the middle of the room, Indian-style, dreaming up all the fun things my mom and I would do together. I remember the way it looked, drinking in the large space around me, the walls beige and blank (later to be painted lilac and yellow, then as a teen to red and cream). I remember the smell: musty, yet sweet. My heart lurched, my tummy twisted—I was in love.

My home from 1st-12th grade was an old (nearly a hundred year old) quaint gray paneled home with a red-painted wooden porch. It was situated on Bridge Street, only a skip and a jump away from downtown Cannon Falls, Minnesota. I fell in love with the town just as much as I had the house itself. I fell for all the comfortable friendliness a town of 4,000 produced, for the warm smiles and friendly faces. I fell for the cutesy parks, bike trails, and historical old-fashioned buildings on Main Street. I became attached to the revving of truck engines, the thick smoky smell of exhaust as they drove away, and the twang of country music blaring loud out rolled down windows. The town itself was a charmer, a sweet, smooth-talking gentleman.

The town was safe. With the majority of neighborhood lights out around 10 p.m. most nights, the nightlife was just about as crazy as school teachers and city councilmen sipping light beer and throwing back an order of wings at Chuggers on a Friday night at 7:30. I fell head over heels with the feeling of security, and the perks and quirks of small town life.

Home, however, wasn't always endearing. After spending many years there, I began to see Home in a different light. Home had his downfalls. Sometimes Home would bore me to tears. I started to become frustrated with Home. I was annoyed when the most exciting thing to do on a Saturday night was to sit parked in City Parking Lot (commonly referred to as “City”) and gossip about what Cassie Dulek wore to school the other day. “Did you see her purple hair?” “And those pants? Rainbow leggings, honestly?”

I hated the fact that in order to do anything fun—for example, shop, go
to the movies or dine out—a minimum 15 minute drive was required. I began to feel caged in, suffocated, and confined. So in common small town fashion, my teenage years gave way to an obsession with popularity and alcohol induced head-spinning fulfillment. I’d justify my illegal behavior and rebel-child activities with the phrase, “There’s nothing else to do in this town!” Although jaded logic, it became a motto. My idea of home and my feelings for home shifted.

As I grew, my relationship with Home changed. I began to feel ashamed of Home. The bigger I got, the smaller my gray paneled house on Bridge Street became. With 3 bedrooms and 1 bath, our house was the perfect size for our family of 4, but embarrassingly tiny in comparison to the mansion-esque, crisp white-paneled homes most of my friends had. Whenever I got together with groups of people, I’d automatically rule out my friend on Bridge Street.

For me, home had lost its spark; the magic was gone. I was all too familiar with the twists and turns through the neighborhoods and alleyways. I could practically drive downtown Cannon Falls with my eyes closed and still make it to my destination without qualms. In my house, I’d memorized the creaks of the floor boards and the squeak of the second-to-last step from the top of the staircase. I became a pro at opening my bedroom door quietly, and closing it quickly again before turning on my lights so as not to wake my parents in the room just down the hall. It was all too comfortable, too monotonous. Like a dog on a leash, I’d explored my territory, done my sniffing and made my markings. I’d made the most of my life where I was, but now I was leashed, stuck in a little square of same-old same-old.

When I graduated high school, and took off for college, I packed up my belongings and said goodbye to my dear friend, Home. I walked away from my bedroom, the gray paneled house on Bridge Street, and the town of Cannon Falls, leaving it almost as empty as it was when I first laid eyes on it. With nostalgia and tears welling, I left home realizing that not only had I filled this space, but this space had also filled me.

In my bittersweet escape, Home and I parted paths, I said goodbye, and I left for Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. Sioux Center, a town of 6,000, in some ways reminded me of Cannon Falls. And now, with every revving truck engine, or friendly face in the grocery store, I am reminded of home. Sioux Center, like Cannon Falls holds a similar small town charm and safety, but the smells are different the smiles are different, and there’s a whole new sets of twists and turns that I’ve yet to find comfortable familiarity in. I never thought
I’d admit it, but dorms and college apartments have nothing on that little gray paneled house.

Still in college, I am a wanderer. I’ve left home behind but have yet to find another to love. I return to home a few times each year, pushing back the red-painted wooden porch doors and entering into a place of love. Inside my old little gray house, memories were made.

Memories whisper at me from the outdated papered walls. I step inside, overcome by the musty yet sweet smell. The ceilings, though once overwhelmingly high, seem lower now than they did those years before... but somehow they fit just right. With each returning visit, my heart lurches and tummy twists settling into a feeling of comfort and joy I’d long forgotten, neglected, and had come to miss.

Thoughts of home still warm my heart; Home will always occupy that special place. As the years continue pass, however, I am beginning to come to terms with the fact Home and I are no longer as compatible as we once were. Home was my first love. Home taught me things no other place could have taught me, and gave me experiences no other place could have given me. Home romanced me, entertained me, and protected me. Home loved me, and I loved home, but that love has changed now, faded into the background. My love for home has become a thing of the past. I will always care about home, but I will never again feel that same kind of wonder and delight for Home that I once had those years before.

No matter the circumstances, Home will always stand as an important part of my life, and in my journey to adulthood. I will most likely continue to visit Home on occasion. Every now and then we’ll reconnect and spend a few days together, but never for long. Though we shared so much, I fear going back would only lead to further suffocation and frustration.

I’ve outgrown home. I’ve come to crave something different, and felt my heart drifting towards a larger city. I’m looking to move to a larger city straight out of college, just to experience the thrill of something new. Big city life is new, and exciting; big city life is not Home. Big city life is dangerous and mysterious—a leather-wearing, motorcycle riding, tattooed bad boy. Big city life lures and entices me. But just as most rebellious flings come and go, perhaps this lifestyle too will be short lived.

I may someday find another home in a small town similar to Cannon Falls. I’ll settle in and fall in love all over again. Sometimes I like to dream
about my perfect home. In many ways, my perfect home resembles my first. I imagine it with similar charm, similar perks and quirks, with safety and a similar sense of familiarity, but larger—without suffocation, without boredom. Finding a new home is scary. My future love may have his downfalls too. Perhaps my new home will annoy me with new things, and challenge me in ways that call for uncomfortable change. And I know I'll miss my cozy outdated papered walls, and the smell of foggy exhaust coming from large noisy trucks. But hey, love has it's struggles, and I'm moving past that. No matter the fear, I believe there's something new ahead, a love yet to be discovered. I am excited to fall in love again, but I'll always be thankful for, and I'll never forget the memories I once shared with my first love.
Facing the Darkness
by Jerusha Lynn Pimentel
Black and White Charcoal
VISUAL ART

Highland
by Jordan Lubben
Medium Format Photography
Kahuna

by Aubrey Pasker
Photography
My name is James P. Harrison. Maybe you’ve heard of me. I’m Chief Executive Officer of High-Charge Inc. Head honcho. High commander. Caesar Supremo. Well, at least I was. Right now, I’m out of a job, out of friends, and out on bail. Here’s how it happened:

It all started with a phone call. I was sitting in my office, minding my own business, when suddenly the phone on my desk rang: once, twice, three times. I sighed, reaching for the phone as it began to jangle once again.

“Hello,” I said, “This is James Harrison. How may I help you?”

“Oh, Jim, thank goodness!”

“Who is this?” I asked. The voice sounded vaguely familiar but I couldn’t quite place it.

“This is Mark. Mark Colbert? I was the guy from marketing who presented on our new line of Super-Charge 12’s.”

“Oh yeah. I remember now; the laptops that are supposed to run for twelve hours straight, right?”

“Yeah, that’s right. The only problem is, they aren’t getting such a super charge. In fact, the battery doesn’t even go up to 50%!"

“What! That’s ridiculous!” I shouted, “High Charge Inc. is committed to giving our customers the best charge for their charge!”

“I’m sorry, Sir; but they just aren’t charging fully” Mark said, “In fact, they’re only going up to 49%. After that they say ‘plugged in, not charging’.”

“Don’t worry, I’m on it!” I said, and hung up without waiting for Mark’s reply. I was determined. Resolute. Immovable. I would get to the bottom of this and restore the pristine image of High Charge Inc. In short, I would be the hero. I called together the necessary people: the board of directors, the President, the Vice-President. This infestation would be stopped; balance – and charge – would be restored!

“Ladies and Gentlemen” I said once everyone had arrived, “We have a problem. Our new line of computers...” – I paused for dramatic effect – “isn’t charging properly.” This revelation was not met with the shocked gasps and intake of breaths I expected; if anything, the audience looked bored. I tried again:

“AHEM! I just said OUR NEW LINE OF SUPER-CHARGE 12’S ISN’T CHARGING PROPERLY! The batteries only go up to 49%! They don’t work! They’re broken!”

A hand in the back shot into the air.

“Yes?” I said, relieved. At least someone wanted to know more.

“Well . . .” came the voice from the back, “you said the computers don’t work; but they technically still function, don’t they? They just don’t charge all the way.”
“Just don’t charge all the way?” I repeated, dumbfounded. “I don’t think you realize the gravity of the situation. If our computers don’t fully charge, we lose customer confidence. And if we lose customer confidence, we lose customer business. And if we lose customer business, we lose money. And then . . .” I gathered my breath, “WE GO OUT OF BUSINESS!”

“Surely you’re being a bit overdramatic,” the company VP, Julie Albert, stammered. “I mean, yes, we certainly need to address the problem, but go out of business over it?”

Things were not going well. Everyone seemed to be conspiring against me, and though no one said it out loud, I could tell they were all thinking: You brought us here for this? Couldn’t it have waited for the monthly board meeting? Nevertheless, I kept my cool and pressed the advantage I did have.

“Well”, I said, trying to sound as sensible as possible, “As you mentioned, Julie, we do need to deal with the problem. Maybe it won’t cause an instant downturn in our sales, but over time . . .” I stopped, letting the phrase hang in the air.

Slowly, heads around the room started to nod. “I suppose we should do something to address it,” said one board member. “Yes, I agree,” echoed another. Finally, someone turned to me and asked, “What would you recommend?”

“Well,” I began, “the problem is a technical issue, not a marketing or financial one, so I’d suggest we let our tech team solve it.”

There was a general aura of relief in the room at this statement. Everyone was glad that this would no longer be their problem, that they wouldn’t be the ones accountable for finding an answer. I was glad too. I went home that day, sure that our company’s programmers and computer engineers would find a solution within weeks, if not within days.

If only it were that easy.

I got up early the next morning, showered, shaved, put on my best suit, ate a hurried breakfast, and kissed my wife goodbye before heading off to work. Today would be a good day; I could feel it. Not everything was resolved yet, but no doubt it would be soon. It was Friday; if I could just make it through today, my worries would be behind me – at least for a couple days. Of course, I’d still have memos to look at, emails to send, sales charts to study – but at least I’d be at home, able to work at my own pace. I was just thinking about all my wonderful weekend plans when disaster struck. It was the VP, Julie, already looking haggard though the day had barely begun. Her brown hair was frazzled, and instead of her usual smile, she wore a distinct frown. I sensed danger immediately
and used my tried and true defensive mechanism for such situations – camouflage. I spotted several of my fellow executives in the hall nearby, exchanging greetings, and turned quickly to join them. Unfortunately, however, the lioness had already spotted her prey.

“Jim!” she called, “Come over here a minute. It’s urgent!”

I sighed. At least it had been a valiant attempt. “What’s the matter?” I asked when I reached her, trying to sound concerned rather than anxious to take flight at the first opportunity.

She took a deep breath before she began and I prepared for the worst. Finally, she said, “I was wrong yesterday. I just talked to our CFO and he said that sales have been dropping on Super-Charge 12’s for over a month, now. Evidently, this battery trouble has been going on for quite a while and it just didn’t come to our attention until yesterday. IT has been working on it for a month but they haven’t gotten anywhere. It looks hopeless!”

I suppressed a groan. “Julie,” I said, trying to put the best possible spin on things. “If the tech department’s already been working on this, it just gives us a head start. I mean, imagine how much time we’ve saved compared to if they’d just started yesterday,” I finished, forcing a laugh.

“Yeah, I guess so,” she said, “It’s just that . . . well, they don’t think there’s going to be an easy fix. The people I talked to said that the battery has to be completely replaced on every Super-Charge 12. With the type of batteries we use that could cost fifty, maybe sixty, dollars per computer.”

This time, I wasn’t able to hold in my groan of frustration. I put my face in my hands and closed my eyes. Finally, I looked back up. Julie was still standing there, looking flustered, but less so than I’d expected.

“We’ll get through this”, she said, “Like you say, the tech people have been working for a while now. I’m sure they’ll figure something out.”

I nodded, trying to convey more assurance than I felt, and said goodbye to Julie. I told her that I needed to sort through some files in my office; what I really needed was a Strawberry Daiquiri. I took one from the office fridge and added up figures in my head as I drank. They didn’t look promising. Two-hundred thousand computers in the model line times fifty dollars apiece would be a ten million dollar loss – NOT an acceptable figure. I took another generous swig of my daiquiri, pushed the problem from my mind, and closed my eyes, breathing in and out slowly – the last thing I need was to start hyperventilating right now.

The weekend came and went; days passed into months, and still there was no silver bullet, no miracle drug, no cure-all. Complaints were coming in by
the hundreds now – calls, letters, emails – and I was beginning to get desperate.

In my desperation, my hopelessness, my despair; I went to my last resort – my wife. I will have you know, here and now, that it was she who planted the idea in my head, she who encouraged me in my foul deed. It was this woman you gave me, Lord; she gave me the apple and I didst eat.

“Sweetie,” I said late one Thursday night after a busy and frustrating workday, “I’ve told you about all the problems we’ve been having at work.”

She nodded with what seemed to be a sympathetic look on her face, but I could tell from her glazed eyes that this line of conversation had ceased to interest her after the first fifty times I’d brought it up. Despite her lack of interest, however, I plunged ahead. Always before, I had simply wanted someone to talk to, to share my burdens with. Tonight, however, I had decided that I needed more than that: I needed advice.

“Sweetie,” I began again, trying to find the proper words for my thoughts, “what would you do if you were in my position? I’ve had five different meetings with our computer technicians and they all say the same thing: ‘The only practical solution is to replace the batteries.’ Do you have any advice?”

My wife gazed into space for a moment, thinking, then said “Well, pose you’ll either have to replace all the batteries or you’ll have to make it look like the problem’s fixed.”

“Well,” she said, waving her hand airily, “The customers will be happy as long as they think their batteries are fully charged, right? So make the batteries say they’re fully charged.”

Realization dawned on me, and I grabbed the nearest chair for support, stunned by what my beautiful, intelligent, wonderful wife was saying. How could she even consider such a thing? It was ludicrous. Immoral. Criminal. And yet… the more I thought about it, the more the idea took hold of me. This was the perfect solution. No more customer complaints; no more lost sales; no more expense replacing non-functioning batteries.

I considered the solution from every angle. The foremost question in my mind: would it work? I felt certain that it would. The customers would never know the difference, or else would chalk it up to their own miscalculation of battery life. Our company would have a new model out by next Christmas; I’d made sure of that as soon as I’d found out about the problem with our Super-Charge 12’s.

Of course, I knew it wasn’t ethical, to say the least, but I justified my
actions, telling myself that what the customers didn’t know couldn’t hurt them. Besides, I’d truly done the best I could. This was a last resort. A desperate measure. Possibly the only way to prevent bankruptcy. And where would the customers be if High-Charge Inc. went bankrupt? They’d be out one of the best computer firms on the market, that’s what? And what about all the workers employed by High Charge? They’d be out of a job, on the street starving to death—or maybe getting government welfare and dragging our nation deeper in debt. Either way, unacceptable! This wasn’t just about me; I had a company I was responsible for; a reputation to uphold. Even if we didn’t go bankrupt, how could I show my face in public when the headline came out “High-Charge Computers: The Price Is High But The Charge Is Not”.

I stayed up a while longer, still pondering, and when I finally went to bed I dreamed of policemen and computers and angry customers throwing dead batteries at me; it was a welcome relief when my alarm finally woke me up. Despite my nightmare, however, I knew what I had to do; I pushed unwelcome thoughts out of my mind, dressed, and headed off to work.

As soon as I reached corporate headquarters, I walked briskly down the hall towards the technology and electronics department, not slowing my pace until I reached the glass double doors under the plaque Tech Services. I walked up to the desk and arranged a meeting with one of the associates. Soon, I was sitting in a spacious conference room across the table from a geeky looking youth with thick-rimmed glasses and a silver Tech Service badge plastered to his shirt.

“How can I help you?” he asked.

“I was just wondering” I replied, “whether – just hypothetically, of course – there’s a way to show a different charge on a computer battery than the battery is actually getting?”

“Well”, my young geek friend said, “It would depend on whether you have physical access to the computer or not – all hypothetically of course” – he grinned, giving the distinct impression he knew more than I would have liked – then continued, “I assume that you don’t have direct access to the computer, in which case you’ll need an app that could be downloaded onto the computer and make the battery register as fully charged.”

“Could you program an app like that?” I asked.

“Certainly,” he said, grinning again, “Starting now?”

“Right now, if you like,” I responded, and couldn’t help grinning back. We were in this together, now, and I was certain I couldn’t have found anyone better for the job.
It took awhile before the new app was ready; between the programming and raising of consumer awareness, it was nearly a month before we had our battery recharge app ready for download. Once customers knew about it, though, it was easy to market. “Having Battery Problems?” our ad campaign asked, “just download our app, free of charge, to get a charge.” Customers who called were directed to our website to download the app; emails were sent to the customers who didn’t call; pamphlets were even mailed out to make sure no one missed out on this “opportunity” to get their battery problems fixed.

For awhile, it worked. Sales went up; complaints went down. Our new line of Super-Charge 14’s came out and business boomed despite the recession all around us. What more could we want? But then, just a year later, everything changed.

You see, it only takes one irate customer to ruin everything, especially when that customer is persistent, suspicious, and financially well-positioned. Mr. George B. Cunningham just happened to be all three of those things, and when his Super-Charge 12 still didn’t charge properly even after downloading our free app, he decided to investigate. We tried to put him off, to tell him that he was just imagining things, but he wouldn’t buy it. At that point, we made a mistake: not I personally (I wasn’t involved in handling this customer or things would have been done differently), but our Customer Service Department. Instead of offering to buy Mr. Cunningham a new computer or even to replace his battery with a new one, we sent Mr. George Cunningham on his way with nothing for his trouble – no solution, shoddy service, and a fifty-dollar service fee. Can you imagine us, High Charge Inc., treating our customers that way?! It’s no wonder, then, that after his visit with us Mr. Cunningham immediately called his attorney and filed suit.

Truth made a quick and unwelcome appearance once the investigation started. We tried to cover things up and even managed to take the battery charging app off our website before anyone could examine it, but it was easy enough for a team of experts to look at the copies already downloaded onto ten-thousand or more customer computers and prove that the apps were indeed fakes.

Needless to say, customers and stockholders were appalled; sales dropped to record lows, and complaints poured in faster than the waters of the Great Flood. Within two months of charges being filed against us, our stock had dropped to under half its original value. At this point I was placed on “indefinite leave” – a polite way of saying, “you’re fired.”

But High Charge’s troubles didn’t end after I left; within a year High
Charge had filed for bankruptcy. Meanwhile, I was having my own problems: hate mail flooded my email account, my phone rang incessantly, and both criminal and civil charges were laid against me. Everything I had dreaded, everything I had imagined in my darkest nightmare, had finally come to pass. Nevertheless, I kept a brave face. I tried looking for a job. No such luck. I’d have been fortunate to have gotten a position as city rat catcher. My first hearing went as bad as my job search: not only was the evidence against me airtight, I also got the most inept lawyer in the whole city – despite having paid a hefty sum for a “professional”. That brings me to today. I’m still on trial and things are going no better; in fact, they might be getting worse. I dumped my old lawyer and got a competent replacement, but I doubt that will be enough to win my case. Thankfully, I’ve resisted the urge to punch my wife, George B. Cunningham, or anyone else involved in this fiasco; so at least I won’t be charged with assault – only battery.
I don’t really care about almonds. Actually, I love them, but mom says not to eat too many because they’re so fattening. But eat them, she says, because they’re good for you. But don’t eat a lot, cause they’re packed with fat, and so are avocados—don’t eat too many avocados but you should eat some because they’re so good for you. Good fats. Bad fats.

Trying to be a good fat myself.

I don’t even look at ice cream and I don’t think about cake. I have never liked either much, anyway. Trying to remember how much an ounce is, I mean an oz. is. All my almonds are gone. I just ate them all while writing this poem. Can’t remember the taste.

I only eat bread made of whole wheat—dark and rich and brown and dense and never, ever sweet. This is the bread for me because it’s straight from the ground, mostly, and has been through less machines than white bread. I think.

I never wash my fruit before I eat. It drives mom crazy and dad crazy too, except he only gives me looks. I can handle looks.

I am afraid of cheese. I look at it and crave it, sometimes, but the yellow stuff makes my whole tongue wince because it remembers when I was ten and grabbed a great big chunk and shoved it in my mouth. There are taste buds all down your tongue and even in your throat, you know, and during those few moments of gnashing away at that soft yellow block of cheddar, every bud tasted cheese and cheese was all my mouth knew.

I was the hungriest fat girl you’d ever seen.
Faces Unknown
by Jerusha Lynn Pimentel
Black and White Charcoal
When the congregation stood up to sing the final hymn on Sunday morning, the music never started. There they all stood, hymnals open, one hand supporting the spine, the other, smoothing the pages out so the music was visible. Backs straight, mouths all but open and ready to sing. For a split second, there was dead silence, and then the rustling started.

People flipped pages back and forth, as if the music wasn’t starting because they had found the wrong page. They shuffled their feet, itched their elbows. Women smoothed their hair and skirts; men, their ties, while trying, inconspicuously, to check their watches. Little Paul Benson craned his neck, trying to see the organist. Old Mrs. Fernwood turned to her husband, who was mostly deaf, and whispered—loudly—“What’s he doing over there?” The rest of the people looked over too, and echoed—more discretely—her question.

He, that is, Old Man Grout, the church organist, was standing up. For nearly fifty years, he’d sat on that organ bench every Sunday morning, his skinny arthritic hands pounding out hymns, his feet in their trim leather shoes, dancing along the pedal board. Some of the younger members of the congregation weren’t entirely sure they’d ever seen him anywhere but at the organ, and the children were convinced he never left. Christmas songs were his favourites—you could tell by the way he played them, a little fuller, a little faster, using more trumpets and deeper bass. But he wasn’t a fan of Easter music—not enough variety; and the old Psalms were too obscure for his tastes.

But it wasn’t Easter, and the song they were supposed to be singing certainly wasn’t a Psalm. Nobody could figure out why Old Man Grout wasn’t playing through the final phrase of the song by way of introduction. By this point, they should have been halfway through the third verse. Instead, he just stood, and they just watched.

Emily Harris, Jane’s granddaughter spoke up. “Mr. Grout, do your feet hurt? Or your hands?”

The people around her began murmuring, acknowledging that she had asked a good question, that they had been wondering the same.

Old Man Grout shook his head. “Nope.”

Benjamin Stokes ventured the next question. “Is there something wrong with the music? Do you need more light?”

John and Beth Lewes, the church janitors, who were sitting behind Benjamin, huffed. Of course there was enough light—they had changed the bulb themselves, just last week.

Old Man Grout shook his head. “Nope.”

Pete Granger called out from the back, “Well what about the organ—is there a problem?”
The people at the front nodded and muttered, agreeing that that must be it.

But Old Man Grout shook his head again. “Nope.”
Little Paul Benson looked around. “Then are we going to sing?”
Old Man Grout shrugged.
Pastor Jake, who had been strangely silent up until now, finally spoke. “Well, Old Man Grout, I guess we’re at a loss then. Care to tell us what’s going on? Is it the song? Or have you forgotten how to play?”
“No, it’s not that either, pastor,” Old Man Grout said. He was still standing, shoulders slumped. His fingers hung at his sides, his pointy leather shoes turned inward.
Mrs. Fernwood asked her husband again, louder this time, “What’s he doing over there?”
And Emily Harris piped up, “Mr. Grout, can’t we sing?”
Old Man Grout turned and looked at the organ. His hymnal was set up on the stand, open wide to the right page. The lamp was shining brightly, and the right stops were all pulled—lots of trumpets and plenty of deep bass in the pedals.
He shrugged. “Oh, I suppose we should. I just thought I might like to try singing this time. I’ve been on that bench for fifty years you know.”
Pastor Jake smiled. “Well, why didn’t you say so? Go ahead, Grout. Sing along!”
The congregation gasped.
For a split second there was silence, and then the shuffling began. They lowered their hymnbooks. They ran their fingers down the page, looking for instruction on how to sing without an organ. They looked at each other. They looked at Pastor Jake. They looked at the organ.
“Let’s sing,” Little Paul Benson said. His mother shushed him.
“Yes, let’s,” said Pastor Jake.
“No organ!” Old Mrs. Fernwood croaked. The rest of the adults echoed.
“A capella,” said Pastor Jake.
The congregation shuffled. They whispered. They muttered and murmured. They looked around and rustled their pages. Then Old Man Grout opened his mouth. Pastor Jake opened his mouth. Little Paul Benson and Emily Harris opened their mouths. And they sang.