
THE SUSQUEHANNA REVIEW

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ISSUE 15 STAFF

THE SUSQUEHANNA REVIEW

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

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Sincerely,

EDEN

BECCA GRISCHOW

Adam was always run-into-the-father ready
before Eve had even found her underwear
sandwiched between the folds in his comforter.

By the time Adam was in his jacket, flipping the light switch,
Eve was still searching for a sock or condom wrapper,
praying for a power outage.

So it seemed only fair when she asked if he'd pause,
just this once, in the space between sheets and shoes
and let her really see him

the way she did in Eden.

Adam peeled his jeans back to the ground
and stood before Eve with textbook diagram grace,
exactly as exposed as the day God made him,

and while Adam was naked and maybe ashamed,
Eve, still wet with sin, laughed
till she felt one rib give way.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE TEMPLE CLICHÉ

BECCA GRISCHOW

Maybe my body is a sandcastle
tucked above the lip of the tide
built with lopsided turrets
and an uneven seashell drawbridge
crooked, careful details
crafted just because.

Maybe it's a cobwebbed windmill
that slowed to a standstill ages ago
with ivy reaching to cover the places
where the wood is rotting away.

Maybe it's a butterfly house
that's only closed for the season
or a paper mache monument to itself
or a gutted car that somehow is still running

or a condemned church
built from ash and apple cores
whose floor is fogged over with unholy handprints
stained glass shattered at the doorstep
where I keep crawling back to worship.

MOUTH GUARD

BRANDON HANSON

There's this show on MTV called "Ridiculousness," where Rob Dyrdek, 42, is the coolest, wittiest, snap-backin'est, high schoolin'est adult ever, and he spends 22 minutes of a half hour around 10pm laughing at and narrating videos he hand-picked from the part of the Internet where people get hurt. The Monster Energy Drink logo is stitched on the front of his caps, and he wears overlarge sweatshirts also bearing the Monster Energy Drink Logo. He rolls the sleeves to his elbows. He is always ready to skateboard. His co-star, Chanel West Coast, is Los Angeles beautiful. She throws her whole body into her laugh.

Tonight, I'm watching Ridiculousness, limp, mouth slack. The videos go like this:

A large child, wearing sunglasses, stands on a rock in a raging river. He poses for a picture. He is then pelted by paintballs that streak across the screen. He shrieks. He has absolutely nowhere to go. He lifts his leg up and covers his face with his arms over and over, screaming, "I swear I'm going to kill you guys!"

A pastor stands in a courtyard, amidst a prayer circle. He holds a pigeon in his hands, and as he finishes his hymn, he tosses the pigeon in the air. It lands seven feet behind him with a thump, dead.

A woman, probably mid-forties, wearing her burgundy cardigan and khaki capris and flats, tries her hand at the dirt bike. Her family stands around her. She slams the throttle, and she screams at the camera before she collides with her sister, who is in a wheelchair.

"Jesus!" Rob Dyrdek says, throwing his hands in the air, yelling at the floored woman on the huge screen, "Your sister just ran over you with a 250 Kawasaki!"

I feel that touch of sleep absolve me of Rob Dyrdek, and somewhere between the slow blink of eyes and the pulsing ache of my calves and back, I fall asleep.

"Oh, this is gonna be good," says Rob Dyrdek, his voice bouncing as he rubs his hands together. The crowd around him is raging, he is shaking his snapback head and smiling. Chanel is pushing her hands over her dress, smiling and looking around at everything in the room. The huge screen, displaying the videos, is on me now, and I am laying prone on the dusty grass. This is fifth grade. I am sixty pounds.

“Why is the biggest thing on this kid his eyeballs?” says Rob Dyrdek.

I remember this. The way that helmet hurts. God. Every night, I have to rub away a hot rectangle from my forehead, where the helmet presses into me like it’s trying to kiss my brain.

I am lying across from Cole Dollar. Cole Dollar weighs 90 pounds. He ran for 23 touchdowns in seven games last season. He has leg hair like my dad. We are on the cusp of a Nutcracker, as we call it, like actually call it, where Cole Dollar and I roll over, stand up, and slam into each other. That’s it. And it’s all I think about all day.

Today Cole is especially unhappy, because his dad, the same one who beats up his wife and went to jail after being tazed once in the chest, and once in the testicles, is especially unhappy, and he is our assistant coach, and he made the whole team do up-downs until one kid puked and then he laughed at the kid who puked.

The whistle blows. I roll. Cole rolls. He hits me so hard I feel his lungs hug my lungs.

“Oh, oh, oh god! Hahahaha!” screams Rob Dyrdek. He pauses the video, and points at my body, aerial, spinning. The crowd roars, they slap their knees.

I watch myself take thin, shaky breaths, then claw at the dirt while I scramble to my feet. I watch as the team hangs their heads and move on to the next thing.

I sputter my breath and jog over to them, and we line up in rows like this:

PAIN	PAIN	PAIN	PAIN
PAIN	PAIN	PAIN	PAIN
PAIN	PAIN	PAIN	PAIN
PAIN	PAIN	PAIN	PAIN
PAIN	PAIN	PAIN	PAIN

Cole’s dad screams at us to get on the ground. We whimper through our mouth guards, and sink, paw away the rocks, as we lay on the ground, eyes to the sun. Cole’s dad screams for us to lift our legs, so we lift our legs for three minutes. Our vertebrae arch, our abdominals burst at the seams. He screams for us to chop our legs, and we do, and this always rips us to pieces.

“Beat your bellies!” he screams, and I see his shadow, blurry at the appendages with his thick arm and leg hair, pass over me as he paces. He sweats through his sunglasses, paces our pain square, and we hammer our bellies with our dirty little fists.

“Scream!” he screams, “Scream!”

And we scream through our mouth guards, and beat our bellies, and my back streams pain from the bottom vertebrae to my neck, and my guts mash, and I am still dizzy from Cole’s hit, and Rob Dyrdek is there the whole time, roaring with laughter, screaming at the screen:

“What is this?” he says, and Chanel West-Coast laughs her horrendous laugh, “A cult?”

The TV is still on. My mouth tastes like sleep. Rob Dyrdek looks confused. On his screen, flickering in a grainy, black and white image, is a girl, in a thick black dress, playing in a blizzard.

The film spatters black flecks over the white rage of the storm, and Rob and Chanel and the audience are quiet as the girl's figure dances about, pushing the snow into piles with her bare hands, letting the icy wind whip through her hair. She is squeezing handfuls of snow and letting the water run down her arms, where the wind blows it thin across her skin and it freezes. She prances, and with every kick we see her little buckle shoes blur in rhythm.

The film goes on like this for an hour, and the audience's faces are sinking as they watch the girl slow down. Her arms are crossed tight over her chest, her hair is frozen. She stumbles up a set of concrete stairs, and her body falls against the wooden door. She is still. The camera zooms out to a huge brick building, maybe a castle, four stories, with windows, set under arches, gathering the snow as it fell.

I'm up again. I watch myself make my first tackle in football. It's sixth grade. It's from the ground. I have learned to fight from here.

The running back cuts through the hole, arms tucked over the ball, head down, and I stick my entire leg up, his shins connect to mine in two thuds that jolt up my leg, and he flips over. It happens just like that.

"That's a baller move right there," says Rob Dyrdek, eyes closed, smiling, nodding, clapping his hands.

Awake again. "Where the hell did this video come from?" says Rob Dyrdek. Chanel West Coast's eyes, a deep brown, framed with eyeliner wings, are wide open.

Sitting on a pedestal in front of a silver cross, grazing the ceiling, is the little girl, dead, in her black dress, eyes white, vacant, encased in a glass box. Pointing at her is a nun.

"You must ask," she says to the other little girls and boys in black, "If you wish to go outside."

The kids are silent. The audience is silent.

"Or this is you," the nun says, simply.

I'm up. We're hitting the Gilman. It's my freshman year of high school. The Gilman is a long, heavy sled, from which a man-sized, cylindrical cushion juts out. We are charged with pounding it up, then slamming it down. Jeremy slams it down. Jesse slams it down. Matt slams it down. Tyler slams it down. Tony slams it down. Jimmy slams it down. Louie slams it down. Cole

slams it down.

I load up my stance and lunge at the Gilman on the whistle. I throw my whole body into it. I pump my legs, lift it into the air, and I twist my back to wrench it down, but instead, I slip beneath it, and the sled lands heavy on my legs.

The pressure is insane. I push at the bag, but it won't budge. I feel the long bones in my legs bending. The whole team screams, Rob Dyrdek, screams, "Oh, shit!"

My teammates rush to either side of the sled and lift it off me. I am fine. I wobble to my feet, and I remember the way my guts feel, the way my teammates look at me as I walk to the back of the line, their frowns through their facemasks, and I wish that that thing would have just broken both of my legs.

I'm not falling back to sleep by now.

"Jesus," Rob Dyrdek sighs. A scene of a shirtless guy in shutter shades trust falling the wrong way off of a hotel balcony is cut short, and replaced with the black and white grain again. We see two nuns, in a cemetery, with a street sign reading "Seventh Street" in the forefront. They throw the glass box that holds the little girl into a hole that was dug fast. The glass shatters, the whole crowd cringes, throws their hands over their ears. The rest of the video is 45 minutes long. It is the nuns, in full garb, piling dirt, spade by spade, into the grave, as the video flits its black and white specks on the gray of the whole thing.

Sophomore year, when most people had quit, and eleven of us remain healthy, my coach insists that we block with the icepick technique.

"Imagine," he says, "that you are holding an ice pick in each hand."

We all nod, our dirty hair dripping sweat into our eyes, our bodies wet, grabbing every flying particle of dust that we've kicked up. Rob Dyrdek stands way behind our coach. I see Rob in someone's yard through the fence down the street, and I can't hear him laugh, but I can tell that he is.

"Now, you're going to hold the ice picks like this," says coach, and he presses his fists together tight to his chest, so his elbows flare out, "and jam them into the defender's chest."

I ice pick my heart out, loading myself up in the hips and slamming into number 44, the biggest guy on North Dickinson's, five-time state-winning team, and I am chopping my feet, but he is a wall, and I am a breeze.

Cole peels out of the backfield with the ball tucked between his gorilla arms and his gorilla chest, and I hear those feet cranking only the way Cole's do, and number 44's eyes shift to the ball, and like the genius he is, he throws me backwards into Cole, and we collide, and my arm is locked into Cole's, and I land flat on my ribs, and Cole lands on his head. We gained one

yard. I am wheezing.

“This is a segment I like to call, ‘Teamwork,’” says Rob Dyrdek, rubbing his hands together, running his tongue over his smiling lips.

Cole snaps to his feet and shakes his head, muttering, “What the fuck is wrong with you?” My organs wither away. We return to the huddle. The quarterback will pass the ball. We are on the line again, and again, on this play, I launch out of my stance and ice pick Number 44 for as long as I can. The ball is in the backfield somewhere, and number 44 is looking for it, so he leans into me, and I load all of him and all of me into my legs, when number 16, from the far side of the field, blitzes at me in ten yards’ worth of furious steps and launches himself into my distended left leg, and my knee crumples under my body at an angle I only see in Rob Dyrdek videos.

“Oooh,” says Rob Dyrdek, scrunching up his face and turning away from the screen. Chanel West Coast feigns vomiting as the crowd covers their eyes.

I am on all fours, breathing in and breathing out and breathing in and breathing out, and I push myself to my feet, and an arc of lightning shoots from my left leg to my hip bone, and I bite on the mouth guard and scream, and hobble back to the huddle, and the quarterback says something, and we get on the line, and I ice pick Number 44, and we get back in the huddle, and I ice pick Number 44, and we huddle, and ice pick, and huddle, and ice pick, and all the while, Rob Dyrdek is watching me from the end zone down the field, the small muscles in the corners of his mouth turned down in disgust as I put weight on my leg, over and over, and every time, it wobbles like I’m rubber.

I walk by a lady on Seventh Street, around 2:30 in the afternoon, on a Saturday. I’m walking off the stiffness in my left knee, and it’s a great day for it. It is 77 degrees outside; the sun is bouncing off the bleached sidewalk. I see the lady from the bottom of a hill, and she is doubled over. She wears a thick brown parka and long black pants. She is dragging a full travel bag with a sleeping bag strapped onto the handles. Her face is caked in a deep red foundation, cracked and fissured where her wrinkled face is compressed. Her eyebrows are graphite, drawn on huge. In place of her eyes are two black slits. She radiates pain like heat.

As we pass each other, silent, I feel the warmth sucked from my body, and I am frozen to my last fiber, and whether or not she is magic doesn’t matter, because either way, she has me watching myself, bird’s-eye, as I walk down Seventh Street, staring forward, and my courage is buzzing on the ground beside me, and her agony is way down the street, warming the atmosphere.

“You guys are losing 48-0,” laughs Rob Dyrdek through the earhole of my helmet, and he starts clapping his words, “How! Do! You! Even! Do! That!”

He's somewhere, and I'm sprinting down the sideline, and the rain is plastering my skin, and their cornerback has me covered, and Rob Dyrdek is screaming, "This is your last chance." Our quarterback pitches the ball to Cole. Cole sets his feet, cocks his shoulders, and launches the ball sixty yards in the night air. This is a halfback pass to the end zone. This is a miracle thing.

I look up. The man covering me is keeping up, easily. Our feet chop in unison. The lights shine through the haze, and break apart in the bars of my facemask. The ball is there. It hits the defender's finger tips, and something in me tells me to hit the ground, and so I hit the ground, and the ball spins loose into the night, and it's all there: the medial collateral ligament, torn, and healed, the abdominals, strong, Cole's dad, back in jail, Cole, himself, my friend, the Gilman, slammed into the ground, the Homecoming game, me, pounding my chest, standing over their star quarterback, writhing, the pigeon, on the ground, the kid, painted, the wheelchair, tipped, and the dust, falling.

I catch the ball. The crowd, on the sidelines, in Rob Dyrdek's studio, goes wild. Chanel West Coast blows me a kiss.

I sit up. I am cold, wet from the grass. Cole jogs to me, and helps me to my feet. He tells me it was a nice catch; I tell him it was a nice throw. I look around. The lady from Seventh Street came to the game. She's there, on the sidelines. Both sidelines, actually. I look for Cole's hand on my back, muscular, but instead it is thin and pale. I look at him, and she is there instead, and she looks at me with her slits for eyes. I look up. The scoreboard reads only zeroes. The light shines on her, all twenty-one of her, on the field. She is the fans storming the field for the other team, and the fans trickling onto the field for ours. She is hugging me, saying nothing. The rain is melting the foundation off of her face, and underneath, there is more foundation.

I look up. Rob Dyrdek floats there, his snapback flipped forward, dripping rain. He is holding Chanel West Coast's hand. She is in a flowing white dress, her hair is soaked. They say nothing.

I push the lady off me and peel my helmet off. By habit, I rub the hot rectangle off of my forehead. I take off my shoulder pads and all of the ladies from Seventh Street watch me do it. I pull the jersey off the pads, and drop them.

On my jersey, the number 84 is green. The body of the jersey is white, spattered in blood and dirt. I can't tell what is what. I shove my face into the jersey, and weep. "Uncontrollable Urge," the Ridiculousness theme song, rumbles in the night like thunder.

A POEM THINKING OF ORPHEUS

COLIN CRISS

I witness a hunting man
and his daughters discover
a fawn, leg-wrapped in the bushy shade
of a still-leafing tree. Submissive and kind
it only tips its ears—they tremble flatly
back as when, newborn, it streaked
first circles around its mother
in the waving grass, soaking wet
from birth and dew. Here,
the fawn begins to call at the people,
a throat-noise like an engine failing
to turn. The hunting man gathers
the fawn in his arms, securing
the legs and knees, the warm body
pressing to his woolen layer.
One child strokes the fawn's markings—
wild, white with joy—
and then the man slits its throat.
He cuts from its ribs through its gut,
scrapes its acrid soup-stringed hot tripes,
and scuffs ground-rot on them. By its legs
he swings the fawn home, the children
just behind him, following.

NORTH AMERICA ABSTRACTED

ANNA GIRGENTI

Backwater:
part of the river untouched by the current,

stagnant as
my Alaskan summer, or a body
not dead, afloat.

If I were a fish, I'd die soon,
the way I refuse to move, glued to a
blue wall. But

ate ikwe¹ always something grows

in fallen tree trunk, fertile and hollow;
in half-sunk ship;
in my silver pregnant mother face-up
in a bathtub.

At night I feel the build-up of stones in my throat.
The white men upstream call this
January,
do you feel lonely?

If I were a width, I'd be bomb shelter,
six-inch plywood on the edge of rose-tint

Translated to English from Ojibwa, atekwe means in woman

salmon eggs hatch in the palm of my
tongue like beads of ice they
spin into the stream

I feel a cold front coming but
not for now, for now

is wet pelt and ripple.
No give, no sound but the quake
of gunshot and a language dying

do you feel empty?

and on the bank a split char,
a woman without her womb.

FORGETTING

HENRY HIETALA

Where is it?

Amelia stops searching and looks out the kitchen window. The sky is grey, the rain constant, and the peat wet. Pneumonia weather—or, as Lorne calls it, a Scottish heat wave.

She scoops an egg off the pan and slops it on the plate. Oil drips down the sides of the spatula. She checks the breakfast. The base of beans, baked into lumps and lathered with juice. A galaxy of black pudding, starred with oats. She has always relished the moment a fitness guru American tourist asked where it came from. Sausage, blackened at the tips. Half a tomato—fresh, leaky red, never the canned shite other Bed and Breakfasts serve. Everything is fried, even the toast.

No bacon. Amelia checks the pans on the stove. Only grease and water. Not on the counter, in the cupboard, or the rubbish. Where is it?

She looks at her list of kitchen supplies, checking the date of her last supply run. Two days ago, as she thought. No note on bacon. She reassures herself with a chuckle. My memory has not gone yet. She picks up the incomplete breakfast plate and curses in her mind—never out loud, she is forty years past her profanity prime.

“One Scottish breakfast for you.” She sets the plate in front of the young Dutchman in the dining room. “Sorry, we are out of bacon. Would you like more tea?”

“No.”

The Dutchman has stayed at the MacLeod House for the last two nights, setting out for long treks after breakfast. Amelia cannot decipher his dreadlocks; to her, they look like paler, longer links of the sausage on his plate.

He finishes breakfast. Amelia offers him a ride to the bus stop, which he takes as an insult. Her face goes red with shame. First the mess of a breakfast, now this. She prides herself on her service, taking the disappointments of guests personally, no matter how trivial. A forgotten mint on the pillow makes for some head-racking; anything beyond that and she broods for hours on end. When the Dutchman tries to underpay her for the stay, she fully expects it. But she can't move on price, even if the breakfast was incomplete.

The Dutchman sets off down the road. She crosses his name off the guest list, taking

long breaths.

Lorne's colossal snore echoes from upstairs. She lets him sleep. Endless years of marriage and he has gone from tea at five to dozing past checkout-time. Lorne has slowed down.

She checks the meal cards for her other guests: American family, due in the dining room at 9:15. She starts cooking their breakfasts. Minus the bacon.

On her way to the car, Amelia hides the 'No' on the vacancy sign. Her mood has improved, mostly due to the American family's lovely little girls. She drives south along the Skye coast, headlights skimming the haze. The rain has eased up. A car approaches and she veers on to one of the pull-offs, letting it pass on the narrow one-lane road. No wave or nod from the driver; surely a tourist. She wonders if, in ten minutes' time, her husband will be checking the driver in.

A scarf of mist wraps around the mountains. Amelia knows that, somewhere beneath the vapor, Greg Thomson's sheep are grazing. Lorne used to work the croft with him, until he could no longer distinguish the numbers on the wool. Now he receives two pensions a month: one from the government and one directly from Greg, who, unlike most of the highland renters, always appreciated his friend's labor. Greg still drives him to the pub for football matches.

Amelia stops at the store just north of Portree. Greg's sister Catriona owns the store, which is stocked with essentials: toiletries, Talisker, groceries, hardware, and plaid umbrellas (the only consolation for the tourists).

It was an easy decision to travel there for bacon; she needed flour anyways. She brings the two items to the counter, bracing for an exchange with Catriona. By some demographic fluke, Catriona is the only other old woman within thirty kilometers of the MacLeod House. Aside from age, proximity, and a resounding hatred of Labour, the two have nothing in common. Catriona runs her store ruthlessly, overcharging locals and tourists alike; Amelia gives out free biscuits to her guests. Catriona walks ten kilometers a day; Amelia has a lavish belly from years of fried haddock. Catriona drinks Tennent's at Portree pubs, berating footballers or rugby flankers or dating show contestants or whoever else is on the telly; Amelia sips Scotch in her living room, hearth crackling, a McEwan novel open in her lap. The two are far from friends, and Amelia only speaks to her when necessary. She prefers the company of Lorne, her guests, or her irregular book club at Broadford.

"Bacon again?" Catriona asks with raised eyebrows.

Amelia ignores the insult. "The bag disappeared this morning."

"Lorne didn't eat it?"

"No, he doesn't like bacon." She hands Catriona a five-pound note.

"One of the tourist shites then."

"They're good people." Amelia's usual response. She bags the bacon and flour herself.

“Bye.”

“Aye.”

—
The “No” is up again in front of the vacancy sign. Rain falls fast. Amelia rushes inside, not bothering to lock the door of her car.

Aside from Lorne, the house is empty. The family has already set out for the day. He sits at the counter, eyes distant, newspaper upside down in his hands.

“You never told me you read like that,” Amelia says, laughing.

Lorne turns it right-side up and looks at her.

“Was it another American?” she asks.

His cheeks flush with confusion.

“Our latest guest. You flipped the no sign.”

He glances at the front door.

“I had it down this morning,” she says.

Lorne thinks, his beard clutching his chin like a hand.

“No one came in?”

He shakes his head and mumbles sorry. His hands tremor, a condition that has worsened in the last year. She shrugs.

“At least you’re getting outside.”

She walks to the kitchen and sticks the bag of bacon in the freezer.

Greg Thomson’s car honks outside. Amelia calls upstairs to her husband.

“I can’t find it,” he shouts.

“What?”

“My Staggies scarf!”

She finds him tearing through the closet, coat hangers piled on the floor. He unhooks and re-hooks them as she rifles between flannel sweaters and worn leather jackets. She digs through the dresser and checks the briefcase under the bed, peeling a cobweb from the latches.

“Lorne, you don’t want to miss your match.”

He picks up the final hanger. She hopes for one of his curses—gobshite, aw dobber, that’s a wee jobby—because she hasn’t heard one in months. Instead, he stares blankly at the mess of dust and fabric.

“Go on,” she says, “I can tidy this up.”

He nods thanks and heads down the stairs. She watches his wobbly steps, his unsteady hold on the railing. He puts on a coat and walks outside. The car engine fades into the sound of the downpour.

Amelia sighs. The scarf is the third piece of clothing he has lost in two months.

The American family returns after dinnertime. The wife leads the way reluctantly, tired eyes pulling her down the hallway. The two daughters spar with stuffed animals, no longer lovely. A budding Catriona Thomson, Amelia thinks, watching the shorter one catch the other in the face. The husband windmills his arms around, trying to wrest the fluffy weapons from their hands. Amelia can tell he is unaccustomed to Scotch; he hobbles along like a three-legged terrier.

“Get some rest girls,” she says. The family brushes past without acknowledging her.

It could have been any of them. The door to their room slams and the mother’s voice carries through the wall. Amelia once read an article about a woman in California who only ate fruit, vegetables, and meat—the paleo diet, as if our Cro-Magnon ancestors lived long healthy lives. Maybe the mother is on the diet, and she got a little hungry. She also read somewhere that American kids love bacon—at least that burned, streaky variety. Those girls sure misbehave enough. The dad appeared slim and short, a rare breed for an American man. Amelia tries to remember if he was drunk when the family checked in the previous night. Too much Talisker gives you an appetite.

She finds her book in the living room. A little girl’s cry pierces the quiet. Amelia stirs the log in the hearth, charred parts collapsing into flame. She reclines in her reading chair and opens her book to the next section. Once in a while, between sentences or paragraphs, her eyes flick towards the kitchen.

She wakes. Her book is butterflied on the floor below her feet. Embers tick in the hearth. A humming fills the room. She walks to the kitchen, tracing the sound.

The freezer door is open. Cold air coughs out. The interior light clicks off, as if it has not been on for long. Where is it? Amelia tears through the shelves, searching for the bag of bacon.

A crash comes from the stairwell. Her face echoes with worry, imagining Lorne back from the pub. She shuts the freezer and rushes across the kitchen tiles, recalling the last time Lorne was too pissed to negotiate stairs.

It was six months earlier, right before he started losing things. Ross County—his Staggies—had just lost to Rangers. No shock there. He stumbled through the front door, back from his weekly pub pilgrimage with Greg. Amelia was irritated; it was after midnight and she had made the mistake of staying up until his return. He stood by the closet, his sozzled grin reminding her of Friday nights out in Dingwall, when she stayed home worrying. He looked thirty years younger; it scared her.

“What time is it?” she asked curtly.

“What time is it?” he slurred, kicking off his shoe. “I can’t even see the fucking clock.”

She held back a laugh. “Well up you go.”

He moved past her, scarf skimming her cheek. He turned around at the base of the stairs. She let him go without meeting his gaze, playing strict, knowing she should be less amused at her eighty-two-year-old husband coming home off his head.

He took two steps, and tumbled. The next morning, he was all apologies and laughs. A bruise bloomed on his skin, otherwise he came out unscathed. All in good fun. Amelia played along, feeling guilty about the moment he waited at the bottom, when she could’ve taken his arm and guided him.

She hopes this fall won’t be worse.

First she notices the bag on the doormat. Her gaze passes over the plastic, tallying the bacon within. She rounds the corner and sees him. His body is slumped on the stairs, chest swelling with each breath, eyes open and still. A contrail of blood drips from a cut on his cheek. Alone, he resembles a man marooned, the oak steps his life raft.

Amelia rushes to his side. “You alright?”

He tries to stand up and slips, thumping down a stair.

“I’m sorry,” he says.

Amelia sits on the step below him. She wants to apologize, but the words catch in her throat. The American mother emerges from the hallway. Amelia cannot look at her, the shame is too complete.

“Should I call for an ambulance?” the mother asks.

Amelia is overcome by a great numbness. She can’t move or speak.

“Just a bit of blood,” Lorne says, suddenly lucid and smiling. “I’ll be alright, love.”

The mother lingers for a moment before returning to her room. Lorne coughs. The scent of whisky seizes Amelia. She places a hand on his knee and turns towards him.

“Let me help, Lorne.”

It took a bit of blood for her to believe what she already knew: he was forgetting. Amelia has heard of this happening: retired lords stepping into strangers’ cars; wheelchair-bound women switching their daughters’ names. Memories unmade.

When she first married Lorne, they were making memories. Weekly dinners at the restaurant by the quay. A drive to the Quiraing and a short trek. A ride from Armadale with the ferry stumbling underfoot, the water drunk with sun. The vacation in Wrexham with Amelia’s extended family, when Lorne guttered and called her aunt a sheep-shagger. Nights at the pub with the Staggies game on—Lorne watching intently, Amelia reading conspicuously. Where has

it all gone? Now he loses his clothes, flips the vacancy sign, and steals bacon. Before long, she despairs, he'll forget my name.

It is morning. Amelia looks out their bedroom window. Colors comingle in the distance—short reds, long yellows, clouds in between. The remaining sky is dark blue, a reminiscence of night, the sunrise mirroring a sunset.

Lorne sits up in bed. Amelia meets his gaze, trying to peer past his wary smile.

FORGETTING

KATHERINE CONNOLLY

¹something you can't feel, but see

²something you can't see, but feel

when i say ghost,
i mean i still remember

exactly what color of autumn
you are. it has been years since

i've seen a tree lose anything,
but i am certain that we were

the quietest forest
fire imaginable.

MEET THE AUTHORS

BECCA GRISCHOW graduated from Valparaiso University in 2017 with degrees in creative writing and digital media. She lives, writes, and frequents coffee shops in Chicago.

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COLIN CRISS doesn't have a bio??

