INKLINGS

noun

1. Slight knowledge or suspicion

2. A literary discussion group, associated with the University of Oxford, where members met weekly for readings and conversations about their writing.

3. A literary magazine and workshop at Colby College

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1
FALL 2014
Dear Reader,

In a 1958 interview with The Paris Review, Ernest Hemingway explained that he rewrote the ending of A Farewell to Arms 39 times. When the interviewer asked Hemingway what problem he was experiencing that he had to revise so many times, Hemingway famously responded: “Getting the words right.”

As we’ve learned from famous writers, our professors, and our own writing experiences, revision is an essential part of the writing process. It was the importance of the revision process that influenced the formation of Inklings.

After my semester abroad in England, I was inspired by C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the other writers who hosted the original Inklings, a casual literary discussion group at Oxford University. My goal was to create an active community of writers on Colby’s campus comprising students who are eager to engage in creative writing. We’ve met in workshops focused on fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry throughout the semester; we’ve attended lunches with and readings by published authors, as well as shared our own work in student readings on campus. Seeking advice about the craft of writing, we’ve interviewed writers from our Creative Writing Department’s Visiting Writers Series and our own Colby professors. Most of all, we’ve been writing and revising. And revising. And revising.

The pieces you’ll read in this magazine are the result of an entire semester’s worth of work. They are by students who are passionate about creative writing. Some of these students had taken every Creative Writing course offered at Colby; some had never shared their work in a group setting before. Our workshops are author-driven: a writer brings a draft to workshop, poses questions about the piece, and revises based on feedback from his or her peers. We’ve also been maintaining a blog throughout the semester, with writing samples and interviews with published authors.

In this magazine, we have poems, personal essays, short stories, and selections from longer works-in-progress. Some of the authors have written a note to accompany their work, explaining where their inspiration came from, their writing process, and how the workshop helped them revise. The authors whose writing appears in the magazine have all been through the workshop process. We wanted to represent as many of these writers as possible, so some of the selections in this print edition are shortened versions of longer pieces. An extended edition of this issue is available on our blog: <web.colby.edu/inklingsmagazine>.

I’d like to thank everyone who helped with Inklings throughout the semester. Specifically, thank you to our advisor Professor Debra Spark, the members of Colby’s Creative Writing Department, Student Government Association, and Colby Libraries and Digital Collections. Thank you to Maurice Manning, Debra Spark, and Jennifer Finney Boylan for sharing thoughtful advice in interviews. Finally, to all the students who participated in the workshops and contributed their work to this magazine: Thank you for being part of this community and for your endless effort in revising your work. I hope you feel that you’ve finally gotten the words right. Enjoy!

Laura Rosenthal
Inklings Founder and Editor-in-Chief
First Fuck Poems and Dead Nana Stories

by Elise Ozarowski


Those and the first-encounter-with-grief poems. I mean, let’s be serious. When you look at old poets, you know, the ones they bore you with before you’re actually able to appreciate them for how fucking beautiful their sounds are, they write about sex and death, too. It’s kind of a natural human thing. Sex enchants us, even after we’ve had it. Why else would erotica be so popular? I used to tell him that I didn’t need to read about someone else’s sex life because I had my own. Have. Different guy. But have.

Have you ever had those creative writing classes where—even if it’s fiction—you’re reading a piece about sex and you’re like and now you’ve made it perfectly clear exactly what your sex life with your boyfriend-same piece that you wrote or if you should be proud of course they had to read something that they wrote about something that is complete fiction and then a guy from your class messages you and says hey, i just want you to know that i’m here if you ever wanna talk about what happened with that guy since i know you said you feel like he’s the only one who will ever love you and i want you to know that’s not true and you’re not sure if he read the same piece that you wrote or if you should be proud that your work was convincing or if you should be insulted that someone thought you wrote that ‘he’s the only one who will ever love me’ because that’s the sort of thing you wrote in your journal in sixth grade because you’re probably not going to read about Natty Light. Although I must admit, I did read a hilarious ‘ode to natty light’ poem once. Some of the love poems you’ve read have actually made you feel something. Like the one about the girl walking home holding her heels in one hand as the earliest golden hour caresses her shoulders. It was from the point of view of the guy who couldn’t sleep and saw her from the bench he was sitting on and you prayed oh god please don’t turn this into a cliché and have these two get together and they don’t and you’re internally cheering the writer he could go all the way as the guy watches that girl but doesn’t go after her. The fact the he is a human noticing another human presence is enough for you because even though you can’t quite figure out why that moment is so significant, the way the writer told you about this non-interaction-interaction makes you feel like you’ve just witnessed something important. Because you have. [im]

This piece is continued on the Inklings blog (wed.colby.edu/inklingsmagazine)

45 Months as Twins

by Catherine Kapples

My heart is jumping. I pat my hand on my chest to calm it. I look down at the cold bottle of Dr. Pepper tucked under my arm. I don’t like the taste of coffee yet. I don’t think I ever will. I prefer cold drinks or any drinks cool enough to drink from a straw. I drink a glass of Dr. Pepper with ice every morning, usually from a travel mug, so people just assume it is iced coffee, but this morning I have to settle for a bottle and no straw. I try to slow down my breathing once the elevator doors open. My brother Edward is asleep on the wooden bench outside of the entrance to the hospital's neurological wing. His breath hums as evenly as a cicada. I sit down on the bench beside him and scan the eggshell walls lined with pictures of green landscapes and smiling babies. I exhale a long breath. My heart still feels jumpy. I fold my arms over my chest and stare at the entrance to the hospital’s neurological critical condition at least. She has had so of course mom felt odd reading about her own alcoholism and dad didn’t like the fact that Uncle was never able to get over that girl who dumped him twenty years ago—all of these things earned me a phone call so people just assume it is iced coffee, but this morning I have to settle for a bottle and no straw. I try to slow down my breathing once the elevator doors open. My brother Edward is asleep on the wooden bench outside of the entrance to the hospital's neurological wing. His breath hums as evenly as a cicada. I sit down on the bench beside him and scan the eggshell walls lined with pictures of green landscapes and smiling babies. I exhale a long breath. My heart still feels jumpy. I fold my arms over my chest and stare at the entrance to the hospital’s neurological critical condition at least. She has had so of course mom felt odd reading about her own alcoholism and dad didn’t like the fact that Uncle was never able to get over that girl who dumped him twenty years ago—all of these things earned me a phone call an other, mother, then father, as longtime roommates, and speech don’t you-think you-should-write-about-how-remarkably-we-are? Perfection is overrated. Writers crave imperfection. Because that’s where reality is hiding. You think Toni Morrison would have become popular if Pecola’s father baked her cookies and told her bedtime stories then went and made love to his wife? That said, Toni Morrison writes about death and sex. We’re kind of hardwired to care about them since we’re all gonna die and college students have lots of hormones and lots of stress that needs relieving. Also, they’re both real. As in if you’re going to write about stuff you care and about, you’re probably not going to write about Natty Light. Although I must admit, I did read a hilarious ‘ode to natty light’ poem once. Some of the love poems you’ve read have actually made you feel something. Like the one about the girl walking home holding her heels in one hand as the earliest golden hour caresses her shoulders. It was from the point of view of the guy who couldn’t sleep and saw her from the bench he was sitting on and you prayed oh god please don’t turn this into a cliché and have these two get together and they don’t and you’re internally cheering the writer he could go all the way as the guy watches that girl but doesn’t go after her. The fact the he is a human noticing another human presence is enough for you because even though you can’t quite figure out why that moment is so significant, the way the writer told you about this non-interaction-interaction makes you feel like you’ve just witnessed something important. Because you have. [im]

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my birthdays, and learned the right things to say about my experiments with home hair color kits. Today it seems surprised about our sister's latest escape from punishment, though.

Mallory, who always buys the orange properties in Monopoly and only enters a pool using a ladder, never gets in trouble with our parents.

Two and a half months a year, Mallory and I are the exact same age. Forty-five months as twins. Our only aunt or our only proms, and graduations. We would worry about our parents dying before the end of the bay, we would worry about the murmur of the ripples and above the murmur of the ripples ing side by side under the bright stars. Those nights on the dock, ly-dock after playing gin rummy on the porch. Those nights on the dock, ly-dock after playing gin rummy on the porch. Those nights on the dock, ly-dock after playing gin rummy on the porch. Those nights on the dock, ly-dock after playing gin rummy on the porch. Those nights on the dock, ly-dock after playing gin rummy on the porch.

I told her that I wouldn't roll off the dock because of the ladder she propped up against the pillars that resembled the gates parents put up to keep babies away from stairs. She kept an arm around me anyways. I want her to forget summers on the docks, but I want her to remember our forty-five months of being the same age. Forty-five months as twins.

Mallory's room is just a couple doors down from the nurse's station. The last time I saw her was nine and a half months ago. The last time I talked to her on the phone she yelled at me and I wanted to cry after I hung up. As I trudge into the room, Mallory rolls over, turning her face away from me. The room smells of latex and the fans from her blow dryer or the from Mallory's rooster alarm clock or waking up to the cock-a-doodle-doo in her mouth. She is not one to let butterscotch candies melt in her mouth. Mallory's greasy head into her consuming embrace. I can almost smell my mother's vanilla scent. I can almost feel her soft, dry hands, which were always red from scrubbing pots, rubbing my upper back. "Hi, Grey," Mallory says automatically. "When... when did you get here? Did I see you... were you... last night?" Her voice is thick and cool. I look at the bandages and IV lines to not remember everything, and I wanted her to suffer, I had wanted her that run up and down her arms. I had wanted her consuming embrace. I can almost feel her soft, dry hands, which were always red from scrubbing pots, rubbing my upper back.

"Mallory, honey, someone's here to see you," Mom says. She strolls over to the side of Mallory's bed and bends down to her eye level. She tucks a loose strand of hair behind Mallory's ear. Then she wraps her long, skinny arms around Mallory's neck. She pulls Mallory close against her tiny frame and burrows Mallory's greasy head into her consuming embrace. I can almost smell my mother's vanilla scent. I can almost feel her soft, dry hands, which were always red from scrubbing pots, rubbing my upper back.

And then you find yourself, a thousand miles away, remembering that you are somebody's idol, wanting the silly step-sisterly steadfast love (the one you're afraid to admit, because you're not done hating your mom yet)

calling the same ten numbers that've always been home, hoping that a high-toned voice answers the phone and tells you about how much her friend Paige sucks while you don't tell her that you just hate living in a room without an orange stain on its carpet.

by Megan Lasher
Canoe Trip

easy camaraderie as the sun rises,
strokes of paddle in sync,
wind sloughs off the week's stresses.

osprey twists midflight,
snatches fish in talons,
wheels through upper air, triumphant.

mist lifts from river's surface,
sky clears, blue trailings of summer.
drift in current, content.

make camp where wind-whipped
waves busy the ears,
let sun steep into skin.

time stretches.
sun dips low on horizon –
take shelter behind rock.
cracking campfire –
driftwood pops, snaps,
burns hot.

loop round the flames and spin tales,
sprawl back onto rocks,
ponder atop the expanse of universe –
stars spin with the earth,
trees recede, sky opens up,
bask in your insignificance.
sleep, with your dreams lapping gently
against the shore.

they rise with the mist in morning.

by Alyssa Lang

Author's Note:
I wrote this poem one afternoon during the fall break canoe trip Ryan Linehan led. We’d paddled across Chesuncook Lake that morning, and spent the afternoon sunning ourselves on the rocks by our campsite. It was so peaceful and reflective – I wanted to capture that moment, that feeling of contentment. When we returned to Colby, I brought this into the Inklings workshop – Laura helped me iron out some kinks and inconsistencies in it. I feel like it now truly portrays my experience on that trip, my first foray into the Maine wilderness. It was a beautiful moment for me, and I hope you can feel it, too.
For the Days When You Mistake a Dime for a 5P  
by Laura Rosenthal

Write about the cold lost nights in London when the rain soaked through your leather boots and the light from the top of the Regent Street buildings made the whole city feel comfortable. Write about the couple sitting across from you in the Tube, arguing in broken English, insisting that the other is in the wrong because I just want to chill with my friends, baby. I thought that’s what you wanted, too—no, why would you cancel our date to chill with everybody? He needed a haircut, but maybe she liked his hair that way. Maybe that was the only reason to stay with him. Or maybe that was the biggest reason to leave him, and the parties of his friends smoking in her house was just an excuse.

Write about the night you went to the bar, just the two of you, and you didn’t drown in Guinness but you almost did, and by some chance they played every single song you had ever danced to.

Write about the barista at Costa who, when you ordered a medium hot chocolate and raspberry jam biscuit, asked if your father owned a gun.

Write about standing in the yard at Shakespeare’s Globe and buying a tiny blue copy of Romeo and Juliet to give to Ellie, who bought you a tiny red copy of Romeo and Juliet for your 18th birthday because you both can still recite the line, “Tybalt, the reason I have to love thee doth much excuse the appertaining rage to such a greeting. Villain am I none. Line, “Tybalt, the reason I have to love thee doth much excuse the appertaining rage to such a greeting. Villain am I none.”

Write about the day where you explored the city by yourself, how you walked in yesterday’s clothes from Piccadilly Circus to Oxford Street to Hyde Park to Harrods—where you spent 20 minutes inside the store before you realized you were staring at £200 scarves when your jeans were fraying at the thighs—to the Natural History Museum to the cheapest Thai restaurant you could find in the city, where you ate subpar Pad Thai at a table alone and wondered whether the women at the next table were old friends or lovers and what could they be thinking about you?

Write about the photos you took of food. How you don’t care if a picture is worth a thousand words or a thousand dollars (although you might care more if it were worth a thousand pounds) because the pictures don’t taste like the Heavy-only Halloumi Veggie Burger from Borough Market that you woke up early and traveled half-way across the city to eat. They don’t taste like the monkfish you ordered at the top of the Shard, which you ordered because Charlie explained that monkfish were hideous, bottom-eating fish, but renowned as a delicacy, and you liked the culinary proof that what matters most is what’s on the inside. Still, you should write about the photos because you insisted on interrupting every meal, every meal you cooked yourself or with friends, every meal you bought from a stand or restaurant or market, to take a photo of the food.

Write about it all because if you forget which pub has the sepsis tone painting of people walking without umbrellas in the rain by Tower Bridge. And if you forget that, you might forget whether you turn left or right at Bond Street to get to the Shard, which you ordered because you saw a photo of the food.

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The Chyron Academy Chronicles:  
Gideon Castor  
by Madison McLeod

Today was not the day that he was going to die, especially not at the hands of those flower-pattern-wearing crones. They'd shown up at his doorstep demanding he come with them and, after his refusal, had been chasing him for days. He was getting really sick of their cackling and wheezing coughs. He'd managed to squeeze his way into a full diner by pretending to be a part of the family in front of him and he hoped it'd afford him a little peace.

There's no way they'd attack him in a diner full of people, or at least they'd never attempted it before. He managed to grab an empty seat at the bar and order some strawberry-banana pancakes with the little money he had left. They tasted like buttery, golden brown deliciousness and as he reached for more syrup, he smelt that awful, overpowering flowery perfume and knew to duck. He crawled his way to the end of the bar and squeezed through the kitchen door.

As soon as he could get to his feet, he spotted the back door, slammed through it and ran. It was only as he sped towards her that he noticed evil old woman number 2, which he'd named Doris, holding a trash can lid in her hands. The last thing he saw was it heading towards his forehead.

When he came to he realized three things; one, that he was in a very comfortable bed; two, that he still smelt that awful flowery perfume; three, that he was pretty sure Doris was whispering about him to a man who looked like a mix between a mad scientist and a sweaty high school history teacher.

"I'm sure it's him, Gerald. Do you doubt my abilities?"
"Of course not, Phyllis." She turned towards his bed.
"He's up now. Come along Gideon. Time for your entrance exam," she said.
"My what?" said Gideon as he opened his eyes.
"Your entrance exam."
"Where am I?"
"You're currently in the infirmary of Chyron Academy. I think it's time we found out whether or not you'll be staying with us. Go through that door when you've dressed. Instructions will be delivered when you get there. Good luck," said Phyllis, and with one last glance at him she left through the door opposite the one she had mentioned. [IM]

Falling...

I spread myself thin and all I get is dirt and concrete.  
I branch out and find new ground,  
All I get is darkness and chaos.  
Then when it gets cold, bundle up  
And freeze – I wait until the time is right.  
Right? When is time right?

But time is walking away  
Slowly and steadily  
Just out of the grasp of my hands,  
Terrifying yet soothing  
Knowing that in the darkness  
Still nothing will be ok  
Nothing will be fine  
Everything is what you make it  
No, how you make it  
Because when I spread myself thin,  
There's no support  
There's no structure  
There's nothing for me  
Thick will help me  
Thin will tell me that  
No matter how branched out you are, it's whether you're close to your roots  
Because when leaves fall in the fall,  
We might as well all transform and hibernate and go with it all,  
Just go with the fall.

by Jocelyn Ng

Author's Note:
I started writing this poem on the bus to Freeport because I had nothing to do for an hour and a bit. I decided to write on the concept of time and the season: fall, coupled with the idea of friendships. Right now, this piece is on its own, but I will continue to work on other parts that symbolize the other three seasons.
I think of you when

I get water from the vending machine and my eye catches the logo for the orange soda that you always drink.

When my feet are cold and my hands are cracked and red, and the snow on the ground is a gray, crunchy heap.

When I wake up and I can’t breathe in.

When the air tastes salty, and the sky is a ripe peach above white sails; when I see cracker-crusted haddock on a menu.

When I stay up late, coated in soft tungsten light, cuddled in with a good book that I want to read to you when we stop living through memories.

by Megan Lasher
"I've been waiting for you guys to help me. You expect me to do this by myself? I'm not as strong as you! Why do we have to clean up for these Frisbee faggots?"

He's small for his age. 5 foot 3, maybe one hundred pounds. He always wears a camouflage hat, an auto racing t-shirt, blue jeans, and dunky work boots.

We watch. The Price is Right during our lunch breaks. If the contestant wins a car, Matt will talk about its specs like he's a mechanic. Evan, who actually takes classes at the technical school on auto mechanics, calls him a dummy and says that it's actually a V8 engine or something like that.

Matt's lunch bag contains plastic bags full of popcorn, potato chips, and cookies. He also has a small sandwich—mostly white bread and ketchup.

"Does anyone want my cookies?" Matt asks.

No one does. He throws most of the food away.

Our workday ends at 3 PM, but we usually finish our work early and spend the last half hour sitting around the barn.

"Did that waste of a human being give you any trouble today?" Lloyd asks Adam and me. We're standing inside the garage and there are some rafters where a bird has made its nest. It flies around, feeding its babies while they chirp.

"No problem, X, " Two responds. "I'll continue working."

"We need to get this take and send it to Sector 9, " Lloyd says. "The voice echoing through my left ear is distorted to an abnormally low register, which I know mine is as well, but that doesn't make me any less annoyed by it. Unfortunately, it is the only way we can hide our identities in the office. If our conversation is picked up. I take a deep breath and flop back onto my bed from the stiff sitting position I was in while I read the speech."

"The script is... I would say awful, but that doesn't fully express how strongly I feel about it. I explain, quickly forcing the paper into a pocket."

"One, we need to talk more about this, " I growl."

"His dad's a drunk, " he tells me, "he used to work for the English Alliance before death. And, being the liaison group against the Alliance System, I would get the English Alliance before death. Part of me is upset that I am wasting my whole life writing. I wish I could say the ending will be a happy one, but I am sensing a tragic. If that is the case, though, I am going to make sure it will be the most jarring tragedy seen since Oedipus gouged out his own eyes."

"I can only guarantee this connection will remain secure for another thirty seconds," my Second Lieutenant, code name Two, chimes in. "One, we need to talk more about this," I growl. "I know it annoys them when I use dead languages, but I cannot help but feel like my voice is the only way we can hide our identities in the office."

"Two's hacking ability is the most vital part of my plan, " Two's hacking ability is the most vital part of my plan. "We need to get this take and send it. " Two may be my second in command, but I am not too proud to admit that Two's hacking ability is the most vital part of my entire operation."

"There will be no problems, X," Two responds. "I'll continue looping the sleeping tapes on both your primary micros as well as the video feeds to your rooms."

"I'll give you the go ahead once everything is set up. Then, One, you can head over to X's room to fix this."

"Merci, " I smirk. "I know it annoys them when I use dead languages, but I cannot help but feel like they sound more poetic than English."

"Somebody up there is breathing down my neck on top of everything else is causing me to go a bit crazy. I just want to get all the players in their positions. " Two, can you ghost us for an hour? " Two may be my second in command, but I am not too proud to admit that Two's hacking ability is the most vital part of my entire operation."

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"I will give you the go ahead once everything is set up. Then, One, you can head over to X's room to fix this."  "MERCY, " I speak. "I know it annoys them when I use dead languages, but I cannot help but feel like they sound more poetic than English."

Author's Note:
Due to the fact I had never written science fiction before, my first instinct in writing this prologue was to do an introduction similar to the Star Wars movies. When I brought the piece to Inklings, the advice that stood out to me was to bring in more dialogue and not to give the readers all of the information from X's point of view right away. With that in mind, I decided to try and write a dialogue to incorporate more of X's voice and interests rather than the academic soundpaper of the original draft. Through this process, even though the prologue is a very short piece that is only one part of the larger work, I feel like I was really able to find X's voice as a character.
Somebody that I Used to Know

by Kayla Turner

Gram always liked music. She didn’t sing much but would often hum or whistle. She would waltz around the kitchen to “Blue Suede Shoes” and “On The Road Again”. She was the kind of woman who always wore pantyhose and believed pink lipstick never went out of style. She was the epitome of refined domesticity.

On the day of my graduation from middle school, Gram had set a battered stool in the middle of the kitchen. As a little girl she would prop me up onto it to wash my hair in the sink through my hair. “How about a comb, though? Can I have a comb?”

I produced a comb from the bathroom down the hall. Then waited. And waited. I felt panic that I had never heard from my grandmother, she whispered, “I’ve ended her life.”

She walked over to me, balanced precariously upon her 6-inch heels. As she took a seat, her hand fell upon mine so softly as to suggest they wouldn’t be considered the Golden Age of Jazz. No one listened to jazz anymore, hell, this may have been the only place in the city that still had live music, but, again, it would be a stretch to call it live music. I would call it dead music, dead music in a dead bar.

Back in the fifties, this place had been hopping with thugs, mobsters, and the various scum of the era. There was a different crowd at the bar now. There were the old men who had traded their dreams of success for dreams of another beer. They would sit at the end of the bar nursing their drink, staring into its murky depths trying to see the happiness that might be found at the bottom of the glass. They were as much part of the scenery as the stools they sat on. There were suits hiding from their wives. Their ties loosened and top buttons undone as they drawled to the bartender about their boss and the market and how they would probably be fired the next day. They muttered about the end of the Regan boom and stocks and the Federal Reserve. They complained about Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, but only about how it affected the market. The complaints bounced around the walls dying before they found the ears of anyone who gave a damn. Their wives would probably value the conversation more than anyone at the bar.

At one end of that room, on a faintly blue-lit stage, sat the only thing I can focus on. She had now backed all the way to the mauve countertop. Her lip quivered, the short pointed hairs beneath her nose prominent. With a sense of panic I had never heard from my grandmother, she whispered, “I’ve forgotten how.”

According to the bartender, Shakespeare’s jazz club was always just an hour away from peak time. The bar wasn’t a seedy place. Calling it so would have been a compliment. At some point in the past, back when I was in my twenties and the world was in the fifties, the bar was seedy. It had now moved beyond seedy, it was just sad. I’m in my late fifties and the world has moved on to the nineties. What the nineties would be looked at as, I wasn’t entirely sure of. What I was sure of is that they wouldn’t be considered the Golden Age of Jazz. No one listened to jazz anymore, hell, this may have been the only place in the city that still had live music, but, again, it would be a stretch to call it live music. I would call it dead music, dead music in a dead bar.

Last Call at Shakespeare’s

by Jacob Adamson

At least now I wouldn’t have to find a way to leave her. I’m a glass half full kind of person. I wondered why anyone would want to kill Debbie. It real- ized that, in the months that I had known her, I had neglected to learn anything about her. All I knew is that she was a jazz singer at a bar where no one listens to jazz. I uncoupled her purse and searched through it for something that resembled a clue.

I waited a moment, felt my chest, and realized happily that I was still alive. I allowed a sigh of relief. whoever was trying to kill me had missed, terrible shot. I rose up and realized my detective in sad old jazz club in the sad old city of Philadel- phia, so I just call her Debbie. I’m getting awfully tired of her-also. When she talks she betray the fact that her teeth have a speckled look, and for a jazz singer, I find her voice remark-ably annoying. Still, we’ve been doing the horizontal mamba for the better part of the last two months, and I’m not one to turn that down.

I can’t stay with someone that long and not get bored, not notice her flaws. Once I discover them, they’re always there; they grow and become the only thing I can focus on.

“I sure would hurt.” My stellar mimicry of her accent went un- noticed. She took my hand and led me through the crowd. A dog on a leash, I followed her to the room upstairs.

At least now I wouldn’t have to find a way to leave her. I’m a glass half full kind of person. I wondered why anyone would want to kill Debbie. It real-ized that, in the months that I had known her, I had neglected to learn anything about her. All I knew is that she was a jazz singer at a bar where no one listens to jazz. I uncoupled her purse and searched through it for something that resembled a clue. [i]t

THIS PIECE IS CONTINUED ON THE INKLINGS BLOG

(web.colby.edu/inklingsmagazine)
For the Widow

Poseidon took it upon himself
To prove to a poet the power of
Prayer, and with his waves like hands
Strangled an unprotesting
Percy Shelley.

For need of public safety
They burned the sea-swelled body
So his pearl eyes and coral bones
Would spare from cholera
The others.

They built a pyre on the beach
To honor Percy like Patroclus,
And the smell of the ashes appeased
The sea god, who left un-singed
Shelley’s heart.

Mary Shelley fought her friends
For possession of the calcified organ,
And winning her husband’s remain,
Held it in her living hand, like a pot
Of basil.

She could have placed it
Under her pillow or in her pajama drawer
Or displayed on a shelf for all women to envy
Or planted in her garden in place of
A radish.

Held it in her living hand, like a pot
Of basil.

Mary sewed the limbs together
And left a space in this borrowed monster
Two hands, one face. She brought them to
Her bedroom.

Under her pillow or in her pajama drawer
Or displayed on a shelf for all women to envy
Or planted in her garden in place of
A radish.

I wrote this poem after a class on British Romanticism, where we learned about
Mary Shelley, author of Frankenstein and Percy’s wife, ultimately kept his heart.

My poem borrows imagery and language from the British Romantic poets, Shake-
peare, and Homer to imagine what Mary might have done with the heart.

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Where is Everybody?

by Faiyaz Islam

I walked down the middle of the gray suburban street, looking left and right at every cute little house I passed. It was one of those newly constructed neighbourhoods where all the houses looked pretty much the same. It always made me a little uneasy, going into another person’s house and having all the architecture be the same but the furniture different. The sky was a blue gray, as though the color from the sky was leaking into the thick, flasky clouds above my head. It felt dreary, but not in a sad way. It was very cold at the same time cool, relaxing me in a way that just couldn’t happen on a warm day. Something about the clouds seemed strange, though, they were moving too fast.

What time is it? I slipped my hand into the pocket of my jeans and pulled out my phone, clicking the screen on as I brought it up to my face in one smooth motion. 2:38. I had slept in for a long time today. I could have sworn it was 10:00 when I first woke up. I remembered the clock on my desk telling me that anyway. I think there were some kids playing in the street outside; they must have woken me up. I could hear something through my bedroom window. I remember being glad the sun wasn’t shining onto my face. I probably just went back to sleep.

I got to the house at the end of the street, right before the main road that led into the heart of the town. It was a dumpy, dying crab-apple tree. It wasn’t symmetrical for one thing. The right side of the house ended abruptly as one solid, straight wall from the top of the house right to the ground. But the other side had an inclined roof and a balcony and a porch and clear indications of drift in the stonework, like a regular house. On the right side, it just looked like someone had chopped the end of it off and put up a wall. On the lawn, at the foot of the wall, was an apple tree. Again it was a little bit odd, because it was a订购 apple tree, like the rest of them, it was a proper apple tree. I never met the people who lived there, so I don’t know how or why they had that tree. It was very tall, brushing up against the house at the top; maybe it was there before they even moved in. I realized I hadn’t eaten anything yet, but going all the way back to the house didn’t seem worth it. It looked like no one was home, and I was sure the owners wouldn’t mind if I grabbed an apple off the tree. There was a collection of red ping apples all over the lawn, smashed open by the elements or by some kids or animals. It didn’t seem annoying having to clean those off the lawn every time. The red of the apples on the tree looked redder, but the ones on the ground just looked brown against the beautiful green. I noticed that there were actually a lot of perfectly good apples on the grass, like someone had reached up and plucked a number and then just laid them down. I looked at the tree to see which apples I could get; a lot of them were too high up for me to reach. I could probably climb a little ways up and grab a good one.

The top of the tree was actually very close to the edge of the roof, and it looked like I could also climb up the house. It looked like it was done on purpose, like it was meant to be, because if I was sitting on the edge of the roof on the right side, it would be exactly the perfect place to pick apples from.

I heard a car coming up the hill and turned around to see it. I was hoping it was my car, the one I left parked on the side of the street.

Sigh. I walked around to the other side of the tree and found an apple I could grab if I stretched a little bit, I plucked it and inspected it for anything obviously bad, like worms. Finding nothing, I took a bite and walked back to the tree. It was pretty good, way better than crab-apples anyway.

The main road towards town went uphill and didn’t have any sidewalk on it, just a gravel shoulder that I always used. There were no cars on the road the entire time I was walking and no sound of other cars. It was peaceful, actually. The loud, obnoxious sound of cars driving by with their windows down was very stressful, and I don’t want to constantly be looking behind me for approaching vehicles. It was just a relaxing stroll into town. I calmed my body down, relaxing my shoulders so I walked with a slouch and took deep, full breaths of air through my nose. I finished most of the apple and tossed it into the grass to rot. I could see the street light coming up, changing just from red to green, and I knew the town would be right on the other side of the hill.

I walked the sidewalk, looking left and right at every restaurant and store I passed. There was no sound, no sign of life. There were still cars in the parking lot, so people must have shown up, but they were all abandoned. I walked into the parking lot and looked up to see the stores in the strip mall. None of them had the “Closed” sign, but they were completely empty. I walked up and put my head against the door, trying to hear something through every window, taking a couple steps in through every door. It didn’t look like a horror movie; there was no blood or sign of struggle. There were no papers lying on the floor in a mess, no panic. There was just a little sign hanging in the window.

“Hello?” I called, but there was only silence in answer. That’s when I saw them. [im]
Oasis

I sit on a stair that reeks sour and alcoholic,
And I look up at the stars, washed out pale by city lights.
I wish the streetlights would turn into trees,
And that the bump-thump bass would become thunder,
The kind that collapses the clouds, dumping out all the rain.

The feel of night is thick in my lungs.

by Alyssa Lang

The ticket was already booked

I was lying: I am, in fact, good at goodbyes
and if ours is on a night like this
we can talk about the weather—
not how the air is so thick that the scent
of peach-sweat and the neighbor’s cheap weed
stays in our clothes
not how the sidewalk hums
or the heat-dreams we wake from, your fingers
still tangled in my hair.
but we can talk about how strange it is:
thunder at this time of year

by Maya Ramakrishnan

An interview with
Jennifer Finney Boylan

Jennifer Finney Boylan, our beloved former professor of Creative Writing at Colby College, has moved on to new adventures as the inaugural Anna Quindlen Writer in Residence at Barnard College of Columbia University. We already miss her animated leadership of class workshops, her singing during readings, and her insistence upon bagpipe performances and séances as part of the Colby experience. Trying to fill this hole in our creative writing lives, we reached out to her to ask a few questions about what she’s been up to and what advice she has to offer about creative writing. Thanks to Faiyaz Islam for interviewing Jenny, and to Jenny for taking the time to answer our questions!

IM: How did you get into Creative Writing?
JFB: Oh, I think I have been a writer for about as long as I can remember. I mean, maybe not in the womb, but right after that.

IM: How would you describe the department and the students here at Colby? What was the best part of your experience as head of the department?
JFB: Colby has one of the best English departments in the country, period. I never walked up those stairs without feeling a tremendous sense of anticipation about whatever was going to happen to me next. I was co-chair with Peter Harris for two years, from 2002 through 2004, I think. The best part of that experience was working with Peter, who is a lovely man. He is a talented poet, a legendary teacher, and just a decent human being all around.

IM: How important are workshops for the writing process?
JFB: The thing that workshops do, actually, is to help young writers learn how to be better critics of each other’s writing. It’s easy, when you’re young, to see what’s wrong with what someone else has done— but harder to recognize your own failings. Learning to talk diplomatically and graciously— but firmly and honestly— to other writers about their work means that you have to read with tremendous care. And in time, with any luck, you learn to turn that eye upon your own work. That’s an essential thing to learn— how to be your own critic. It’s the most essential tool for a writer. If you don’t see your own work clearly, you can’t revise. And if you don’t learn to revise, you’ll never learn to make your work shine.

IM: Any funny workshop stories?
JFB: Most of my funny workshop stories involve my own questionable behavior in class, like the time I kind of randomly made waffles during a lecture, and no one knew what was going on. Eventually a student asked, “Excuse me, Professor Boylan, why are you making waffles in class?” I believe I said, “Because I am driven by an unspeakable inner joy.” Like I said, these aren’t stories that reflect particularly well upon me.

IM: What are your thoughts on Inklings, the student-run writing workshop?
JFB: The thing that workshops do, actually, is to help young writers learn how to be better critics of each other’s writing. It’s easy, when you’re young, to see what’s wrong with what someone else has done— but harder to recognize your own failings. Learning to talk diplomatically and graciously— but firmly and honestly— to other writers about their work means that you have to read with tremendous care. And in time, with any luck, you learn to turn that eye upon your own work. That’s an essential thing to learn— how to be your own critic. It’s the most essential tool for a writer. If you don’t see your own work clearly, you can’t revise. And if you don’t learn to revise, you’ll never learn to make your work shine.

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reasonable of criticism, if they don't feel respected.

**IM:** What's something that you always try to get students to improve on in their writing?

**JFB:** Revision, Faiyaz. It's all about revision. It's the most important skill, and it's simultaneously the thing that no one wants to do, at least not when they're first starting out. And it's not exactly easy to teach.

**IM:** Your work as a professor has touched a lot of people. Have any interesting stories come up from former students getting back in touch with you?

**JFB:** You are nice to say that, but every professor at Colby touches people in some way, I hope. It is nice, though, to hear from students whom I've been out of touch with. The very best thing is when some of those students turn out to have become teachers themselves. A former student of mine came to a reading by Edward Albee a few years ago; Albee had been my teacher, back at Johns Hopkins, and so there was a way in which my student— I can only remember his nickname, which was Nickles—was Edward Albee's grand-student. Nickles, of course, was using the same jokes I had been taught by Albee. His own students—some of whom he'd brought with him, must have thought of Albee as their great-grand-teacher. It really is pretty great when you find a student is teaching. It really is like a torch is being passed, hand to hand, generation to generation.

**IM:** Can you think of a prompt you gave that resulted in a particularly memorable student work?

**JFB:** I don't use "prompts" in that sense— but one time a student who was on the football team was just apologizing to me in my office, saying, "Well, I'm not that guy who's ever going to write a great story." And somehow I was able to shake him loose of that conviction. I asked him, "Who is that guy? Why not you?" That very summer he got a job working for the Waterville Sentinel. Then he headed west. Today he's a journalist. That's pretty great, although I can also assure you it wasn't me. I just happened to be on hand right at the moment he needed a shove. I start teaching at Barnard as the new Anna Quindlen Writer in Residence in January. I'm on leave from Colby for two years while I test those waters. It's an awfully sweet position they've come up with for me. But even if I end up with a serious continuing relationship with Millie the Dancing Barnard Bear, I will always love the Colby Mule. My first wife. I am hoping I can come up with a good way of staying connected to this community. I'm continuing to live in Maine 7 months of the year, May through mid-January, and I hope I'll be able to be part of the life of this wonderful and very special place.

More info about the Amtrak residency is at my blog, jenniferboylan.net.

**IM** [im]