LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

You may be wondering why Sage Ridge’s literary magazine is called The Midwife. A midwife is commonly known as a person trained to assist women in childbirth, yet this publication has little to nothing to do with child-birthing (sorry if that’s what you were expecting). So, why this moniker? Did someone just pick a random word after seeing that both “The Sage” and “The Ridge” were already taken? That is a perfectly plausible theory, but I’d like to offer another rationale for this ostensibly arbitrary title.

According to popular search engine google.com, a midwife isn’t just a person with a specific career in child-delivery. Rather, a midwife is any “person or thing that helps to bring something into being or assists its development.” That’s kind of what we try to do with this magazine. Sage Ridge students (that’s you guys) are crazy talented. At the Midwife, we work to offer a platform for you to exhibit your artistic endeavors. You guys supply all the creativity, and we channel it into one easily accessible publication.

Our staff would like to acknowledge those who have helped us since the beginning of the school year to put this magazine together. Many thanks to Gary Brown, Meghan Ward, Kate Eisele, and Ian Moser for helping us get submissions, facilitating our assembly of the magazine, and generally supporting us. We couldn’t have done it without you! A final thanks goes out to our headmaster, Mr. Norm Colb, whose advocacy of the arts at Sage Ridge has been instrumental to the magazine’s success.

We hope to keep expanding the Midwife as Sage Ridge grows, but we can’t do it without the continued support of our student body. This magazine is merely an empty vessel until you guys provide us with the art and writing. So, to all you Sage Ridge students: keep writing, drawing, finger-painting, or whatever it is you do, and never doubt the power of unbridled creativity.

Yours Truly,
Celeste Barnaby, Editor-in-Chief

STAFF

CELESTE BARNABY
AIMEE LOWENSTERN
MATTHEW HAYASHI
ALEXANDRA RUGG
LILY XU
JASMINE BRAZELTON

ART PHOTOGRAPHER:
SOPHIE KIM

ADVISOR:
JOHN SLOYAN

ART CREDIT:
FRONT COVER - JOSIE SLOYAN
BACK COVER - MELISSA KING
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Like Sheep by Jonathan Louis...................................................4
Tattoo by Celeste Barnaby.........................................................6
By the Poets by Aimee Lowenstern...........................................9
Vernal Falls by Jacob Bain.......................................................10
Drive-Thru Life by Rob Lamb.................................................14
Haiku Morning.......................................................................16
CONTENTS

Sorting Through by Tyler Becker................................................19

“Did Mr. Riley honestly have to keep me at school until 4:30?” by Courtney Leonard.................................................................22

Graph-Inspired Short Stories.......................................................24

Every Rule by Claire Adams........................................................27

Rot by Aimee Lowenstern............................................................30

A Change of Heart by Lauren Becker..........................................32
Like Sheep
by Jonathan Louis

No bell has rung
No warning has come
The masters tell us to go
Hear ye, hear ye
You have no thoughts,
You have no choice
For God’s sake, do as you’re told

We funnel in narrow doors
Our masters lead us
They make sure we go
It’s not a school of children
It’s not a school of fish
But one, like sheep
Led by pastors
We go.
Tattoo
by Celeste Barnaby

Jane stood before the smudge-laden bathroom mirror and unbuttoned her shirt before lowering her arms and letting it gently sink to the floor, revealing her bare chest. The sun’s tepid afternoon rays shone through the frosted-glass window to her left and illuminated her undressed body. She dampened a cotton pad in the sink and began scrubbing the afflicted area—a small patch of skin just above her left breast. Slowly, the copious layers of concealer gave way and revealed the secret beneath. While it was perfectly normal for a twenty-something such as herself to have one, the shame and tarnish that accompanied hers impelled its perpetual concealment. The image grew darker as she continued to scrub, transforming from a cloudy, skeletal frame into a thick, dark blue outline, contrasted sharply by her pale complexion. Upon completion, she tossed the soiled cotton pad over her shoulder and into the trashcan, her eyes remaining fixed upon the engraving mere inches away from her heart.

It was, by all objective accounts, a lovely tattoo. The letters swooped and curved gracefully, and were adorned by two blooming roses. She could remember the ecstasy she had felt upon seeing it finished for the first time—the sensuality and confidence that it had endowed her with. However, those memories were all blurred and tainted now, and thinking of them filled her with a profound sadness, for she only now knew what was to follow. After staring at it for some time, she languidly licked her lips before letting the word fall out of her mouth: “Ian.” It was a word she had said many times, a word she had thought and dreamed and tasted and cried. She remembered loving how easy it was to say, how little she had to move her lips and tongue. She used to whisper it over and over to herself at night, as if it were a lullaby. She had once looked it up and learned that it was a Hebrew name meaning “God is forgiving.” She now hoped that wasn’t true.

As she meditated upon the word, pictures of him began resurfacing. Little pictures at first: his large hands, his dirty-blond hair, his brown eyes that over time turned from sweet and gentle to angry and callous. Short features soon began playing in her mind: his fingers combing through her thick, unkempt hair, his chapped lips upon her forehead, the sound of an open-handed slap on the cheek, a ceramic plate thrown against the wall. Connecting the word with its meaning, seeing this meaning—seeing him—permanently imprinted on her body made her nauseated, sick with grief and stupidity.

After showering herself with these memories, she retrieved the supplies from the drawer beneath her sink. They were collected in a small blue box with lavender trim. She placed the box on the counter and evaluated its contents. One bottle of peroxide, one bottle of dark blue ink, one bowl, one washcloth, one sewing needle. Also in the box were a few pieces of paper and Styrofoam that she had practiced on, until the design was to her liking. She could afford to go to a tattoo parlor, yes. The product of a professional would surely be much more attractive. However, this was a deeply personal matter. The right to redeem her body was hers alone. Reaffirming this truth, she unscrewed the bottle of peroxide and poured a small amount into the bowl. She swirled it around for several moments and then added the entire bottle of ink. She picked up the needle and traced along her chest the outline that she planned to draw, lightly enough that it just tickled slightly. She then dipped the tip of the needle into the ink and, taking a deep breath, plunged the sharpened point into her skin, at the tip of the “n”. She pulled it out and drove it back in, right next to the previous mark. She continued like this, making tiny blue spot after tiny blue spot, occasionally refreshing the needle with ink.

As she persisted, the pain grew noticeably distracting. This was a pain, unlike most pains, that she had only experienced once before. It was a hot, stinging sensation, like scratching a sunburn, almost. She was flooded with memories of the last time she had felt such a discomfort. She had been lying down that time, her bare back pressed against a prickly cushion of Ian’s craigslist couch. He had worked diligently and tenderly, and with much more dexterity than she now possessed. While his right hand maneuvered skillfully, his left hand had clasped hers comfortably, with the same firm assuredness that he would later viciously clasp her throat. In an attempt to avoid an embarrassing cry of discomfort, she had focused her thoughts on the lovely lies that had led her to this moment: “I’m doing this for me,” “I can’t lose him,” “I want him with me forever.” Facing these memories of delusion and careless naiveté created far more anxiety than any discomfort from the needle.
The pain becoming too cumbersome, she stopped briefly, balancing the needle at the rim of the bowl so that only the tip was submerged. She drew the washcloth to her chest and gingerly dabbed away the excess ink. She took a moment to remember what she was working for, what she had worked for since she stepped out his front door for the last time. Since she had let the last bruise fade and the last scab peel off. The pain subsided, and she recovered the needle and continued in her endeavor. It was an arduous labor, and took far longer than she had originally expected. The sun eventually dipped so low in the sky that its light alone was no longer substantial enough for her to see clearly, and she was forced to momentarily stop and flip the switch by the door. Instantly, her cramped bathroom was filled with intense brightness from the fluorescent lights in the ceiling, giving it the same sense of sterility and artificiality as a hospital room. She looked up at the lights, recalling the feeling of lying on an examination table, the thin paper crinkling beneath her as she cradled her swollen wrist, waiting for the doctor to return. It had been then, at that moment, that she had decided to make a change, to forever stop grimacing as she dabbed concealer over tender, darkened patches of skin, to stop apologizing as tears welled in her eyes, to be unfettered and, maybe, after a while, even happy. Re-endowed with motivation, she went back to work.

After two painstaking hours, she was finally done. It was by no means perfect; some might have even called it unsightly. But in her eyes, it was gorgeous. It was liberating. It was no longer a reminder of inadequacy and despair, but instead one of survival, of renewal, of hope. Sure, there were some obvious errors. The spot where the “n” had been altered to an “m” was clumsy and uneven, and the “I” was far too close to the “a” to be a distinctly separate word. These details were irrelevant to her, as she dabbed away the extra ink one final time and, with a slight smile, gently whispered the words that her body now held.

_I am free._
By the Poets
by Aimee Lowenstern

Here is the night; it is grand, is it not?
And here is my life, like pearls on a string;
And here are the stars, like the pearls of my life,
Both so oft forgot in the singing and gleam.

It has been proven by the poets
That your eyes are like stars.
I am wondering if
Your eyes are like the lemon cake
You ate at midnight on your birthday;
The tart sugar of it.
We would therefore see
If midnight on your birthday is night or dawn;
Both are very beautiful,
As proven by the poets
In their lonely little five-o’clock laboratories.

The velocity of a broken heart
Is inversely proportional
To the quantity (In Austens)
Of love you have not yet loved-
This is textbook,
And can be repeated with certainty.
We cannot, however, certify
That chocolate contains less than 10 milligrams of magic,
That words are incapable of murdering you in your sleep,
And that two plus two will eternally equal four.

Though we know, as you can see here in chalk,
The yards of thread
That it takes to sew up your broken heart,
If laid end to end, starting at the table
With the lemon cake, will lead
To a girl with red hair
Fingers stained with ink
Who proved your eyes were like stars.
Vernal Falls
by Jacob Bain

The trail starts flat,
And slowly rises from the ground.
    A rock cliff to my left,
And a 100 foot drop to my right
    I know not to worry,
But rather to look ahead.
    To keep my focus on my goal,
And grasp for the nearest rock.
Slowly I hike through the trailhead,
Searching for a single ray of sunlight.
    I look up,
Only to see an empire of rock towering over me.
    I sigh,
And continue to dwell on the sights I hope to see.
    My feet keep moving,
As if they are on cruise control.
Something feels empty inside me.
    What was once excitement,
Now feels like nothing shy of disappointment.
    I want to believe it is all in my mind,
But it’s stronger than that.
It’s almost like I am struggling to find the true light,
The light that not only stuns my eyes,
    But my other half.
The half that loves nature,
    The half that craves beauty.
Not the beauty of an invention,
    But the beauty of understanding.
Understanding that all the things
    We take for granted are the
Little things that come together to create who we are.
These thoughts exhaust themselves as they tread through my mind.
    As I finally begin to
Accept things for what they are,
    My problem is resolved.
I look up, to find a combination of things
    That I would never take for granted.
    I see water, sliding down granite
And rendezvousing in an emerald pool.
    A rainbow,
Blanketing the icy water as it prepares
    For its next journey.
The journey of spreading knowledge.
    To travel and enhance one’s education,
Give others what they need.
By the time I could see things for how they really were,
   It was time to leave.
After that day, many people would ask me what
   I learned about nature,
   And why it’s important.
   I would think very deeply,
And tell them that it lets us escape from technology,
And an assortment of other things I really did not believe in.
   I did this simply because I was scared.
Scared to take the next step,
   To contribute my discoveries.
Always thinking that I might be judged,
   Or criticized for caring.
Scared to be made fun of for having the half that many
   Lost long ago.
The half that never grows tired of sunsets,
   And can never take enough pictures of the wilderness.
   Now I realize that
When the day comes that I start the next part of my journey,
   I will imagine myself as the empire of rock
   That once protected me,
And I will take my first step into a New World.
And so the humdrum begins.

Students fill in bubbles as if they were worker bees depositing nectar into designating parts of the mother hive. Like clockwork. Their heads uniformly face down at their paper, almost as if they had just embarked on their journey to the depths of despair. There is no doubt in my mind that Dante must have left this part out of his exploration from the sheer, gray horror that even level nine could not compare to. Why would any living soul choose to be here? It seems that each individual is totally aware of his own will, but yet has no control over it. An invisible hand shoves all of us into these lifeless rooms in order to take tests that silence our voices and prioritize probability. Those who reason and are critical learners, what our society defines as scholars, must paradoxically suffer under this meritocratic process.

“Five minutes left on section one” uttered the monotone proctor.

As I looked around at the bees buzz, buzz, buzzing away, I noticed I hadn’t left a scratch on my paper. Perhaps I’ll write about the proctor, he seems peculiar. I assume this is his classroom given how comfortably he sits at the desk, but there is still some uncertainty. There is surely something off about him, almost as if humanity itself has been sucked out of him by administering this test at 8:00 AM. Yes, that’s what I’ll write about! I’ll begin by –

“Pencils Down” said the test proctor, emerging from his morose sleep. “Close your test booklet and put the answer sheet inside.”

I almost jumped by his suddenness. Rushing to put something on the paper, all I wrote was the word “monotony” and then, abruptly, closed my test packet. It was the only thing that came to my head. As I gradually looked up, I knew the error I had made. My fellow “peers” looked as if the wind had been knocked out of them. However, one strong kick to the solar plexus could not resonate with me as much as their faces did. Not only did they seem utterly defeated, but like they were machines subjugated to a dull, prosaic task without any sort of consent. There was no choice or freedom. There was no originality or cognizance. It was all formulaic, constricted, and claustrophobic. They resembled sheep locked up in some pen, prohibited from roaming their natural terrain in order for their owner to shear them of their fur, removing each of the animal’s sense of individuality.
By writing that one word, that one absolute truth about the burden of sameness students must endure, I came to the conclusion that I, too, had joined the herd. I wished that I could remove that stain from that sheet of paper, but the proctor had already announced for us to move on to another test section.

“Should I?”

After realizing that I whispered this out loud, I slyly used my peripheral vision to see if anyone had noticed. The girl next to me looked at me in the strangest way, as if I was the one who had the problem. She was hunched over her desk – so that her back almost formed a perfect right angle – and was scouring the multiple choice answers for the right question. Even the Hunchback of Notre Dame would have pitied her.

After a few seconds, her head snapped back into “test-taking” position and continued to punch meaningless numbers into a useless calculator. I should say that the brevity of our first encounter was quite off-putting. I couldn’t even open my test booklet after what I had done. Had I truly fallen victim to the schemes of test makers? No. I refused to believe that I had been corrupted by a series of bubbles and numbers. Yet, I could not bring myself to turn back and erase “monotony.” In a world where conformity has polluted all sense of probity, where does the individual draw the line? What morals exist, and if there are any, what are they? How will I know that what I am doing is right or wrong with the injustices our shepherds have committed?

“Time. Thank you for taking the SAT, you are now free to go home after turning in your test to me” regurgitated the proctor from the printed instructions. I couldn’t even move my legs needless to say get out of the room. After everyone had fled out of the room like bulls unleashed in the streets of Spain, the proctor noticed me sitting there, staring up at the ceiling. He cautiously approached me and asked:

“Do you need anything?”

With tears in my eyes and barely being able to keep my head in a conversational position to address his question, I murmured the phrase: “I need help.”
Drive-thru Life
by Rob Lamb

Impatience simmers in cup
Of instant oatmeal
Work-outs wander after Fatburgers
Dreaming of liposuction, pain-free
Hangovers
Complicit slaves of more, faster, cheaper
Strengthen my DNA
Gimme, gimme that genomic quick-fix
Jello brand beauty mix
Fast-food virtues
The finest powder this side of Heaven
In a pill, bottle, cream, dressing
There for the taking, for your pleasure
On [fill-in-the-blank] social media
#Livestrong Lance’s legacy
Lies of the Livelong Foundation
Prolonging prosperity #conquer
Cajole, deceive thyself—use whatever means
“Use the Force”
What is necessary?
“The Last Great [Path-of-Least-Resistance] Stand”
For life, liberty, happily ever
Get me to the church late, never
#Nevermind
Haiku Morning

Microbomes eat and grow
Mass and form and froth and smell
and then they expire

Sun rises high up
What a world is this we live in
I know the vastness
- Claire Adams

I quite like ramen
It is my favorite food
Deal with it, okay?

I like writing haikus
They are fun and enjoyable
But I like sushi more
- Madeeha Sheriff

A red light blinking
Gleaming atop the mountain
Hark! It seals our doom.

I hate the mornings
Wednesday is uncomfortable
I want to leave school

Winter snowball fight
Everything sparkles and shines
Dusts my cheeks with white

In the beginning
You could smell bacon and eggs
Cosmic kitchen mess

I play volleyball
I bump, set, and spike the ball
Volleyball is fun.

Oh, haikus again?
It’s twenty fourteen, silly.
No time for poems.
Communism blows!
Capitalism is great!
Go America!
- Calvin Ruyak
  Audrey Thompson
  Maddy Welch
  & Jeremy Novak

Waterfall dew-drops
Dancing in the sky with me
It is beautiful
- Michaela Massa

Trees make me happy
They are tall and have branches
Pollution kills trees

Paintball is very fun
It gives you lots of bruises
Do not fall asleep

Sometimes I wake up
In the middle of dreams
Where did that thought go

I like to eat steak
Vegetarianism
World War Pizza

Eyebrows of a man
are the blindfolds of the soul
fluttering in the wind

Yellow belly two
the password to my accounts
try it if you like

We don’t write haikus.
Period. End of sentence.
Inspirationless
Sorting Through
by Tyler Becker

CHARACTERS:
Lucy, 24 year old woman.
Peter, 32 year old man.

PETER: Hey beautiful.

PETER: Nothing, I was just sorting through some books and thinking about you.

PETER: Yeah we could do that, but this might take a while. Could you assist me with this?

PETER: All right-- that sounds good. I’ll see you in a bit. Love you.

PETER: Bye (hangs up the phone) I wonder if I could make this look messy. (Quickly takes a book from the A section and places it in the S section, then shudders) this feels dirty. (Continues to change the positions of books and goes to place some next to the phone on the table. He makes sure to replace with the book that is in front of the jewelry box with a bright blue covered one). It’s a pity to make such a mess, but it’s probably worth it for her.

How could this get any better? Well at least I know how it could get worse, but she knows what I’ve done for her, and so she’ll stay. (loving sigh) I love her even though her hair isn’t as pure as the flaring sun, even though her eyes could never be described as lakes that I could take a dive in, or hear their sweet, sweet music. However, I love her still (walks over to the bookshelf), for I am the hero and she the damsel.

LUCY: How did you let it get this bad?

PETER: Hello, Love (crosses to her and gives her a hug and kiss), and I can’t make people sort my store for me (keeping her in his embrace). I would lose all my business that way.

LUCY: (ending the embrace) You’ve never been very sad about that before.

PETER: That reminds me I have something in the back that you simply must read (exits stage left).

LUCY: (Lets out a sigh) I don’t know if I can do it. It seems he doesn’t even know me, or even care to, and that gift last week. How can he even think that buying me a ruby necklace would make me happy? All I want is something simple. Actually he’s never been very good at getting me gifts, although last year’s Christmas gift was simply amazing, he actually took me on a trip to Africa with his father’s money, to visit the poor village people. But, if he thinks I’m the kind of girl who only wants expensive things, I don’t think he can truly love me. I’ve been telling him that I’m going away to Africa for some time now, to try and make a difference in the world, and he hasn’t said so much as word to me about it. Although, I know he hears me because he stops talking as soon as I say A-

She stops as she hears the door handle turn, enter Peter from stage right.

PETER: I found it back there hiding amongst others, but I’ll only give this one to you for now (hands the book to Lucy).

LUCY: (looks at the title) I’ve never even heard of this, what is it about?

PETER: It’s about how Arthur’s knights took France in the Middle Ages.

LUCY: It definitely looks like it’s from the Middle Ages (blows dust off the cover), how old is this?

PETER: Only a couple hundred years, it’s the second edition of this book ever printed.

LUCY: This is way too expensive; I don’t think I can even take this out of here.

PETER: I promise you’re only borrowing it. I don’t think I could ever let this out of my sight for too long. (He takes the book from her hands and strokes the cover, then stairs at it for a moment before giving it back) Original cover and everything, so much history in those pages.

LUCY

Shouldn’t I be reading books about the world today? I just can’t understand why you care about what happens in the past.

PETER

What do you mean?
LUCY: Well I find books about life today much more interesting than knights of the Middle Ages, you know I’m reading Lone Survivor right now.

PETER: This is just like that I promise, and actually I think that it’s much better.

LUCY: All right, but...(She sighs) Anyway, you said you needed some help!

PETER: Oh yes, I almost forgot; these savages apparently know nothing of the Dewey Decimal System.

LUCY: (Talks with pauses) I guess we’d better get started if we want to go to dinner tonight.

PETER: (Points to the shelf with the blue book on it) you should start here then. It seems like ground zero.

LUCY: (Lost in thought) Yeah it—ah-looks like it too (puts the book down on the table then begins to sort. Beat). So... you know I’m going to Africa in a couple weeks...

Peter immediately looks away from her.

LUCY: No Peter, we need to talk about this sometime, and it may as well be now.

PETER: Let’s talk then, if you want (moving to the other side of her shelf to begin helping her).

They begin coming closer to the blue book at the same pace.

LUCY: (Looks at him for a moment) as I was saying I’m going to Africa, and I was thinking about how we should deal with that...

PETER: Yeah, actually I was too (looks to the left at the blue book).

LUCY: I didn’t know what I should do so I started to think about my life, and our life.

PETER: I know exactly what you’re saying.

LUCY: You’ve been so huge in my life for a long time, in fact ever since mom died, and I thought about how grateful I am to you for trying to help.

PETER: Of course I am a gentleman.

They both are coming closer to reaching the book when she slows and then looks at him. Beat.

LUCY: Yes, you are, but I need to be able to take care of young starving kids, and I can’t do that while you take care of me.

Peter continues to sort quickly until he comes to the blue book when he stops realizing where he is, and he looks at her.

PETER: I know you, you’ve always needed my help before. I just don’t know if you can handle it out there on your own. Why don’t you stay with me?

After a short pause she begins to sort books again at his beckon (a simple motion of his hand), and she comes to put her hand on the blue book, but then stops and talks.

LUCY: I don’t know any more if I can stay or not, and I just don’t know if I can help them when I’m getting help from you, and that’s why I... (takes a breath, but then, unable to find the words, she removes the blue book from the shelf and she sees the ring, dropping the book in surprise). What’s this? (Picking it up and showing it to him).

PETER: It’s what I meant just now.

LUCY: This can’t be what I think... (she stops as he drops to his knees and takes her hand).

PETER: I love you, and as you move on in your life I want to be your answer, if you don’t know whether you can or can’t do something let me be there to tell you that you can, and I want to be able to support you, will you take me as your husband?

Tears appear in Lucy’s eyes and she doesn’t give an answer.

Beat.

PETER: Don’t you see, everything you were talking about just now, I’m the answer to, if you don’t think you can help those kids maybe you should stay.

Lucy holds her hand to her mouth, she still doesn’t answer.

Beat.

LUCY: You don’t even know who I am, (He starts to talk but she cuts him off again) no you don’t. You think I’m this court lady who’s afraid of everything. I try to say how I feel, and you look like you’re listening, but obviously you aren’t because you can’t tell why I’m saying no, or why I would hesitate to take the book. You’re too wrapped up in your books to see past the text on page. Personally I love the people of Niger enough to help them, even if you only need books. I am a human being, and I have more feelings than whether or not a place is dirty or hot, and I don’t need people around me to be able to live someplace.
PETER: How could you say that?

LUCY: I have to go, I’m sorry we never got to have that dinner.

Beat, Lucy straightens and looks at Peter.

LUCY: Listen, I’m breaking...

PETER: (Now a whisper) No you can’t say those words.

LUCY: I love you, that’s why I have to say those words. Peter I don’t think we should talk anymore (at this Peter starts to object). Listen, (touches his shoulder) I’ll always remember the man whose only wish was to save a fair maiden, but (he turns away and she grabs his head and kisses him hard on the lips) I have to leave. I love you.

Lights begin to dim as Lucy exits through the door on stage right leaving the book that he had given her on the table in front of him. The lights become darker, and eventually leave a spotlight on Peter, and low lights on the stage, as he sits down at the desk.

Peter puts the ring on the table and inspects the bookshelf before taking a book from it and leaving through stage right. Fade to black.

CURTAIN.
“Did Mr. Riley honestly have to keep me at school until 4:30?”
by Courtney Leonard

I. Bonnie
Could they have wasted my time anymore than they just had? Honestly, it’s not like I had committed a crime. I just haven’t turned in my homework in like, the past two weeks. But did Mr. Riley honestly have to keep me at school until 4:30? I get it, I need to do my work, whatever. On top of it all, he made me miss the bus. Really? I have a 40 minute walk home now. Thanks Mr. Riley. My feet hurt as they pound against the pavement in my high heels. Of all days to wear heels to school, of course I had to choose today. The messenger bag I was carrying kept hitting my side, heavy with the work I was supposed to be doing. Clunk clank clunk against my side. The houses in this neighborhood are actually really beautiful. I guess I ever had the urge to appreciate them on the bus; but my house was still half an hour from here. Probably longer considering these heels are starting to give me blisters. I’m probably going to ruin my new Gucci heels by having to walk this far. Mr. Riley you owe me new shoes. I kept looking at the houses. They were complete with two stories, picket-fences, perfectly mowed lawns. You walk past one then the other. Everyone here must have lots of money with all their expensive cars sitting there in the driveway. Blue car, black car, red car, black car, gree---. Black car. Toyota. License plate: New Hampshire 451-878. My dads car. He works until 5:30. Why would he be here? The door to the house opens. I’ve never seen this house. I freeze. The door is opening, my dad is walking out. With a woman. The woman is not my mom. They’re talking but I cannot hear what they are saying. He works until 5:30. Its 5:00. He kisses her. The woman is not my mom. He turns around. I’m still frozen. Our eyes lock, terror shoots across his face, and mine. And I just start running.

II. Michael
Bonnie. Bonnie is at the bottom of the driveway. Bonnie. My daughter Bonnie. Why is she here? How could she be here? I’m caught. I’ve been caught. My daughter caught me. I shouldn’t have done it. I don’t know what to say or do. But she does, she runs. I don’t know what else to do except run after her. I sprint down the driveway. “Bonnie stop! Bonnie stop and listen to me! Bonnie please!” But she doesn’t slow down, she just keeps on running, I see her heels click together. She loses her balance and falls face down. Damn those shoes, they cost me $75. But now I’m grateful she begged me for them. I pick her up, holding her to me, clinging her back to me. She’s struggling. I shouldn’t have done it. I shouldn’t have done it. “Bonnie, please!” She stops. I shouldn’t have done it. “Please, Bonnie. Please don’t tell your mother, please. I shouldn’t have done it. I shouldn’t have done it.”

III. Madeline
What time is it? 5:30? Bonnie should be home. She must have gone over to Jessica’s house to do their homework. They’re always studying together at Jessica’s. She’s very responsible. One apple, two apple, three apple, four apple, five apple. Flour, sugar, water, egg, baking powder. Where’s the baking powder? There it is. Apple pie is Michael’s favorite. He is going to love it, he always loves my apple pie. He always told me he loved it. That’s how we first met. We were at a charity event and I made apple pie. And my, he wouldn’t stop talking about how wonderful my apple pie was. That was almost 22 years ago, and it was the first time we ever talked. I think I fell in love with him right then and there. Bonnie loves apple pie too. Like father like daughter, I guess. Where were those two? I’m making apple pie and they are both late. Michael is probably just working late as usual. Car engine, car door, the rustling of bags. Michael is home. I go to clean my hands on the dish towel by the sink. The front door opens. “We’re home!” Michael yells from the doorway. I turn to look over and both of them are there. My two favorite people in the world. “There you two are! I’ve been worried!” I say. “No worries Mom, I missed the bus so Dad picked me up from school,” Bonnie replied. I’m glad they are home now.
One day, Sharquisha was walking down the street to go to the supermarket. Once she reached the store, she smelled something fishy in the air. Some guy was randomly cooking salmon in the middle of the road. Sharquisha went inside the market to complete her shopping and saw some weird type of game occurring. People were getting in a line and being thrown into the air by a worker at the supermarket. Sharquisha thought this would be a fun thing to try, but little did she know she was walking into a contest. Once Sharquisha reached the front of the line, she was thrown to a maximum height of twenty feet before landing in a pile of pineapples. She was struck, but she could still see the rest of the contestants. She then realized that she had been thrown into a pile of fresh fruit.

Sharquisha saw an elderly man with his shopping cart full of food get into the line, thinking it was a checkout. He did not realize he was in for a treat. Once the man was at the beginning of the line, he began to hand his items to the worker. The worker told him to climb into his arms, but the old man took this as insult and started to throw his items at the worker. The worker became agitated and threw the old man as far as he could, into a shelf of birthday cards. The man reached a maximum height of sixteen feet before reaching the ground. The old man had fallen and could not get up, so he used his Life-Alert to call an ambulance. Meanwhile, Sharquisha saw her friend, Sha-Sha, step into the line to be thrown. Sha-Sha did not see his friend in the pile of fruit or the old man surrounded by singing birthday cards. He reached the front of the line and was thrown in the air without even realizing what had happened. He reached a maximum height of eighteen feet before landing in another person’s shopping cart. When the ambulance finally arrived, the paramedics went inside the supermarket, looked around, and sighed before helping the old man.

-Chris Cunningman
Once there was a locket. It was a very simple, elegant locket, no doubt once belonging to a great-great-great-great grandmother who wore too much perfume and owned nine cats. Somehow, this locket ended up in the hands of Ebony Fields. She never had known much about it; it was a birthday present from her best friend and neighbor, Simon, from years back. The locket was rusted shut, so she had no way of knowing what was inside. That didn’t bother her too much; she liked the feeling of mystery surrounding it. Ebony wore the locket every day, and hardly ever took it off.

One day, Ebony was going to swim practice, and had to take her locket off before she swam. She put it down on the bench with the rest of her clothes and went off to swim some laps with her team. She stayed later than everyone else, and realized that she was going to be late to dinner, which her mother would not be happy about, since they had guests coming over that night. She jumped out of the pool, grabbed her bundle of clothes, and ran home. On the way there, she dropped the locket near Simon’s house. In her hurry, she almost didn’t notice. She looked down and saw that the seal of the locket had cracked. Ebony took the locket and ran up to Simon’s house, forgetting about the dinner entirely, and let herself in. Simon heard her running in and went to see what the deal was. In her excitement, Ebony tripped, causing the locket to fly from her hands in a perfect arch through the air, and when it hit the ground, two small diamonds flew out in shiny, beautiful arches as well.

- Ana Ohnersorgen

Once upon a time, there were three brothers who lived in the wild town of Circo. Because of the fact that they lived in a crazy town, all three boys had unique names. The oldest went by the name of Gordo, and he was 15. The middle child was Promedio, and he was 12. The youngest was Flaco, and he was 10. Each child was very different, but they all got along very well. What the siblings had a hard time doing was obeying the rules. Circo was known for its absurd entertainment companies, the most famous being the circus that rolled around 4 times a year. It was June, and when the circus rolled around, the brothers had snuck backstage before their mother could tell them that they were prohibited from going. There was only one goal the three boys had when they went to the circus: to become a part of it.

When the boys got into the giant red curtain where the circus took place, they found the circus members in the middle rehearsal. They also found one other thing that had made their hearts skip a beat: a cannon. Within a minute of them walking in, they saw a clown shot out of the cannon, and come crashing down into a pool of water. Promedio told his brothers that they had to do this, or else it would be a waste of a trip. So, they took their phones, and downloaded an app that made the noises of a wild creton on the loose. When the performers heard this, they freaked out, and all 48 of them jumped into a Mini Cooper. They high-tailed it out of there, and left the boys alone... with the cannon. First, Gordo went, but not without some complications. He barely fit into the cannon, but he did. Promedio and Flaco squeezed the sticks of dynamite in, and off he went. All three of them were very disappointed with the result. Gordo’s flight was pretty flat, and he had landed in the bleachers before he knew it. The cannon wasn’t in good condition either. It had tipped over, and the boys struggled to push it up.

Flaco went next. He easily fit into the cannon, so they could fit a ton of dynamite sticks in. They lit the fuse, and Flaco went shooting practically straight up. It was like Kris Humphries’ marriage with Kim Kardashian; it happened so quickly, people wondered if it was real. Similarly, it ended all too fast. Flaco came crashing down, bringing a couple of pigeons with him. Flaco landed, and the kids analyzed who he landed on: their mom. This could not have worked out better. The brothers hoped she would remain unconscious long enough for Promedio to go. He dove into the cannon, and began gorging it with dynamite sticks. He took off, and his flight was so graceful that when his mom woke up mid-flight, she passed out again. Promedio had taken off at the perfect angle, and his was a lovely combination of Flaco’s and Gordo’s. He landed in the pool, and got out like a boss. As the kids were dragged home by their ears, they realized why each of their flights were the way they were. Gordo weighed 225 pounds, so he weighed the cannon down. This was why he shot out at that angle. At least, that’s what Flaco figured. The only thing Gordo figured out was that candy helps depression. Flaco also knew that he was so light, he barely weighed the cannon down. That’s why he shot straight up. Promedio weighed enough to push the cannon down to the perfect angle, and that’s why his flight was so incredible. The boys knew they were going to have a great time at the circus, but they didn’t think it would be this great.

-Jacob Bain
Every Rule
by Claire Adams

Characters:
Receptionist, a young woman in her mid-20s.
Mark, a man in his early 30s.
Amanda, Mark’s younger sister who is 27.

Scene opens in a white, dismal hallway. A classic 1940s receptionist with bright red lipstick sits at a desk, chewing bubble-gum loudly and blowing bubbles. A man enters wearing a dark hat and trench coat. His clothes are soaked and he leaves muddy footprints on the white linoleum beneath the flickering lights. He approaches a desk smoking a cigarette and lays his arm on the top. The receptionist looks up at him and blows a bubble, it pops loudly.

Receptionist: You need something, hon?

Mark: (He puffs on his cigarette.) I’m here for a visit with one of your patients.

Receptionist: Name?

Mark: Mark Shore

Receptionist: You here for Amanda?

Mark: Yeah…(He pauses and shifts uncomfortably.) my sister

Receptionist: You can head down to Room 203, but smoking isn’t allowed with the patients… they could…(beat)Well, I don’t have to explain anything to you, go ahead darling.

He puts out his cigarette in the ash tray and begins to walk down the dank hallway. His shoes squeak uncomfortably and he reaches Room 203. He gently opens the door and it squeaks slowly. He walks into the room to see Amanda sitting on an old, run-down cot in a room with peeling flowered wallpaper. She wears a white gown with her hair back in a loose ponytail, a dress code for all patients. She draws a picture with a broken crayon and remains focused on the paper even when Mark enters. Mark takes off his coat and hat and sits in a chair near her bed, shifting uncomfortably for a moment. A beat passes.

Mark: Hey Amanda, (She remains silent.) It’s been a while, huh? I’ve missed you, how has it been in here? (A beat of silence passes.) So what do you think of this weather, huh? It’s been raining all day.

Amanda: (Monotonously) Rule 33: make casual conversation, preferably about the weather.

Mark: Are they treating you all right? I know it’s not always easy…

Amanda: Rule 102: Don’t tell Mark anything, don’t tell Mark.

Mark: (He leans forward, concerned.) Don’t tell me what?

Amanda: Rule 102, Rule 102

Mark: Tell me, Amanda!

Amanda: (She begins to rock back and forth violently.) No, no, no, no.

Mark: (He holds out his hands, trying to calm her.) Okay, okay, we don’t have to talk about it. (His tone softens.) You know why I came here today?

Amanda remains silent staring intently at her paper. Mark readjusts uncomfortably. Beat.

Mark: It’s the second anniversary of the accident, you know, the day…(He gestures to her softly.) this happened. God, you were just 25 and your life was ripped right out of your hands. I want you to realize I… I know how much you miss him, I do too. Can you hear me, Amanda?

Amanda: (The rocking subsides slightly.) Rule 84: Don’t talk about Dad. (The rocking becomes more violent once again with her eyes closed.) Don’t talk about Dad, don’t talk about Dad.

Mark: (He wipes his forehead.) I’m sorry, I forgot how upset it makes you.

Amanda: (Covers her ears, talking louder now.) Don’t talk about Dad, don’t talk about Dad! Stop the car Dad! Stop the car! (The rocking intensifies and she pleads quietly.) Stop the car… 84, 84, 84

Mark: It’s okay, just calm down. (He gently touches her shoulder.)

Amanda: (She screams.) AHHHHH!! (She struggles to get away from him, she scrambles to the end of the bed and covers her ears.) 84, 84, 84

An awkward silence passes while Amanda anxiously hums the tune to the ABCs.

Mark: (He gets up from the chair, loosens his tie and paces around the room.) Fuck! Can’t you see I’m trying? I’m trying so hard to connect with someone who’s not even there anymore.

Mark violently kicks the wall, leaving a scuffed mark and a tear in the wallpaper. He falls back into his chair while Amanda begins to rock aggressively again.
Mark: (He sits down and pleads quietly.) I’m sorry, please don’t get upset. I just can’t do this anymore, all I want is for you to come back. Nothing’s the same anymore. (He puts his face in his hands.) I need someone to talk again, to not be so damn invisible.

Amanda: (The rocking calms now.) Rule 63: Don’t upset Mark, don’t upset Mark.

Mark: (His head still in his hands, a tear falls and he cries subtly. He chokes out the first sentence.) You know... it’s ridiculous but I got in a fight last week. The son of a bitch hit me and I just lost it. Spending all day in a cubicle does things with your head, you know! It can drive a guy insane, hell, sometimes I think I should be in this place too. (He looks up and around the room, beat.) I know sometimes it seems like I’m mad at you, or everyone for that matter, but you should know how much I love you. I don’t visit often because... every time I do you seem farther away and I hate to see my own sister becoming someone I can’t even recognize. (Beat) But God, if Dad could see you now, see how beautiful you are, he would be so proud of you. (He stares at his feet, a beat passes.) You’re not as crazy as they say you are, you know, you just deal with things differently, through your rules. You just compartmentalize everything into neat little rules, blocking out everything that doesn’t matter. Maybe if everyone thought the way you do, they wouldn’t be so wrapped up in their own stupidity. (Beat) You’ve always been the girl that made the world a little bit brighter, but now I can see you slipping away, and everything just seems... dim.

Amanda: Rule 1, Rule 1

Mark opens the drawing and smiles, he stares at it for a moment before getting up and tacking it on the wall. It reveals a crude, childish drawing done in pink crayon of two stick figures holding hands. One wears a tie while the other wears a hospital gown.

Amanda stops rocking momentarily, and slowly crawls back to her drawing. She picks up the broken crayon and continues drawing, ignoring Mark.

Mark: (He rubs his hands together anxiously.) You have to know that I want to get better, I want you to feel okay again. I don’t want you to be alone like everyone else in this damn world. (He mutters softly.) I want everything to be better for once.

Amanda: (She continues drawing, but speaks softly.) Rule 1: Always love Mark (She hands a drawing to MARK while looking down. She cringes when he takes it and draws her arm back sharply.)

Mark: (He puts on his hat and coat and opens the door. He turns and blows a kiss to Amanda who has closed her eyes and is gently rocking back and forth.)

Amanda: (Softly) Rule 1, Rule 1

He closes the door softly and walks down the hallway. He lights a cigarette and passes the receptionist.

Receptionist: (She pops her gum and waves while staring at Life magazine.) See you next time, sweetheart.

He returns the gesture with a nonchalant wave and walks out the door, holding the cigarette at his side and leaving only his footprints.

CURTAIN.
“It’s like Paris,” George said.
“You don’t go there, you never plan to,
You pretend you’re an expert,”

“It’s still life,” George said.
“You take some fruit, a book, and a vase of flowers. You paint it.
You paint it until the flowers are dryer than your grandaddy’s bones
And the fruit is all shriveled
And pocketed and bruised like the underlids of these eyes in the morning and
the vase has cracked
And smushed the fruit all over the book
So you can’t read it anymore and no one wants to anyway.
Then you stop painting.
Ya sniff.
Ya grimace.
Ya wipe the paint off your hands and pretend it’s
Fruit juice. Then you throw the real Still Life away
And try to convince yourself that yours is better than the real thing, because it
doesn’t
Rot.
And then you
Rot.
And you pretend that’s poetry.”
A Change of Heart
by Lauren Becker

Samuel
I jump as the old man enters the sleek black vehicle and angrily pulls the door shut. I discreetly close my eyes and take a deep breath so that I don’t show any signs of fear, and place my shaking hands on the wheel. Mr. O’Brien can detect any traces of fear from his strong political opponents, but also from his meek staff. I am particularly afraid of him today because I have given him a reason to strip me of this job. He is a selfish man and no individual should possess the enormous amount of wealth that he does. The black suit and red tie that he is wearing today glistens in the sunlight as if it is made of precious metals. How I despise him. My wife would not have the fear that I have of him and she would not restrain herself from deeming him a selfish member of society. How I love and admire her. Sometimes I wish that I had the bravery that she possesses. But I need this job. And now he has both the power and the reason to strip me of it. When I look in the rear view mirror our eyes meet. His are dark and cold and filled with anger. I quickly look away and turn my attention to the road ahead and the cloudy blue sky. They remind me of my baby girl’s beautiful dark gray eyes and then I am reminded as to why I need this job so desperately. Fear consumes me again.

Mr. O’Brien
Focus. I will take my anger and use it to deliver the most powerful, passionate speech of my campaign. My classless, ignorant opponent Mr. Henderson will tremble with fear when he hears the roar of approval from the vast crowd that will be gathered to hear me speak. He does not stand a chance against such a powerful, charismatic man as myself. Yet, Henderson’s driver must be on time when he orders him to drive him to the location where he will deliver a speech...unlike my selfish driver. My driver dares to make eye contact with me in the mirror? Look at those selfish, dark eyes. How dare he make eye contact with me in the mirror. I will make him fear me before I fire him today. I will make him fear me like a mouse fears a cat. I will make him fear me like my political opponents fear me. He is below me and I will be sure that he understands that before this day is through. The sound of the hands moving on my Rolex is painful to my ears.

Bobby
My Mr. O’Brien button is secured firmly to my new, brown fleece. I am wearing it proudly! I am thrilled to see him deliver a speech today. He is such a good orator and an inspiration to people like me. I hope that one day, I can achieve the political status that he has and give a better life to my family. I check my watch and the time is ticking away quickly. My old, worn sneakers squeak as they glide along the pavement that is wet from the rain. I look down at my watch again, afraid that we will miss witnessing the opening of Mr. O’Brien’s speech and begin to quicken my pace. The city is always crowded, but the number of people in a hurry paired with the vast number of umbrellas makes it even more chaotic. And I am a klutz. I look down at my watch again and then look down at my feet as I if am urging them to go faster. My daughter releases my hand as we begin to cross the street as she spots a small shiny penny on the ground. My feet carry me into the middle of the street where I stop and turn around in order to retrieve her.

Samuel
The city is especially crowded today and the rain is beginning to come down from the sky rather aggressively. I am nervous about driving in such conditions, but when I hear Mr. O’Brien’s sharp, deep voice from the back seat, I feel the transfer of more weight onto the gas pedal of the car and I weave through the immense number of cars and people with great effort. I need this job. I need it to support my daughter...my poor baby girl, who is sick at home. Mr. O’Brien has a wife and children; he must understand that my priority lies with caring for my daughter. Why do I try and convince myself of this? Mr. O’Brien is going to fire me because I was late this morning. I glance into the rear view mirror to catch a glimpse of his eyes again. Maybe they have changed and become more calm and forgiving since we departed from his home this morning.
Ah finally, I see the convention center in the distance. “Speed up the vehicle, please” I urge the driver. He does so willingly. My eyes turn to the vast number of people hurrying through the streets of the city today. I do not see their faces. They are merely voters. My eyes turn to the front of the car. Through the rain it is a blur, but a moment later, the car swerves and the driver slams on the breaks. I look down at my glistening Rolex and feel the burning anger rising up inside of me because time is moving and my vehicle is not. My driver continues to astonish me with his behavior as he exits the vehicle. I do so as well. Then I see it and my anger turns into shock and disbelief. A man in a hideous brown sweater, wet from the rain, lies in the street. The rain ceases to stop and the heavy raindrops make a loud pattering sound as they collide with the shiny red “Vote for Mr. O’Brien” button on his sweater. I am losing my stoic demeanor and I feel my jaw drop. I am too astonished to take my eyes off of the scene, but out of the corner of my eye I see my driver approach a small girl who is standing on the sidewalk and crying. The gravity of the situation sinks in and I no longer feel powerful. I feel helpless. My driver is a better man than I am. I hesitantly walk over to the man lying on the ground who is gingerly trying to sit up. I am disgusted with myself. I have hurt a man…not a faceless voter…a man…a man in a cheap sweater with a small daughter and big dreams. I used to be him. A crowd of interested onlookers begins to gather in the street. One man, dressed in an expensive, well made business suit stares at me with harsh, fearless eyes like my own. I turn to him, take my prized possession, my watch, off of my wrist and say, “please, take this. I won’t be needing it anymore”.

Mr. O’Brien