

Outside the Box

Issue II

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From the Editors:

Outside the Box features Creative Nonfiction stories written by our students. Creative Nonfiction is writing that is factually true but reads like fiction. Creative Nonfiction, also known as literary journalism, is a relatively new genre in the field of writing, combining the best skills of the journalist, the poet and the fiction writer. Creative Nonfiction isn't a twist of the truth; it is taking the truth and treating it in a creative, thought-provoking and entertaining manner.



Three stories from a place we love to hate

Material Mahem

By: Rebecca Jeskey

Her black Jetta Volkswagen exhales exhaust, as if it's growling at the stoplight that refuses to turn green. The car is sandwiched between two lanes of SUVs and their angry, tired drivers. To the far right, a billboard advertises a weight-loss pill. It shows before and after photographs. The before photo: a pudgy body, a stomach spilling over a pink bikini, a round face that stares straight forward. The after photo: a smiling woman wearing the bikini that now fits perfectly over a slim, tan body.

"I'm going on a diet," Jackie tells her sister. Her blonde bangs swoop across a pale smooth-skinned face, hiding her squinting dark eyes.

She stares at the rows of traffic on McKnight Road, a congested stretch of consumerism in between suburbia and the north side of Pittsburgh. McKnight is like a drug: some people imagine that it contains everything they need to be happy, even though it doesn't. Others avoid it at all costs. And some people, like Jackie, lose themselves in it, without ever realizing that they do.

The sisters are on their way home from an afternoon spent at Ross Park Mall, an upscale shopping center full of overpriced and overrated products. Everything about Ross Park verges on excess: the 18 shops devoted to accessories, 15 others for health and beauty, and department stores like Nordstrom and Macy's, selling products that look like reasonable purchases -- until one reads the price tag. Throughout the mall, people move in a hurry to purchase more shit they don't need or want, but for some reason, think that they do.

It only makes sense for this mall to be located near a crowded McKnight Road, the span of surplus. Restaurants. Furniture stores. Car dealerships. Bridal shops. Clothing stores. Best Buy. Tanning salons. Pet stores. Book stores. Jewelry stores. Convenience stores. Gas stations. And a Starbucks. ...To name a few.

And in the middle of this relentless

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© Alexis Gruber

A former Libby Lu employee dresses up in one of the store's costumes.

Libby in the Sky with Diamonds

By: Alexis Gruber

Saturday afternoon, Bailey* drags her dad and little brother through the maze of people on the lower level of Ross Park Mall, in the North Hills. She is overly excited about going to her favorite store. As she crosses the large, sparkling, silverthreshold of Club Libby Lu, a blonde teen greets her, wearing a crown, boa, and fairy wings. The fairy girl asks Bailey and her family if they'd like to make a magical fairy wish. Only Bailey agrees, so the fairy girl tells her to close her eyes and make a magical wish. Bailey tightly shuts her eyes and the girl reaches into a tiny pink pouch filled with silver glitter, and sprinkles some on Bailey's head with a fluffy pink puff ball. "Awesome," the girl says to Bailey. "Open your eyes. Okay, now touch your toes, touch your nose, spin in a circle and strike a cool pose!" Bailey does all of the above with ease, as she has been here many times before. "Wow, great job princess!" exclaims the fairy girl. "Did you come here today to get a rockin' Libby Du makeover?"

This story isn't heartfelt or magical; it isn't about making dreams come true or following your bliss. This story is about how one place could be the greatest place

*Name has been changed.

on earth for someone, and hell on earth for someone else.

Club Libby Lu, or Libby Lu, as just about everyone called it, was created in 2000 by a former Claire's executive named Mary Drolet, who had an imaginary friend growing up named Libby Lu, and she wanted to make a place where girls could go to be transformed into their favorite princesses or rock stars. What set Libby Lu apart from other retailers was that it was known as an *experience retailer*. This meant that instead of just being a store where people could go to buy overpriced clothes, jewelry, and bags of glitter; girls could book birthday parties and makeovers. Two years after its creation, Saks Incorporated, the owners of Saks Fifth Avenue, bought Libby Lu. Drolet remained the CEO of the company, and they were able to open up more locations across the United States. The Ross Park Mall location was one of the first new stores opened, and at the time of its closing, five years later, there were 98 stores across 28 states.

Everything associated with Libby Lu had a cutesy name. Everything. The creators of the Libby Lu believed that you could never take the "every girl is a princess" mentality too far. Even the corporate headquarters and product distribution center was known as *The Wish Factory*,

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Twisted

By: Ellen Horn

The phone is ringing. "How dare you look at my daughter's phone, you little bitch." Run. Tears. Bathroom. Inside, the yellow stained walls puff like a fish in anger. Years of water damage and neglect are evident. Signs on the wall read about labor laws and harassment. The metal racks hold cleaning supplies that were never used and dirty tennis shoes. The floor is stained a brownish, red color. A giant door, like a crypt keeper, holds all the secrets that go on in that room. Today's secret includes what consists of the backroom: neglect, anger, and harassment.

* * *

It smells like the inside of an oven when you first turn it on. You know, the sweet smell of metal coming to life. The blue-checkered tiles on the floor are stained a dingy, brown. The faucet always drips, even after it's been fixed. The sound of T.I. blares in the background and the swinging door hangs lazily on its hinges. That door separates suburban north hills from something much darker. In fact, that door hides what goes on in most suburban households, people are just too afraid to talk about it: the dark underbelly of society and the ruin of America's youth. What is this horrid place? That answer is easy, it's the lessons learned that aren't.

This is the story of a place that changes you. The kind of place that makes you into something you never intended to be. Most people wouldn't believe that a job at a pretzel shop could be a soul-searching endeavor. However, most people don't know the truth about what went on behind that swinging door at Auntie Anne's Hand-Rolled Soft Pretzels. This is the story of how a backroom at a pretzel shop can show you the ugly about society.

The North Hills is like a camera for despicable things. No one really notices the ugly until they get the picture developed. As a whole, it's a Mecca for the over wealthy, over zealous, brand-obsessed person. No one talks about what goes on inside closed doors, though. How the evil that no one sees resides within. No one

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which housed about 70 corporate employees, each with their own cutesy job title. The only males on staff at club Libby Lu worked out of the Wish Factory, one of them, named Greg, was known as the Prince of Loss Prevention. Each store location was represented at corporate by an Area Diva and a District Diva. At the store level, the titles of employees reflected the club-type atmosphere the company was trying to create. The store manager and her assistant were known as the Club Director and Assistant Club Director. Under them were the key holders, or Senior Club Counselors, and the regular store associates were called Club Counselors. Even the customers had a cutesy title. They had the option to “join the club” and become a V.I. P. or Very Important Princess. It was free and they got a free charm bracelet, the charms of course, could only be earned by partaking in one of the store’s experiences.

If you worked at Libby Lu you were always known as either a princess or fairy. Each employee’s shift was mapped out on a chart called the P.D.A. or Princess Daily Activities. The POD or Princess On Duty (similar to manager on duty), would mark each hour marked with initials that let them know exactly what they were supposed to be doing, if they saw FF that meant they were a front fairy, SF was selling fairy, PF was party fairy, RF was register fairy, and BF was back-room fairy.

Much to the excitement of the Libby Lu customers, and the dismay of its employees, there were five different Libby Lu experiences to choose from. These included makeovers, potion making, pooch parlor, ear piercing, and wish making.

WISH MAKING

There was always a front fairy at Libby Lu. She was the person who greeted each customer and offered them a fairy wish as they walked in the store. The Princess on Duty closely monitored this unlucky fairy to make sure she was offering EVERYONE a wish, not just little girls. There were a few acceptable ways to offer a wish, the most commonly used one: “Hi Princess, welcome to Club Libby Lu, would you like to make a fairy wish and get magical fairy dust in your hair?” Glitter at Libby Lu was to always be referred to as either sparkles, or fairy dust. The store manager wrote up employees for calling it glitter, because according to company, the word glitter sounded trashy.

MAKEOVERS

The front of the store was rich with the scent of perfume, hairspray and nail polish. This was because of the makeovers that took place each day. Makeovers were the most popular experience. A makeover on more than one girl was considered to be a party. Each party had the option to dress up in costumes and dance. There was much controversy over the original “rock star” costumes at Libby Lu. They were something of a pedophiles’ dream come true; consisting of shiny silver stretch pants with sequined stitching across the waist, and a tiny silver stretch tube top that was more like a bathing suit top than a shirt. These costumes were referred to by more than one angered party mom as whorish, and it was hard to disagree. The costume came in sizes extra small to extra large, but on a 12-year-old girl the glittering spandex outfit had too much in com-

mon with a stripper ensemble. You would think that there would be more than one option for dress up, but that was pretty much it. There were a few princess and fairy dresses, but they only fit girls ages 6 and under, and since the girls got to choose their outfits, they often went straight to the silver spandex. After receiving much criticism from customers over the aforementioned costume, the Wish Factory sent the store black tee shirts with a giant silver star on it to replace the tube tops.

After dress up, the girls got to go to the style studio. The style studio was a giant seating area with sparkling, silver, heart-shaped mirrors, located in the front of the store. It was here the girls chose from four different hairstyles, or Libby Dus, each crafted by one of the party fairies using only hairspray, hair ties, and bobby pins. The finished style was then coated with spray on glitter. These hairstyles changed periodically throughout the year, and the club counselors had to learn each one the day before the change. Each hairstyle came with the choice of an accessory. Girls could either choose a giant bejeweled tiara, a “rockin” headset that was really just a pretend plastic microphone, not unlike those worn by drive thru workers at McDonalds, but pink and covered in sparkles, a fake hair extension in some god awful color that clipped into the little girl’s hair, or a necklace, for the girl that didn’t like to wear stuff on her head.

Each Libby Du had a unique name like “The Priceless Princess” or “The Royal

her own concealer and began covering the 6-year-olds face with it.

POTIONS

Create- your- own fancy potions were another experience in the store. The fancy potion station lined the left wall of the store. Girls got to choose from five different creations like glittery lip gloss, scented body wash, and perfume. For a short time, Libby Lu offered a body scrub that had the appearance and texture of ice cream. Corporate was forced to pull this product, known as the soapy sundae, from the shelves after too many kids had gotten sick from trying to eat it.

* * *

To an 8-year-old girl, Libby Lu was like crack. Set to a soundtrack of blaring Disney music, a little girl could find all the things she never knew she wanted: purple lipgloss, tee-shirts that spelled out “Birthday Princess” in magenta glitter, stuffed dogs with pierced ears, and fake purple hair extensions. To the 18 year old store employee, Libby Lu could be the most annoying place on earth. Libby Lu prided itself on embarrassing its employees.

The humiliation began as soon as they came in for the interview. There were two parts to every interview, the interview itself and the audition. The audition was a series of hands-on activities each hopeful girl had to complete in order to be considered for a position in the store. Part one was the fairy wish; the interviewee had to act as a front fairy and give a wish to whichever manager was conducting

“These costumes were referred to by more than one angered party mom as whorish, and it was hard to disagree. The costume came in sizes extra small to extra large, but on a 12-year-old girl the tight spandex outfit had too much in common with a stripper ensemble.”

Heiress,” and there was always a featured hairstyle that usually wasn’t a hairstyle at all, but a wig fashioned like the hair of a popular tween star. The most popular feature makeover was that of tween sensation Hannah Montana. She was known for her Disney TV show where she was a normal girl during the day, but at night, after putting on a blonde wig, transformed into a hugely popular rock star. The makeover consisted of a low quality blonde wig and a makeup compact shaped like a guitar. While most moms cringed at the sight of the glossy bleach blonde wig, this makeover was very popular with the young girls. The purpose of this makeover was not to make the little girl look exactly like her tween idol, but to make her feel like it was possible to be able to transform into a different version of herself. The party mom’s weren’t always able to grasp this concept and some became hugely disappointed when their daughters, with the addition of the blonde wig, did not resemble Hannah Montana in the slightest. One such mother, whose daughter had a dark olive skin tone, went as far as asking the party fairy if she had any white skin makeup to “make her look more like Hannah.”

“We don’t carry that kind of makeup,” the party fairy said. “Fine,” huffed the mom, “I’ll do it myself.” She pulled out

the audition. After that they had to pull up the manager’s hair into a ponytail. At Libby Lu it was not necessary to have any experience styling hair, but the worker had to be comfortable with the idea of touching the hair of any little girl that might come through the door. Next, the wannabe employee had to dress a dog in the pooch parlor, a small section of the store devoted to dressing up stuffed dogs in shirts with matching carrying purses. After the girl outfitted her pooch in a pink or purple sparkly shirt emblazoned with the words “Cupcake Cutie,” they had to convince the store manager to purchase it. The last part of the audition was the worst. The interviewee had to learn the Libby Lu birthday dance, a choreographed dance that each party fairy taught to her party, and then perform it with the manager at the front of the store. If the applicant made it this far, and few of them did, the manager judged them on a pass or fail system, and if they passed all four parts they were hired.

Once hired, the managers trained the new girl to style hair, lead parties, sell merchandise, and pierce ears. Every employee at Libby Lu learned how to pierce ears. Some girls were able to complete the ear piercing training with ease, and they were eager and willing to test out their piercing skills out on the young customers. Some

were not quite ready, but were still forced into this awkward situation. Jane* was one of the latter. After training, she was given her first piercing assignment; a little girl, age seven, named Maddie.* Maddie was excited about getting her ears pierced, but a little nervous, not nearly as nervous, however, as her mom. Jane broke the first rule of piercing, and told Maddie’s mom that it was her first time. “Do you trust me,” Jane said to the mom, pulling on her tight rubber gloves. “I trust Jesus,” the mom replied reluctantly. Jane cleaned the piercing gun, or wand, as she was told to call it, and got the pen out to dot Maddie’s ears. Since it was her first time dotting she had trouble getting the dot in the right place, and the mom was not happy with the placement. Instead of trying again or asking another employee for help, Jane handed the pen to the mom and said with an air of annoyance, “why don’t you show me where you want them.” Surprisingly, the mom complied and even without training was able to easily dot the girl’s ears. The girl claimed that she wanted both sides to be pierced at once so Jane enlisted the help of another club counselor, but right as they were about to pierce the excitement was just too much for Jane, who screamed “I CAN’T DO THIS!” then threw the piercing wand on the ground and ran to the back of the store crying. The Princess on Duty quickly picked the wand off of the ground and said, “Princess Maddie, after we pierce your ears, why don’t we make you your own fancy potion to take home for free?”

There were many things that made working at Libby Lu unbearable. If it wasn’t the parties and piercing then maybe it was the phone greeting. It changed every month, but was always something along the lines of “we’re having a rockin’ good time here at Club Libby Lu.” Or maybe it was the uniform, a childish tee shirt that changed with each promotion, the worst one being a white tee shirt bearing a giant picture of Hannah Montana. It could have been the flair, three pieces minimum, that each girl had to wear, including, but not limited to, a tiara, a fuzzy boa, and fairy wings. Whatever it was, working at Libby Lu was definitely not for every girl, and it was no wonder there was a high turnover rate.

After eight long years in business, Libby Lu closed its doors at all locations in January 2009 because people just weren’t buying glitter like they used to. Critics of the store praised this economic loss, while all over America, little girls hearts broke when they heard they’d no longer have a place to go for makeovers and overpriced accessories.

Club Libby Lu was a store unlike any other. Stepping through the glittering doorway was like entering a different world, but this world was not for everyone. In fact this world catered to a specific age and gender. There wasn’t a huge gap in age between the customers and the young workers, but there was an obvious gap in experience. It is amazing how one place can simultaneously create two completely different situations. The workers saw the little girls as younger versions of themselves, not yet privy to the cruelty of the real world, and still living in a fantasy land without bills or responsibilities, and the little girls looked at the workers and just assumed they had the greatest job on earth.

Death's Waiting Room

By: Steven Keller

The Angel of Death is walking down the hallway. The hallway is covered in beige wallpaper. The carpet is a stained gray. The Angel of Death does not have wings. He does not wear a halo. He is a tall, lanky man in his late teens. His complexion is fair and his hair is short, but has a slight curl to it. This tall and skinny Angel of Death is wearing a white polo shirt and a pair of stained Dickies work pants.

All of the nurses, aides, and residents look at him as he comes morosely down the hall. He seems innocent enough, but they know exactly why he is there. He is pushing a comfort cart down the hall—a means of delivering a distraction to the family members of a dying resident. Poetically, it is always a black cart. On top of this wheeled harbinger of death is black coffee, and double chocolate chip cook-

ies.

Nestled amongst the rolling hills of western Pennsylvania, there is a nursing home. It sits, like a fortress, on the top of a hilly five-acre plot of land. The Home is bordered by houses, Perrymont Road, the six-laned McKnight Road, and a large patch of forest. The bottom of the hill is sprinkled with trees.

Moving up the hill, there is a field where Canada geese often graze. Encompassing the building on all sides is the sea of asphalt known as the parking lot. There are nurses working 24 hours a day, so the parking lot is never empty.

This is a place where death lurks around every corner, illusions are shattered, dignity is lost, and food is served poorly. This is a story about Happy Days* Nursing Home.*

Dignity

On More than one occasion, dietary employee Nick Kezmar has seen a resident being wheeled down the hall on a mobile toilet. The mobile toilet is basic-

**Name has been changed.*

ly a wheeled chair made out of PVC pipe. A person sits on it wearing something similar to a hospital gown, ass exposed, and there is a bucket placed directly underneath him to catch whatever bodily functions may fall.

Happy Days is virtually wall-papered with signs about resident dignity. However, according to some of the employees, the residents wouldn't have dignity if they remembered what the word meant. "They don't have dignity," Kari, a nurse's aide, said. She added that many of the residents obviously hate being there. But she asks what else one can expect when an adult loses control of his bowels, wears a diaper, and needs someone else to wipe his ass.

One will sometimes walk down the hall and look in on a horrific sight: A 100 year old woman who is barely covered; a woman with a string of snot dangling from her nose; or a resident screaming for help and not receiving any. Kezmar said, "I used to tell nurses that someone down

there needed help, but they just didn't care. I just gave up after a while, because clearly no one else cared." When one sees these things, the residents cease to be human. They are merely organisms. Organisms under your care. Essentially, pets.

The Kitchen

The nursing home's dietary department is a real treat. It is staffed with: college kids, Jerry's kids, the briefly-employed emo kids, punk kids, and kids that just never grew up.

A very unfortunate few of the kitchen's employees are college educated or are attending college. These are usually the most interesting and fun to be around. The supervisors often like college kids because they are over-qualified to perform the very simple tasks necessary to be a dietary aide.

There are 23 employees in the dietary department and four of them are mentally handicapped. While the mentally handicapped employees are admittedly

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notices their kid going to work or school with eyes so red it looks like they've been crying for days. Zoom in a little further. McKnight Road. McNightmare Road: A death trap waiting to happen. Adjust the shutter speed: Ross Park Mall. A mall evolving into the perfect utopia of western Pennsylvania. With its glossy floors and bright electric signs, there is no evil that lives there. Fake smiles faces and expensive things equal happiness. Zoom in 3 times. Auntie Anne's Hand-Rolled Soft Pretzels. Blue neon sign. The picture of perfection and happiness. The perfect suburban façade of what happy Americans really look like. Zoom in 10 times. Back room. Dark, complete opposite of the bright outside world. In this place, there is no safe. There isn't enough money in the world to shield what goes on here. The air here is ripe with what over medicated parents with poodles who wear human clothes try to resist and hide: the product of bad parenting and day care. The conversations are light-hearted to the naked ear. What the hidden meaning

really says is, I'm so screwed up, and there isn't a chance for help. Welcome to suburban North Hills.

* * *

Health Codes. "Dude, I just totally dropped all that shit on the floor." That shit, which includes the dough, the butter, the dough cutters, and the yeast, landed on the floor with a definite thud. "Haha, dude, I shouldn't have smoked this morning. It's got me all messed up." What's worse than being high at work? Being the only sober person when the health inspector shows up. There's nothing funny about failing the health tests. Unless your high out your mind the day the health inspector shows up. "Shit, we gotta clean this up." Chris, the manager stumbles to the table, attempts to grab a dustpan, and cuts his hand. Blood spills everywhere. "F@&%, now there's blood on the damn dough." With a quick thought Chris runs the bag of dough under the faucet: "I cleaned off the bag, no one will know the difference, put that shit back out front. We'll use it later." Knock. It's the health inspector, and she saw the whole thing. What she didn't see was, five

minutes before she got there, two of the managers getting high right in the middle of everything. The backroom smelled of yeast and marijuana. Three days later, a customer complained about hallucinations from her pretzels. Fail.

* * *

Harassment. It hadn't been more than a month since the pretty brunette started. She must be new. She still washes her hands before handling the food. Sure sign she's a rookie. It won't be long till the evil here changes her. She seems sweet enough, don't worry, this place will destroy that too. Sure enough, it did:

"I don't understand why she had to be such a bitch about it anyway, I mean God. Shut the hell up." The backroom is a breeding ground for secrets and rumors. Today's included the hickey on Sara's neck and a disregarded cell phone. "If I wanna come in with a hickey, I'm allowed to." Everyone is crowded around the stainless steel table; it's the pulpit of the store. It's where everyone comes to hear the Gospel according to whoever has the latest dish on someone. "Did you see that stupid bitch read my texts, God I hate her." Said phone, was strategically placed on the cart by the swinging door. Another hangout. "My mom told me that I should just kick the shit out of her." According to Sara's mom, if someone got in her way, she should punch them in the face. She deserved to be the best. Wonder what Sara's mom would think of her hickey. As Sara stood in the back applying her eyeliner no one noticed that the pretzels were burning, or that there was a line of 10 people waiting to be helped. No one noticed because she kept them dazzled with the allure of her premature sexual exploits. Stupid boys, she thought, how easy you are manipulated. She put on a smile, laughed, and went out to the front of the store. "Hi, welcome to Auntie Anne's, what can I get for you ladies today?" Her sweet as pie voice sang. The pretzels still burned. Fail..Again.

* * *

Code of Conduct. From the front of the store it didn't sound like much. A little bit of yelling, some crying, and things being thrown for good measure. People shouldn't date if they work together. "I hate you, I hate you more than anything." Crash. "Yeah, well I hope you can find another way home tonight, because I'm not taking your sorry ass." Bang. "Doesn't matter, you're nothing but trash." Crash, Shatter. Parts of a cell phone lay scattered across the floor. The piles of dough bags scratched open. More tears. You aren't supposed to fraternize; didn't they read that in the handbook? In one giant swoop Sara kicked the table, ripped open a dough bag, threw her cell phone, and screamed as loud as she could. A year later, Sara would attempt to use the same defense mechanism when someone tried to punch her in the face in that exact spot in the backroom. Guess her mother wanted her to be best at that as well. The health inspector didn't show up that day, but the police did. Noise violation. Fail...Again.

* * *

The phone was ringing again. "Is everything okay down there?" The only answer that can be given is an out right lie: "Yeah, Vic, we have everything under control." Leave out the ugly and give the sunny side, that's what this place teaches you. Sometimes you have to pick and choose when to lie. "Sara called, she said her mother is very upset about a cell phone incident." Who is Sara's mom anyway? "Um yeah, we talked about it, everything is fine." Talking included time spent in the bathroom, yelling, and crying. Today's secret includes: anger, harassment, and hatred. One thing is for sure, once you pass that swinging door, that one that leads from the dark recesses of the human soul into the bright lights of a makeshift happiness, you are different. You are no longer the same person. Just another day at Auntie Anne's.



© Alexis Gruber

THE PHONE IS RINGING BUT...NOBODY'S HOME

By: Nancy Dal Dosso

"Pain drips like an acid on our hearts when we sleep"
~A therapist quoting a Greek philosopher.

Damn that car stereo! It's breaking the sound barrier as the vehicle that's sheltering it drives by. Finally, the car is out of sight. The next automobile passes without any fanfare. Then, silence. The sun's rays streak across the vibrant blue sky. Shadows fall about you as you sit near a tree. The wooden bench you're on is positioned perfectly; you can view everyone as they do their daily exercise routine through the park. Spring smells sweetly, but you really don't notice it. The green grass sits limply at your feet. You want to be alone, yet you don't want to be swallowed up by what you're feeling and thinking. You thought the park would offer some clarity to your mind. It doesn't though. You just find yourself annoyed with everyone and everything. You also wish that you could join in on their life for the moment. It's a lose-lose situation no matter how you view it.

One person walks their dog. Another person jogs by with a bright colored head band on. A group of teenage girls – obviously all *dear* friends – laugh as they prance by. They're hoping to impress their male counterparts with their shorty-shorts and obnoxious laughs. It's not doing anything for you though. It just grates on your nerves. "Screw them," you think, though there's no cause for such anger on your part. You just can't stand them, or anyone else, because solidarity and anxiety are gripping your stomach. The problem is that no one here sees it. You imagine someone sitting down next to you and asking what's wrong, but your disposition would frighten a Rottweiler.

This is a place we all end up in from time to time. No one ever really talked to you about it when you were a kid. You just sort of felt this pang of anxiety mixed with anger leave your body, and eventually your soul followed along too. The numbness grabbed at your hands and pulled you in a direction that you didn't want to go in. If you've never been here before, just wait. This lingering emotion or state – depression – is coming your way. Maybe not right this second, but in the near future. You will not be immune to it. You will lose something: a race, a pet, a challenge, a job, a relationship, a parent, and so on. The level and depth of it will depend on a lot of circumstances, but you won't have control over any of them. Loss is a part of living. Grieving is right up there too. What happens when that feeling doesn't want to leave you? That is the fine line of mental stability, sanity and insanity, happy or sad.

The stigma of mental illness and depression surrounds you mixed with levels of understanding. No one gets it completely though. Not when *you're* the one in it. "Just don't think about it," someone weakly offers as advice. *Thanks a lot.*



© Susan Snow

Depression is disappearing into the fog of your mind.

Mom just looks at you sadly. *Sorry I can't smile for you.* Your friend, Annie, says, "Ah, the emotional state of depression... is an unfathomable well of sorrow." *Amen to that, sister.* Dad might yell, "You have everything! What do you have to complain about?" *Hooray Dad, you just made me want to execute my suicide plan.* Mary tells you, "I'm there now. Got to go to trial on Thursday to testify about all the abuse I went through with Chuck. Yes, it's been five years since I left him and I'm still not divorced." *Mary, I wish your soon-to-be-ex would simply die and rot in hell.* "Depression is anger turned inward towards oneself," another person advises. *No wonder I just want to scream!* All of these descriptions, and your feelings about them, are accurate for depression. It's a reality state. This is not some fantasy-all-in-your-head disease. In fact, your head and heart feel so empty you couldn't make this crap up if you tried.

Your friends make wary attempts to reach out to you, but you squash the efforts. They don't know what comfort to offer you. It's not their job anyway. Sometimes you're polite about it, sometimes not so much. The trouble is that you *can't* get out of bed. You can't simply concentrate without drifting off. You're not making this up for sympathy. You're not pushing people away for attention. You are unable to be a responsive, coherent human being. Depression, chemical

imbalances, and the like do not work like that. You don't just wish it away or go to a *happy place*. In fact, you want to smack the person who came up with that term. Maybe even give them the big *go screw yourself* for added measure. Depression and its symptoms are almost tangible, and that's how real this abstract place is.

You enter and walk with dragging feet tucked in ragged tennis shoes - treading, trancelike, down a dark hallway. A solemn blackness, without any windows, is the zone you've ended up in mentally speaking. Cob webs ensnare your head, and you duck aimlessly. The dread and anxiety bubble in your stomach like a lot of tiny spiders heaped upon one another, crawling quickly in circles. You feel useless. You feel stuck.

Song lyrics swirl about in your mind. "Suicide, I've already died," is the mantra that Metallica and James Hetfield spew up at you. Death Magnetic and their song "Cyanide" is the way they deal with the emotions no one wants to acknowledge. It fits where you are for now. Any angry or sad music – even certain sounds, are the only real solace you have. Definitive styles of music express your despair, or mask it effectively.

So do movies. Heath Ledger's face as The Joker from "The Dark Knight" is your favorite poster. "Why so serious?" is your mantra. Edgar Allen Poe or Stephen King makes perfect sense to you now. You

make up your own somber poetry. "Gee, I'd like to throw myself off of this bridge and soar, quote the raven, nevermore." Horror, sadness, anger, numbness – they all become one and the same.

Minutes feel much longer, yet there is never enough time. This couldn't possibly be what God feels like. His timing and ours are not the same, but this is not the eternity-with-lots-of-free-time that you bargained for. You can't finish your work or even a cup of coffee. One moment melts into the next. The replay button seems to be hit repeatedly on your life. Yet, it's also in slow motion.

Although you see sunlight stream across the room you're in, you want it, need it dark. The blinds are drawn closed, the windows locked. A phone rings but is never answered. Sorry, nobody's home. You've taken leave of current life-moments, and who knows how long it will last. This is reality. This isn't just a commercial you saw on T.V. about Prozac, this is an animal that has you in its claws. You want it to stop, but even medication doesn't offer instant relief. Time is the healer and enemy of a depressive state. It's the cure and the cause all at the same time. It totally sucks – no lie. This place called depression is that sip of alcohol you take. You know that if this next sip doesn't anesthetize you, the whole bottle will congeal the acid that dripped on your heart while you slept.

THE EVE OF CONSTRUCTION, THE DAWN OF DESTRUCTION

By: Angela Elnycky

There was no light. The sky was starless, the universe was barren, hot and cold existed but were not yet experienced. There was no dark. It was simply blackness, an existence. We were there, floating together with our ancestors and descendants, our pets, prehistoric creatures, the ice of Antarctica and the sands of Maui. We reached out for each other, looking to combine an existence into something more, something with a meaning. We are particles, the building blocks of existence, hungry for life. Maybe it was God, maybe it was our collective will, maybe it was a coincidence -- the reasons don't matter. We reached out for each other, butted heads with others. Everything came together.

Bang--

--flash--

--light.

There was a blinding flash and light existed. Because light existed, the darkness must exist, too. As we meshed together and became intertwined, worlds were created; stars flew back from us and the first signs of life -- cell, organism, plant, animal, human -- were created. All within the fraction of a second, the universe was born.

In Switzerland, scientists at CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research) are preparing the next test run of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC). This device will recreate the atmosphere to a trillionth of a second after the Big Bang occurred. Scientists think that this will help to understand the origins of our universe, to find the "God Particle" and to explain dark matter and dark energy. However, the effects of this device have the potential to create a black hole: a hole in space with such a strong gravitational pull that nothing can be spared in being sucked into it.

Just because science can does not mean that science should. Part of life is dealing with unanswerable questions -- some questions should never be answered.

Surrounded by mountains that are flecked with grass and moss, the city of Geneva, Switzerland rests. It had long been the center for diplomacy; in attempts to end destruction, treaties were signed. In the city, the streets are narrow and the buildings are tall. Railway tracks are engraved into the pavement and few cars are driving about. The buildings are newly painted but have a sense of antiquity to them; the street lamps are short, modern looking posts.

Outside the city are long green fields and suburban homes. The CERN laboratory, which has been called the birthplace of the World Wide Web, sits in the suburbs. Scientists at CERN have been working on the LHC since the 1980s

when the idea of a particle accelerator was only that: an idea. But now, buried 575 feet below and circumference 17 miles of the Franco-Swiss border, the LHC is not only built but almost ready for its second experiment in September of this year.

If the experiment goes as planned, scientists think that it will change the understanding of the universe as a whole. They also say that it will confirm or contradict

“ Part of the wonder of childhood is not knowing. It's in going outside on a summer morning and feeling the wet grass on barefeet and not knowing it's called dew. ”

if the Higgs boson -- called the "God Particle" by non-physicists -- actually exists and what the understanding of it is. The term "God Particle" is not completely accurate because it implies that it is the first particle; the Higgs boson, however, is only one of the first particles - "ancestor particle" might be more accurate. This would be the closest that science will have come to understanding the origins of the universe. In order to test these things, two particle beams will be fired at each other through the metallic, futuristic looking underground tunnels that house the LHC. When the beams collide it will simulate the atmosphere to the fractions of time after the Big Bang occurred.

At several points around the 17 mile tunnel, the narrower, metallic tunnels open up into larger, cavernous rooms. Monstrous devices span from the floor to the ceiling; the electric blue staircases on either side of it and the brightly colored wiring and metal give it the appearance of

a futuristic Ferris wheel. One of the scientists stands in a white lab coat and yellow hardhat, looking up at the enormous device. He is nearly lost in it, staring up into it and through the narrow tunnels that he can't even see.

Considering how large the LHC is, even the slightest error could have great repercussions. With only a trillionth of a second of difference in time, one would

think that another Big Bang could occur if there is even the slightest timing error. But creating others worlds and universes isn't what most are concerned with: there is a very slight possibility that a black hole could be created. Nobel Prize scientists think that the black hole would die out and explode into particles before anything could be pulled inside of it; others say that it could swallow everything within the blink of an eye.

The possibility is very minute, but how high should the stakes we gamble be for the pursuit of further understanding? Nuclear energy has its benefits; nuclear weapons could decimate everything. Part of the wonder of childhood is in not knowing. It's in going outside on a summer morning and feeling the wet grass on bare feet and not knowing that it's called dew.

Even in a worst case scenario, no one would realize what had happened. Some would be sleeping, others just waking up.

Students would be worried about an upcoming exam and those just laid-off worried about finding a new job. Others would be in the middle of their workday, some stuck in traffic. Others would complain about the cold, some about the heat. One works his house key into the lock and then twists the doorknob. He smooths a hand over his face, tired, pushes the front door open.

Blink.

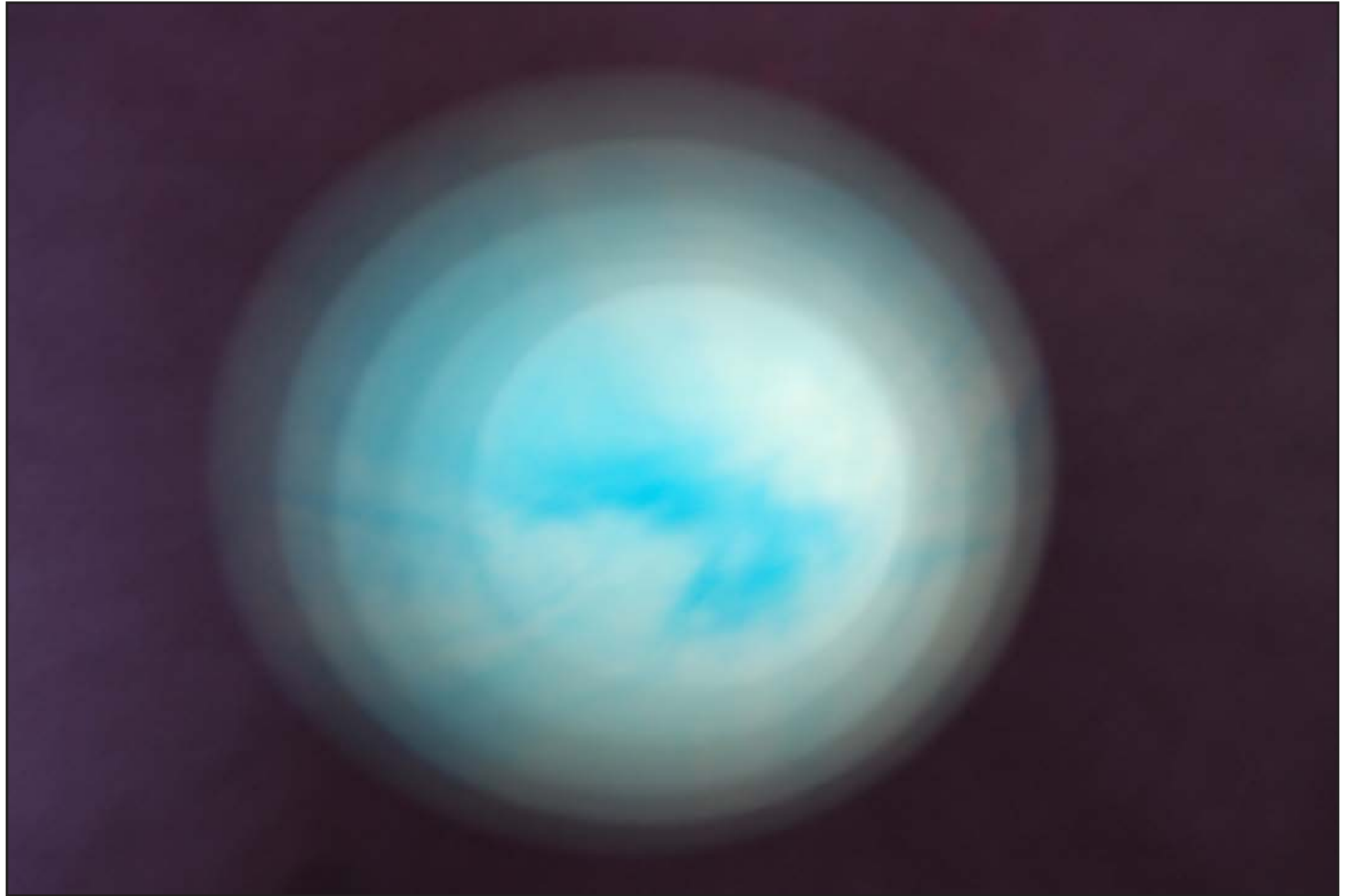
In the fraction of time that it takes to blink, there was no light. Because there was no light, there was no darkness, too. There was simply blackness, non-existence...

This is not science-fiction, it is simply a possibility. This is not a story meant to stir fear. The world is as mortal as we are. If it doesn't end in a black hole or fire and ice as Robert Frost suggested, then it could nuclear war, meteor showers, alien attacks, the effects of Global Warming, zombie holocausts, polluted drinking water or something of Biblical proportions. Worrying and living in fear of possibilities will not amount to anything. Fear can push us, but it can also cripple us. The important things are the way the sun feels against your face after a long winter, the people you love or the calm after a storm. In the end, it doesn't so much matter why the sun shines, the brain chemistry involved in love or when the storm is coming. It doesn't matter when it will end, either, because it is here with us now. In experiencing, we find understanding. Knowledge is power, but it isn't everything.

Source Materials:

<http://lhc.web.cern.ch/lhc>

<http://interactions.org>



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YOU ARE ALL LIARS!

By: Cadwell Turnbull

—and you must be. It is an imperative in order to live in your world, based on empty politeness, and disguised deceit. You comply with it—you accept it with the lies you tell, but most importantly, you lie to yourself.

* * *

There was a Guy once who decided to wear the same clothes for seven days. It was a silly little experiment that had little significance, except for himself. This Guy, enthralled by the idea of not caring, of letting his obsession with fashion evaporate for a couple of days, decided that he would wear the same outfit—a maroon T-shirt embroidered with skulls on its left chest and a pair of old black jeans slightly torn at the bottom.

On his fifth day of trivial rebellion from materialism, Guy walked into the college cafeteria and saw his friends, about nine of them, sitting at a table gleefully engaging in a conversation about something hilarious, something very funny.

As he walked closer he could see their expressions change. They had suddenly caught whiff of Guy's presence and had quickly silenced themselves. Their laughter descended into a low lull. Soft chuckles escaped in musical succession until there was only silence.

Guy set down his book bag and stared curiously at the group, whose eyes had shuffled away from him, their warm tongues dangling behind closed lips, their smiles politely painted on their placid porcelain faces. He realized immediately, as he greeted them with an awkward smile and a "hello," that they were just talking about him.

This is a story about the lies we tell and why we tell them. This is a story about where those lies lead: to the occasional silent stare or unforeseen calamity, the knowing expression of a glance. This is a story about a place, a moment in time, where nature or some unseen force exposes our white deceptions with a random occurrence: an awkward moment.

Guy decided to gather his food from the buffet line of the college cafeteria, which usually only had about six options, options that were almost always terrible. He chose from the beautifully decorated assortment of rat food, horse fertilizer, and acid and decided that acid was the best choice, since it would dissolve his tongue into a chunk of flesh unable to taste anything.

He returned to the table where he looked at everyone quietly. They had begun talking again, and to the far left of Guy someone was talking rather loudly, but was hidden behind a line of heads. Guy recognized the voice immediately.

Cheeks had flared nostrils, a wide smile, and chocolate colored skin. He was challenging Simon to a dare.

"I dare you to wear the same clothes for a week,"

"No," Simon quickly declined.

"Oh . . . you guys were talking about me," Guy expressed in a monotone.

Guy had taken the effort to add a slight inflection as he said "Oh" in order to create what seemed like an authentic realization. But it wasn't. He was already aware that they were talking about him

from the moment he came to the table.

He could have simply told them that. But in awkward moments, especially moments when lies become obvious, people cling even more desperately to lies. It is like the air we breathe, the oxygen that expands in our lungs granting life. We live off lies. Guy was no different.

Guy's friend, Ryan—who was a little more straightforward than Guy's other friends—decided to ask Guy why he was wearing the same clothes for the last five days. The whole table was now waiting intently for a response, now painting nonjudgmental interest on their porcelain faces. Guy sighed to himself, and then gave his reason—that it was a personal project and it was for his own personal development. It was not an accident.

"Oh yeah...he told me about that yo," said Cheeks, who had suddenly recalled the conversation he and Guy had less than two hours before. Guy did not acknowledge Cheeks' statement; he continued to talk to Ryan and his girlfriend Chelsea, who were closer to him. All liars—just like you.

When you pay attention you notice things. What Guy noticed that day had nothing to do with his rebellion from consumerism; it was a discovery into the minds of people.

What he noticed was that in order to not offend him, most people did not ask him why he was wearing the same clothes for five days; they just talked about it behind his back.

When someone did ask it came in the form of: "I don't want to offend you but . . . did you know that you have been wearing the same clothes for the last three days?"

"Yes. Five actually," Guy responded, trying to think up scenarios in his mind

“But in awkward moments, especially moments when lies become obvious, people cling even more desperately to lies. It is like the air we breathe, the oxygen that expands in our lungs granting life.”

of how a person could not know such a thing. Perhaps they got dressed in the dark and just never looked down. Perhaps they had lost the ability to see clothes, or had short-term memory loss and were unable to remember for more than ten minutes at a time what they were wearing.

But he couldn't blame the person for their silly question. It was an abnormal situation. To Guy, however, the experience was the reversed; it was the ordinary that started to look abnormal—grotesque even. He realized that the social life of human beings was a calculated untruth that obscures vision. A fogged glass.

The awkward moment had brought him a gift. Through his trivial rebellion, Guy had pressed his hand against the glass and wiped the fog away.

Behind that glass he saw the reality. People often do not tell you what they really think. They deceive; they hide; they pretend. And though it was once unclear how often it was done, it was now obvious that it was a relentless and obsessive task. Most people would do anything but tell the truth.

It is the thing they fear most and this avoidance of the truth is the reason awkward moments exist.

* * *

Guy later asked a friend what they would prefer: a safe lie or an uncomfortable truth. She replied: "I hate to say that I would always like to know the truth, as uncomfortable as it is, because I hate the feeling of anxiety that comes with it, but in the end I think its best to know the truth."

But why is truth so discomfoting, so frightening, so awkward?

It is because we are deceivers; this is the collective identity that we wear. It is not because of nature or divine will; it is by choice. Though we hold honesty as a high virtue, truth is an ideal that would crumble our carefully constructed world, our world of friendly small talk, of euphemisms, of socially controlled roles, of personas.

So we hold truth high; we adore it but we do not aspire to it. We respect it but we do not like it. And in an effort to esteem it and destroy it at the same time we have become fatally confused—unsure, insecure. This is the burden of hypocrisy.

But what else can we do with such a contradiction? We want truth but have built a society based on lies. It is a paradox of our own making. It is an imperative that we endure the occasional awkward moment to preserve our precious creation.

Will we live ignorant of each other and ourselves in order to protect our creation? Yes. We will. We have to. Truth is not significant—it does not matter.

We prefer ignorance. It is our comfort and our bliss. So we will pretend. We will lie in order to control other people's vision of us and our vision of ourselves. This is the practice of domination, of manipulating reality, of obscuring truth.

We aren't trying to protect ourselves really—not our true selves; we are trying to protect our deceptions. And the reason for this is simple: we have been lying so long that we think we *are* our deceptions.

* * *

Guy pressed his lips hard against the glass and blew a violent breath; the condensation on the glass made the glass seem peaceful and serene, even beautiful. He could see nothing again. It had returned to being just a fogged glass—no soul-crushing truths to obsess about.

Guy changed his clothes the next morning, on his sixth day of his trivial rebellion from materialism, and lost himself amongst the busy college heads making their way to their various morning classes. It was impossible to tell him apart now; he had blended right back in, amongst the sea of porcelain faces. And now all that could be seen were those porcelain faces, hard and impenetrable, with their painted placid smiles.

"The face of domination is often a smiling one..."

~John Zerzan

DEATH, from page 3

punctual and dependable, they are often overburdened.

Some of the older employees in the kitchen are people who just never found their niche in life, people who were more interested in partying than working or learning when they were younger. Donna is one of these these people. Donna is a black woman, 52 years old, just under six feet tall, and the loudest person one will ever meet. She comes in every morning at five a.m. She always comes to work high.

The extraordinary crew that is the dietary staff ensures that sanitary conditions are barely adequate, food is cold, and that a loud and most likely very unnecessary argument emanates from the kitchen and echoes down the halls of Happy Days.

The End is Near

If Happy Days had a theme song it would be Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville. This is not only because it can so often be heard booming from the kitchen, but also because many of the residents live in their own world, completely oblivious to what is going on in the rest of the universe.

The residents at Happy Days Nursing Home are undoubtedly there to die. If they do not die at Happy Days, they will either be sent to a hospital to die, or they will be sent home to receive hospice care and die there.

"Eighty percent of the residents are not coherent. If they're with it, they know they're here to die," Kari said with a look that showed a trace of sadness, but mostly indifference.

If a resident were able to express himself clearly and coherently, he would probably say: "I've lived a long and happy life. I would, at this point, rather pass on to be with God. Who knows, maybe I could play a game of poker with my buddies from The War. Ultimately, I would rather be anywhere but here."

If someone looked at a brochure for Happy Days, he would see a clean facility with warm, well-prepared food, smiling, well-groomed caretakers, and happy, bingo-playing residents. This is an illusion. After spending a few hours at Happy Days and touring the facilities, no one who loves their family members would want them here.

The Angel of Death sullenly walks up to a room. He brings himself upright as he walks in pushing the comfort cart. He gives a nod and a grim smile to the people, one can only assume they're family members, surrounding an elderly woman with pale skin and gray hair lying on the hospital bed. He somberly exits the room.

Immediately after leaving the room, he puts a spring back in his step and opens his cell phone to read a text message. No one looks at him. He's just a gangly teenager now. The aides will strip the bed that the departed used to occupy, house cleaning will clean the room, and someone else will occupy that bed within days.

MAYHEM, from page 2

road of material consumption, in between traffic and weight-loss ads, a perfectly normal looking 25-year-old says: "I mean it. I'm not healthy."

"Maybe you should quit smoking if you're worried about your health," the younger sister tells her, rolling her eyes. "What got into you, anyway?"

Jackie flicks her cigarette, her body straightens, and she softly mutters the two words that so many women casually say: I'm fat.

* * *

This is not a story about women complaining about the size of their thighs. It is not about the stereotype of a teenage girl with low self-esteem. Or eating disorders. Or how awful it is to be a female. None of this applies. This is a story about a place where supermodels have the power to form a girl's mind for a moment in time. A place that serves a different purpose for every woman: a sanctuary for the conceited, a personal hell for the insecure. Where trying on clothes is an obstacle more than a process. A place where mannequins come to life, where advertising and selling bombard women from the moment they enter until the time they arrive home.

The fitting room

It is not a funhouse at an amusement park, but it could be: the array of distorted mirrors; the dim lighting; the voices and the occasional sob from behind closed doors; the photos of ghoulish women posted on its walls, their sunken eyes and bored expressions staring down at you as you enter.

Sometimes, if the mall is crowded, you wait in line. You stand against the beige walls, or you sit on the white couch on the left side of the room. This is when you overhear conversations. You often see girls with their mothers, shopping for formal occasions. A door to one fitting room opens and a red-haired teenage girl walks out. Freckles dot her milky skin and her face scrunches up like she just ate something sour. She wears an orange prom gown and says to her mother, "I want it."

Her mother stands with her arms crossed, stares her daughter up and down with narrowed eyes. "I don't know. It looks... odd."

"Why do I even ask you?" the girl shrieks, flailing her lanky arms in the air.

"I just don't like that dress on you," her mother admits. "And it's too expensive, anyway. I'm not made of money."

Shooting an angry glare in response, the daughter mumbles, "You're worthless." Her pale blue eyes cast an evilness. A coldness that probably makes her mother relieved that her demon child doesn't have telekinetic powers. Because that demon child would have set her mother's worthless face on fire by this point.

An older lady standing in line peers over. "Maybe it's the color of the dress, honey," she says in a soft voice, "and how it clashes with your red hair."

This is code for: Maybe a different color won't clash with the pig's blood your peers end up pouring on you. You know, before you kill them like the girl in that Stephen King novel?

Ignoring the woman, Carrie scowls at

her mother. "I hate you. I never get what I want. You're so cheap."

This is code for: My personality is as ugly as my appearance.

She slams the white door shut and a bundle of plastic hangers fall against the wooden floor.

The older woman smiles uncomfortably at Carrie's mother, laughs, and shakes her head in disbelief. "It must have been a rough day."

This is code for: It must have been hard -- shopping with the spawn of Satan.

* * *

Once an available room finally opens, you enter with your items. The store employees, trained to harass and interrupt you every couple minutes, stand outside your fitting room. Their questions sound scripted, even though they speak in a pleasant tone: Do you need anything?

This is code for: Do you need me to help you buy something?

I can get another size or color for you.

This is code for: Really, I can help you find something to buy.

How are you doing in there?

This is code for: Did you decide on what you're going to buy?

How did everything workout for you?

This is code for:

WHAT ARE YOU BUYING??

And your polite "No, thank you," is code for: *For the love of God. Leave me. The hell alone.*

* * *

When the saleswoman leaves, you stand in the center of the small space. The wooden floor is dusty. The room itself reeks of leather and material. While you try on clothes, you stare up at the posters of empty-faced and underfed models. How their clothes must have slid over their long legs with ease. How perfectly put together they look. You rotate your body, view it in the three full-length mirrors on each wall. Blame it on the poor lighting, the structure of the funhouse mirrors, but you somehow find flaws in your reflection that you wouldn't otherwise.

You look nothing like those models. And the thought of it temporarily makes you sad.

A woman's dressing room is like the popular girl in high school: either she is your friend, or she is your worst enemy. And her decision to be one or the other is completely arbitrary. You imagine her, strutting past you, overdressed like the supermodels on the wall: an expensive cocktail dress, black stilettos. She flips her long, silky hair and observes you with judgmental eyes. Her presence makes you feel uncomfortable, inferior. You hate her for this, and yet you want to get along with her.

After changing back into your normal clothes, you gather hangers and failed outfits, and place them on the fitting room rack as you exit. On your way out of the store, you see the red-haired girl's mother at the cash register. She bought the orange dress. You see sale signs everywhere, big black lettering that reads: **50% OFF. GET IT NOW!** You see the mannequins, their beady eyes and tall, skeletal frames wearing the clothes you thought you wanted. You have to remind yourself that

they're just mannequins when you find yourself calling the one a spiteful whore. Or when you take pleasure in the thought of pushing all of them over, watching the row of porcelain statues fall like dominos. You question your sanity when you realize that you're plotting to hurt an inanimate object.

You are mentally exhausted.

* * *

"You're not fat, Jackie."

"I don't think I'm fat until I go shopping," Jackie says, half-laughing. "I wish I could be like a guy. When they go into dressing rooms, it's to see if something fits or if it doesn't. I, on the other hand, end up scrutinizing every inch of my body. I turn into a completely different person."

"Well, who are you comparing yourself to when you try on clothes?" the younger sister asks.

"I don't even know," Jackie says as she shakes her head and watches the traffic pass on the opposite side of the road.

* * *

Women stand in these fitting rooms, surrounded by starved and strung out models, and no longer see their own reflections. The mirrors in these places no longer pose the question: *Who are you?* They ask: *What are you?*

Are you the average girl comparing yourself to what advertisement schemes say you should be? Are you the freak fantasizing about bashing in the faces of non-living figures that mock the trends you're told to embrace?

Or are you simply a person, performing the simple task of seeing if a specific clothing size suits you?

The utter chaos that is the material world only makes sense when people remove themselves from it. From the onslaught of advertisements. From the billboards and commercials telling us how to feel and how to think. The continuity of it all, causing people to mistake what they *want* for what they *need*. Places like McKnight Road, upscale malls and their dressing rooms, exist to sell a product. The danger is that these places not only try to sell merchandise, but also an idea. An idea that suggests: once you have this, you will be happy. Once you find the New You, you will be completely satisfied.

And so people search for happiness, for the new and improved versions of themselves. They look for it in racks of clothing, in weekend sales and specials, in supplements that supposedly make them more attractive in a bathing suit. Certain mothers teach their children that contentment means owning the expensive prom dress. That happiness, in general, is on sale at the mall. That it is the sound of coins jingling against a cash register's opening drawer, or the voice of the smiling cashier who says, "Have a nice day."

This leads to a constant want, a desire as empty as the mannequins that guard a store's fitting room. A longing as meaningless as a conversation about how a woman claims she is fat. Happiness is not comparative to the things you buy. It is only found once you determine what it is that you truly need, and what it is that you never really wanted to begin with.

Outside the Box

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The work that appears in *Outside the Box* represents the efforts of many talented individuals.

Without them this magazine would not be possible.

We hope that you enjoy their work.