

Under Your Boot Soles

The Last Installment

NATHAN CARTER
Showcase Editor

Chris didn't make breakfast in the morning. He was still surrounded by covers on the couch, snoring, drooling. Laura got up with me though, made over-easy eggs and toast. My eyes were glued to a sketch I was making for a hotel plan. Laura sipped at a cup of tea. There wasn't a word spoken until I reached my last bite of toast. Chris had walked into the kitchen and back out toward us with a cup of coffee in his hand.

"This coffee's shit, Jack," he said.

"I didn't make it; Laura did."

Chris stalled, "Did I say shit? Excuse me, I must've meant delicious."

"Mhm," Laura nodded, another sip of tea. "I've better get going to class."

Chris handed me on the forehead as I added to the sketch. "Have a good day, babe."

Chris pulled two pieces of notebook paper from the pocket of his flannel pajama and handed them to me in the middle of the table.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Part of my next book."

"What's it about?" I forced the last drink of coffee down.

"About Mom."

"...I remember that you couldn't afford much that morning. You walked to school a few times. My mother was gone for one morning, wondering why he didn't smell coffee."

He slid his jacket over his shoulder, looking up, Audrey?

She didn't answer, and he realized she wasn't breathing, cold to his touch. He fell back down to the bed, began to cry, his head in his hands. My brother and I walked in, "Where's mom? Hughie found a dead robin."

Both Miller's and Polermo's relatives had been searching for a grave plot. We'd just bought school clothes. McLane's woman had been looking for their cheapest casket. The health and car insurance just went out the window. Dad said he could do a gravestone, but it wouldn't be a cheap matter of business. Gordon just paid for chicken meal to help with fertilization. Dad didn't get much done those few weeks after mom died.

When it came time for dad to make a decision, we came home to find him digging a hole in the loose soil of our backyard. He cried the whole time, and Hughie looked at the worms in the soil. He had mom wrapped in her mother's tablecloth, which we never used. My brother and I didn't know what to think, but we changed into old clothes. I remember crying with my dad, but my brother was stoic, helped lower mom in and everything. None of us spoke to each other. Hughie howled as we shoveled dirt on her. Dad stopped occasionally, prayed and wiped his forehead. When I stopped shoveling, my father never told me to keep going. He didn't want to do this either, but it had to be done. We couldn't afford anything else.

The soil of her grave hadn't even dried fully before Hughie was gone. Dad started drinking a lot more. We got jobs to get out of the house, but we always had to come back at the end of the day. I always put flowers on her grave, picked from the neighbor's garden. I tried to replant them but they wouldn't catch. My brother had some money saved up by his thirteenth birthday. When we said we wanted to take a bus to Aunt Haley's place, he gave us another ten dollars.

On the bus ride, my brother snuck shots from my father's flask and I thought of that night we buried my mother. We couldn't drag my father away from her side.

He slept there. In the cold. In the dirt. Under your boot soles..."



CREEK TRAIL

MARCUS YEAGLEY - 2010 Graduate

The Bitter Buffalo

(or an exercise in bad poetic taste)

NATHAN CARTER
Showcase Editor

There's a palace on the wall, and the sun's in my hand,
Spin the bottle to heartbreak and watch the falling sand.
That time you drove all night, to the first sign of lights,
You got some chocolate, a lighter, and two Sprites.

We walked back to the car, you said I looked defeated,
Said "three days without you", or a bottle.
You smirked, "where do you wanna go?"
Said "the overlook", didn't need much throttle.

Most of them were surprised we quit each other,
You were blushing red the time before last.
I waited for the bus, asked someone for a cig,
You insisted a goodbye kiss. It was too fast.

A sticker from your old purse
Left on my cd case, you always played DJ,
You looked through my bedroom window,
My truck, three trees and a bluejay.
And a bluejay.

Behrend? SHOW -

"Show Yourself"

TWELVE

EVAN KOSER
Senior Layout Editor

The Last Installment

The sweat in his palms was building up, and he tightened the grip of the nine millimeter in his right hand, pressing it harder to the temple of his head. The breeze he had felt on the back of his neck seconds earlier was gone. He knew the hair was still standing and his left eye twitched twice. He didn't like this and so he closed both eyes. Liquid traced a path along his cheeks and this time he knew, they were tears. He felt them move from eyes to cheek, to nose, and along the curvature of his lips. He felt as they hung off his lower lip, forever waiting to drip to the floor below him. He felt the sweat from his left hand on his right arm as he used it to steady the gun. The sweat dropped from his lip onto the face of his watch less than a second after leaving his eyes.

Now, for the last time, he heard nothing. His eyes were closed and he saw nothing. All but his fingers had gone numb and he held his breath. He couldn't taste his wife's strawberry lipgloss or his neighbor's burnt steaks. He couldn't visualize what his wife looked like or let another man enter her. He certainly did not hear her when she let out a yell of ecstasy, brought upon by his best friend. He no longer smelled the metal and bleach, chlorine and grass that permeated the rest of the room. The silence had been broken, and it was the only time he heard the simultaneous tick of his watch with the click of the gun.

The bullet plowed its way through the man's cranium. The watch had no reaction at the time it took the bullet to leave the barrel, enter his temple, exit through his ear, and be stopped by the floor. The body hit the floor like a sack of tomatoes. The consistency between the vegetable and the human contents on the floor visually and physically was actually uncanny. Bits and pieces of brain splashed the ground below. Skull fragments impaled all nearby objects and blood had begun to stain the almost 60-year-old attic floor.

Downstairs, a woman screamed as she clambered up the stairs. Across the yard, a lawnmower stopped mowing and a neighbor's jaw dropped in awe. Down the block, children stopped playing and bent their ears toward the house whereupon they heard two clamorous bangs. In the attic, two men lay dead. One lay face first—appendages still bound—in the sins of his two day old condom wrappers. The other back onto a trunk of old trinkets, a seven-year time capsule left for the awaiting widow. For a brief second, the watch was the only thing to move.



THE NEW WORLD

CASSIDY BOWERS - Senior Communications Major

Mes yeux sont fixés
sur toi sur ta gorge douce et belle
Tu ne sais même pas.

EVAN KOSER - Editor-in-Chief

So Cold

WILLIAM BENTLEY - Junior Creative Writing Major

A cool breeze brushed David's face as he stared deep into the water. He picked up a tiny pebble from the soft ground and let the small rock rest within his hand. As David stared at the pond's clear surface, his thoughts drifted elsewhere. He then threw the tiny pebble into the water; it crashed through his reflection and descended to the bottom. The ripples moved slowly, slowly pushing forward until finally fading from existence. He reached down and gently touched his fingers to the water. A cool sensation swept through David's hand, a sensation he had felt in days. It felt familiar to him, a comfortable presence. He looked up at the surrounding park, though it was devoid of life, only silence roamed.

A smile came over David's face as he stepped into the cold, shallow pond. A few fish lifted their heads to watch him walk toward the center of the pond. The water slowly became damp and his hands were nearly numb, yet he knew this was where he would find his salvation. It was possible he would be submerged. The bitter cold of the water wrapped around him like a thick wool blanket. David felt safe, as the cool liquid caressed his body. David's mind soon became clear, clear as the water that surrounded him. It did not matter what the last thing he said to her was. The fact that she was still there, her pale lifeless face still haunts his mind no longer matters. It will not bring her back, but he will feel her again. Air bubbles escape from his mouth, David watches them rise and disappear. He opened his mouth and began to take in the murky water. It filled his lungs. It had been far too long since he felt air. He began to feel this. David's breaths grew shallow and the water began to burn. His chest began to erupt with pain; his vision was beginning to fade. He felt like a vessel full of pain, but now full of the cool fluid that set him free. He lay on the water, comforted, cold.