



We're Nice People

Great Lake Review - Spring 2014

THE GREAT LAKE REVIEW OSWEGO'S LITERARY MAGAZINE SPRING 2014

As the 2013-2014 school year comes to a close, we want to thank those of you who were brave enough to submit your work to us. To those who were accepted and published, congratulations! Your hard work and dedication to your craft, whether writing or artwork, has paid off and we are so proud to have you featured in this semester's edition.

To those whose work was not chosen, we want to tell you that this is not the end. Your work deserves to be submitted over and over again until you are completely done with it as a piece. Not being accepted for this semester's publication does not mean that you should give up on the piece(s) that were submitted. Instead, it means that you should have a new goal in mind: keep submitting. Submit as much as you can to as many places as you can, and do not count your work out from our publication. Try again next semester.

Pursue your publication dreams. The literary world cannot exist without people like our submitters and whether or not you were accepted for this edition, we want to thank you for your dedication to your work.

In addition to those who submitted, we also want to thank our editors. This journal and the organization, as a whole, would not be possible without their continued hard work and desire to put together the best book possible. We thank you, editors, for being wonderful.

To end, you have work to be proud of. Please always remember that and go forth knowing your work is worthy. We wish you the best of luck in whatever you hope to achieve with your craft. Please tell your friends and continue to submit to the Great Lake Review. Without your submissions, this journal would not exist.

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**THE GREAT LAKE REVIEW
OSWEGO'S LITERARY MAGAZINE
SPRING 2014**

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THE GREAT LAKE REVIEW
OSWEGO'S LITERARY MAGAZINE
SPRING 2014
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Invocation
Lana Slinkard



Flesh

Amy Lipsky

Children were always the hardest. It always sucked to see these small, helpless creatures with once porcelain skin now rotting off the bone, hair falling out in chunks.

Olivia was a more intact zombie than most. Her skin was tinted green. Her once yellow dress was now muddy and torn; once blonde and curly hair was now pasty white, clinging on by chunks of skin. Her fingernails and eyelashes were gone, her flesh hanging off the bone. She was the freshly dead. Or risen. Whichever you prefer.

And as of right now she had her legs locked around one of my officers, clinging to his back, her mouth gnawing at his neck. I watched, numb, as my little niece worried at Officer Pearson's neck like a mutt, splattering blood on that yellow dress.

Olivia tore a chunk out of Pearson's neck and I knew he was a goner. After he sunk dead to the ground, Olivia sat up, her witless eyes locking onto mine, flesh dangling from her mouth. She snarled, leaping towards me as I raised the barrel of my sawed-off shotgun, aimed, and blew a hole right through her chest. It was my job – I didn't even flinch.

It occurred to me as I approached her that I had bought her that dress for her fifth birthday this past year.

I doused them in gasoline and lit the match, ignoring the smell of seared flesh as the flames engulfed the two bodies.

Copsucker

Christianna Miller

Kaila Matthews often related the film, *8 Mile*, to the story of her life. It was a stretch finding the connection between a film about a man's fight for acceptance in the Detroit rap community and Kaila, who lived in a six-figured home in the San Francisco suburbs. It was never discussed when or where the phase began, but Kaila was all about thug culture. She loved rap music, wore a bandana around her California blonde hair, and frequently rolled her shirt over her pale midriff to expose a variety of temporary tattoos.

I found it unusual, however, that Kaila's music collection consisted mostly of Shania Twain despite her bedroom being decorated with posters of 50 Cent, Ja Rule, and several nobody rappers. Kaila warned if I ever told anyone about her love for Shania Twain, I would never see the light of day again. Once I tried to inquire more about the significant amount of country represented in the teetering pile of CDs that rested on the window sill in her room, but Kaila pretended she didn't know what I was referring to.

Most of the time we spent together consisted of Kaila assessing my appearance and trying to make me cooler. She would give me pictures of her to have for inspiration. It was not "thug" to be seen with a chubby girl who had an unintentional Beatles haircut and a wardrobe of overalls, but Kaila slowly began to make appearances with me in public.

Kaila would stand slouched to one side with her right hand in her pocket and the other on her hip. She would demonstrate the "thug face"- a look she trademarked as her own, which consisted of furrowing the brow and puffing out the bottom lip. One afternoon, she and Ellen Hartley taught me in a bathroom mirror as a way to prepare me for public appearances.

Ellen was the Puffy to Kaila's Biggie; I needed her approval as much as I needed Kaila's to integrate into their clique. Ellen looked like a shriveled version of Kaila. She was slightly shorter but wore platform flip flops to make herself appear as tall. Kaila would often write "Thug Life" on Ellen's belly with a blue sharpie. The two would simultaneously kiss the television screen when their favorite rappers' performances were broadcasted. The screen wasn't big enough for three people, therefore, I would often be stuck watching them.

Ellen had also undergone the transition into Kaila's

group, so she did her best to help me assimilate into thug culture. She gave me lessons on her three favorite rappers: Chingy, Cassidy, and Nelly. She also gave me several items of clothing that she thought would help with my appearance. One was a red t-shirt with Curious George. I didn't understand how Curious George was considered "thug," but I didn't question it. She even spent one morning trying to make me look sexy by applying eyeliner and making an attempt to pull my short hair into a ponytail. Eventually, she gave up and tied a yellow bandana around my head. My light blonde strands poked out from the bottom of the fabric. I looked like a Backstreet Boy but if Ellen dubbed it sexy, it was sexy.

Every recess, Kaila, Ellen, and their friends would gather at the side of the basketball court. After all, basketball was thug. When anyone scored a goal, Kaila would lead the group in a cheer. Not too loud though, because too much enthusiasm was not thug. I looked out of place in my denim overalls and beat up sneakers. Perhaps that was the reason Kaila would encourage me to sit a few feet away from them.

My dishonorable discharge from Kaila's clan happened on the afternoon we watched a group of sixth graders shoot hoops. They would often miss completely and send the ball flying to the parking lot. The pack was led by Andre Bustamante, the male version of Kaila. I don't know if it was the Nike symbol that was shaved on the side of his head or his baggy jeans held up with a Gap Kids belt, but Andre made hearts flutter.

He demonstrated his charming demeanor by aggressively bouncing the basketball into our group. Several girls let out startling squeals, dismissing their thug personas to defend themselves from a charging ball. Kaila wasn't impressed.

"What the hell, Andre?" she yelled. The harsh language startled me more than the attack of the ball. Andre acknowledged her with a smug expression as he mocked Kaila's famous thug pose.

"What, bitch?" he yelled back.

War had commenced on the elementary school basketball court. Andre's friends laughed while Ellen stood up with fists clenched. After a command from Kaila, Ellen sat down faster than she had stood up. Kaila summoned me over to her. Excited, I ran over and nestled myself in between several other girls. We watched Andre make the next shot.

"He is such a pussy, don't you think?"

I had never heard of the word before, but I quickly nodded. What Kaila said was considered the gospel.

“Walk over there and call him that.”

When I asked why, she shook her head and let out an exasperated “just do it.” I stood up, dusted off my overalls, and walked over. Intimidated, I yelled the word and then ran back to the Kaila.

“What was that? No, go back over there and this time, say that he is a cocksucker.”

Never had I heard of that word either, but the way Kaila said it, I knew it couldn't be good. I went back over. Andre, still laughing with his friends, stared at me. He waited in anticipation for the message I had to deliver.

“Copsucker!” I exclaimed. I stood there, knowing I had said the word incorrectly but I still positioned into the thug pose. Hopefully, he hadn't heard of the word either and would think it sounded intimidating.

“Your mama is retarded and so are you 'cause that probably runs in your family.”

He distributed high fives to the members of his posse as they laughed in celebration of his remark. Andre flashed a big smile and his teeth advertised that his lunch included lettuce. I should have seen the comment coming. My mother had made an appearance at school earlier in the year. Even though I'd know it would be social suicide to bring my handicapped mother to a school event, I had refused to be embarrassed.

It hadn't been easy adjusting to the version of my mother that came back from the hospital a few years earlier. During the birth of my brother, she had suffered a stroke. My father, who had brought a camera to memorialize the birth of his son, continued to snap photos under the impression that the alarm in her eyes and her gasps for air were attributed to the pain. My mother came back unable to construct a coherent sentence, operate her limbs, or remember details of my childhood. The way I saw it, my playful, free-spirited mother had died and was yet to return. I didn't want anyone to remind me of that, especially someone who peed his pants in the third grade.

“Retard! Retard! Retard!” Andre's posse chanted in unison. Andre chanted with the most clarity until he broke the rhythm.

“That's probably why she's ugly,” he yelled over his shoulder. “All retards are ugly.”

“Ugly! Ugly! Ugly!”

It was hard to concentrate on maintaining my thug

face when I could feel the stickiness of a tear on my cheek. I quickly shuffled to the corner of the court to consult with Kaila.

“Oh my God, are you crying?” she sneered.

“They made fun of my mommy- my mom, I mean, they made fun of my mom.”

“She still calls her mom ‘mommy’?” a girl giggled.

“Oh, they made fun of your mom because she’s a retard?” Kaila asked with a mean smirk. Considering she was my neighbor, she knew about my mother’s condition, but she never brought it up. She laughed and was quickly joined by the others. I was smart enough to know they were laughing at me, but not smart enough to walk away. More tears began to form and they were noticed before I had a chance to wipe them away.

“What a baby.”

“I am not a baby,” I pleaded.

“So, you are going to let them make fun of your mom?” Kaila’s tone had transitioned into one of concern and disgust.

“What can I do?”

“Stop crying because only babies cry. I can’t be seen talking to a baby.”

I wiped the tears with the palms of my hands, which only spread them thinly over my face.

“Now, thug face.” She waited momentarily while I adjusted my face. I was sure the redness of my eyes and my splotchy cheeks were not considered ‘thug’ but I hoped Kaila would let it slide. “Okay, go over there,” she paused for dramatic effect while looking at Ellen, “...and spit on him.”

Her other friends gasped; Ellen reacted with a reluctant expression of satisfaction.

“I, I, can’t do that. That’s gross.”

“So?” Kaila laughed. “He made fun of your mom. If you don’t spit on him that means you’re fine with your mother being retarded. A stupid, ugly retard. Go do it or I don’t want to see you again.”

Scared at the thought of losing the approval of the popular girls and not wanting to be fine with my mother being declared a retard, I turned on my heel and marched over to Andre and his clique. My armpits stuck together due to the nervous reaction of my sweat glands.

“Look, the retard is back. She’s still ugly too.” His friends roared with laughter. One wearing a rayon running suit went so far as to hold his belly overdramatically. I inched closer to Andre.

One more word, I thought, *one more word*. I gathered saliva at the tip of my tongue, making sure not to show any jaw movement. I was going catch him off guard because no one was going to talk about my mommy like that.

Andre incorporated my mother's condition into a lewd remark about the sex life of my parents. My tongue catapulted the saliva through my puckered lips like a rock being released from a slingshot. I watched as the wad descended from the air and landed in the nook of Andre's tear duct. There was a brief glimpse of surprise and he quickly had to close his eyes to protect them from the clump of spit, which slowly rolled into the split of his eyelid. He was safe now, but he knew as soon as he opened them, his eyes would be subjected to the ooze of my spit.

Andre's posse let out a few gasps. I turned back towards Kaila. She and her friends were no longer stationed on the other side of the court. This was supposed to be the act that solidified my membership in the inner circle, but for all I knew, Kaila might have missed the whole thing. My glance was diverted by the orange hue of a leopard-print blazer reflecting in the afternoon sunlight. Miss Rast was hastily marching towards us.

Miss Rast could invoke a degree of fear in her students that could make the Devil shiver. Certainly not one born for a career in education, she dedicated more time lecturing on etiquette and the benefits of having a pet rock than lessons within the fifth grade curriculum. She was the punch line of much playground gossip, mostly because of her gaudy wardrobe that temporarily distracted attention from her lazy eye. I watched her come towards me as the wind made her wispy, over processed hair sail back. Her multiple beaded bracelets clanked together as she pointed her red acrylic nail of her index finger at me.

"You get over here!"

I was going to die.

I looked behind me again to assure that Kaila was still gone. Before I could turn back around, Miss Rast had snatched a strap of my overalls and placed me a few feet away from the group.

"I didn't do anything," Andre shrieked with his hands up. "She spit on me, Miss Rast."

"Wipe that off for God's sake," she said with no sympathy. His mouth gaped in horror while his eyes remained clenched shut. He reluctantly rubbed the spit with the hem of his shirt. Not so thug now.

“You boys go back to playing. But first, Christianna, apologize for this disgusting behavior.”

“He called me ugly! He called my mom a retard!”

“Enough,” Miss Rast interrupted. Her voice assured me that she was not to be tested. “Apologize for what you did.” I looked at her; she stared back intimidatingly with her left eye while her right glanced into the distance. She was close enough I could smell the heavy aroma of her perfume. Tears emerged again but I didn’t bother holding them in. My mother wouldn’t be able to come and defend me to the principal or the wretched Miss Rast. Kaila had abandoned me after my efforts to assimilate into her clan. She and Andre had won; evil had triumphed over good. I was alone now. What trouble lingered ahead?

“Apologize,” Miss Rast demanded with more hostility in her voice.

I looked directly at Andre. He opened fire on an impressionable girl with a vulnerable mother. I didn’t regret the spit. He deserved it.

“Say it,” she bellowed as she adjusted the grip on my strap and firmly yanked.

I was going to say it and this time, I was going to say it correctly.

“You’re a cocksucker.”

Miss Rast clutched my clothing causing me to stagger as we walked. Being dragged behind her made it so I walked through her perfume trail.

“A child’s behavior is a firm representation of the parents,” she began to lecture, “If you act in this crass fashion, I can only imagine your mother.”

No you can’t, I thought. She couldn’t imagine my mother. My mother would twirl in the kitchen with a mixing bowl in her arms while The Cure played on the radio. My mother would enact novels with flamboyant gestures and costumes so I would better understand. My mother would probably treat me to McDonald’s for standing up to Andre and over french fries, she would discuss effective alternatives for defending myself. Miss Rast couldn’t imagine that a mile away, the same woman lay bed-ridden in a dark room.

And off to the principal’s office we went.

In a Cave Near El Matador, California
Calvin Nemec



*I Sat Here Thinking About A Title for This Thing and Your
Face Came to Mind*

Tom Kline

We hated each other - I mean, HATED - for the longest time,
before I realized the horrible, terrifying, beautiful truth: you
and I, we're exactly the same.

Mirrors

Mareena Razik

I like the snow, falling
Outside as it is now, or was
Hours ago;

Slow,

Deliberate,

Moving,

Descending in clusters.

Their fine crystalline sharpness-stark!
Matching the cold.

Digging

Into our

Clothing, like

Broken

Shards of glass, with

Beautiful jagged edges.

Here

They

Come

Raining down

From the shattered mirror that is

The sky.

Seven years bad luck. That's what they say,
But / don't believe
In any such superstition.

Only snowflakes, and
Their downward assault
On each of us

Below.

Lamentations
Dylan Woods

*A JUGGLER walks onto the stage,
carrying four balls; two are
average juggling size, and two
are small.*

JUGGLER

Welcome. Tonight I will tell you about my family...

He holds up the four balls.

JUGGLER

With these.

*He holds up the two average-sized
balls.*

JUGGLER

These two are my parents.

He indicates the small ones.

JUGGLER

And these are me and my brother.

*He begins to juggle the balls
perfectly.*

JUGGLER

In the beginning, when we were young, all was well. My parents loved each other and they loved us. We were happy.

(beat)

Then, at an amusement park, my brother went missing.

*He throws one small ball
off-stage and
continues juggling.*

JUGGLER

It was horrible. I was young, so I didn't fully understand. I'd stay in bed at night and wonder when my brother was coming home. My father blamed himself. And my mother blamed him too. It was on his watch that my brother disappeared.

He throws one average ball off-stage, and a larger one is thrown back. He catches it and continues juggling, but with difficulty.

JUGGLER

It tore him apart. He took to drink. He'd sleep on the couch, if ever. My parents would argue all the time. His guilt weighed down and almost destroyed our family.

(beat)

(MORE)

JUGGLER (cont'd)

Then one day my dad was gone. My mom found a note and she cried when she read it, but she never told me what it said.

He throws the large ball off stage, then continues juggling. It still appears to be difficult, and he keeps the two remaining balls as far as possible from one another.

When one is high in the air, the other is at its lowest point.

JUGGLER

My mother and I grew apart after that. She hardly spoke to me anymore. Hardly spoke to anyone. I grew older and became a cop. My mother passed away some years ago, her death as quiet as her life.

JUGGLER

He throws the final average-sized ball off-stage. He's left with one ball now, which he throws and catches with one hand. He watches it rise and fall, sadness in his eyes.

It's just me now.

*He catches the ball, then exits.
Lights.*

Downtrod
Emma Johnson



The Unwanted Visitor on the Beach

Collin Henderson

Rudy slapped his hand down on the bar. “I’ll be seeing you guys later. I’m outta here.” The other bar keep and the waitress wished him a good night as he punched out and left through the back door.

Outside, he was standing on a wooden seating area that would be populated with beach goers and locals. But now, in the early September air, the days of tourists, of beach goers, of pretty girls in bikinis, of young kids tossing sand at one another, of teenagers swimming out too far into the water, of six packs under an umbrella, of laughing couples enjoying a glass of wine on their back porch while the sun sets were over until next May. Rudy traversed a few wooden steps and down into sand.

The water was rolling up onto the shore and the breeze blew gently as the sun turned a dying deep orange. He began to make tracks as he walked across the shore, standing right on the cusp of the water, toward the restroom that sat at the edge of the sand. It was a small, rather bland concrete building, built a long time ago with the plumbing to show for it. Most wise people avoided it, but every once in a while, one of the regulars at the bar would tell Rudy an absolutely *hilarious* story about a local who tried to flush the third toilet from the right, really, you just *had* to hear it. And Rudy would listen if for no other reason than tradition’s sake.

But he didn’t have to use the bathroom. Rather, he was getting his weekly soda from the vending machine before going home. He did it to enjoy the final dying breaths of summer before it started becoming too cold to walk the stretch anymore.

He put a few coins that he received as tips into the slot and punched in the numbers for some root beer. It fell to the bottom and he grabbed it from the machine.

“Psst.”

Rudy looked around. No one there. He twisted the cap and took a sip.

“Psst. Hey, Hey, buddy.”

Someone definitely said that. He looked around again and saw nobody.

“Down here, jackass.”

He looked down. Sitting in the sand was a face, staring up at him with black holes in the place of eyes. The

grains of sand that made it up were constantly shifting as it moved, making it hard to perceive a shape.

What the hell?

“Don’t give me that look. Close your mouth, you’ll attract flies.” The voice was nasally, like a person with some toes jammed up their nose. “What, you haven’t heard the stories of the ghost on this beach? How long have you lived here?”

Rudy said nothing, only stood with mouth agape.

“Whatever. Listen, guy, I got one, very important question to ask you. You ready to hear it?” Nothing from Rudy. “Well, are you?”

Rudy tried to say “No,” but it came out sounding like a five year old imitating a cow.

“I got a fanny pack full of acid and condoms. Wanna get weird?”

The face began to laugh. It was horrible, working its way into Rudy’s head and clawing at the inside of his skull. He turned around and leaned on the vending machine, until he saw it was filled with My Little Pony fanny packs. He dropped the soft drink and began to run, totally neglecting to get into his car. He ran home to his apartment, slammed the door and locked it. Breathing heavily, he climbed into bed and pulled the comforter over his head and cried himself to sleep. He heard the laughter of the Sand Face in his dreams that night.

jack the tripper - in love again

Daniel Land

Behold this ginormous, fantastic
spectacle, complete with and
charmed verge of the corner;
stone unturned twice and it's
spot on, man. It's gorgeous too.
In fact, it's a beautiful *she*
and she's becoming for my eyes,
twisted around the world – experted
little gal, insanely cool and there's
frost in her soul that flips me into

a drumbeat so very intense --
as flat as I am, on-look from
the man... that man on the moon.
The mood is kind and it's broken
fresh, copied light, smothered
down to the viscous, visceral core;
down to the pious, gruesome heart that

shines to me from
talk of her.

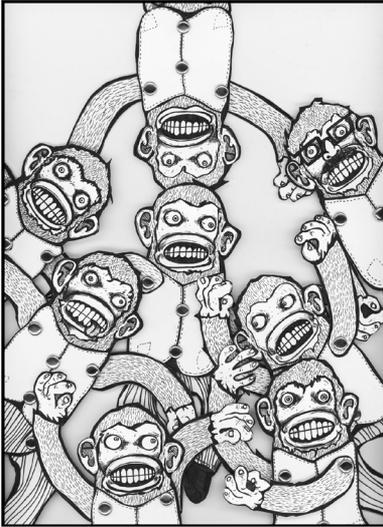
Kills sweetly, flavored like the salt
through the air, spurs nature to nothing less
than its climactic peak.
See me laying here, spotless manifold
of mind? Is it worth my un-daunting
sufferlust to keep me tongue tied to the
rug?

Do I at least get a blanket to shade me
from the mild mesh of rain, the rag-tag
splendor dust?

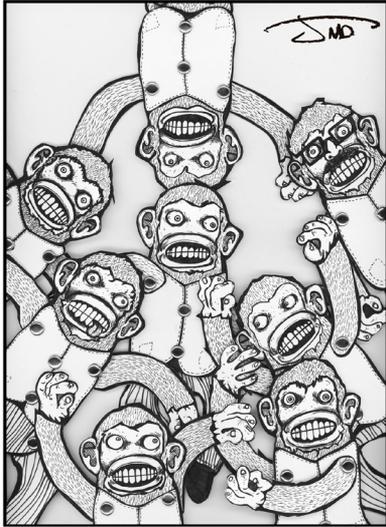
Quickly, it becomes trinkets of my inner
peace which splash me constantly, straight
in my indifferent face. Wet, while
my voice changes to hers, but
without
her knowing. *Why?* Because
I'm happy enough. Happy to see
her, and so very glad to see her

happy with *him*. Because sometimes I never truly figure out how to care less about it.

Dorm Monkeys
Joel N. Dodge



What it sounds like in the dorm next door



What is actually going on in the dorm next door

Ten Fe

Olga Reyes

There was brain matter everywhere. The man's eyes were closed and his white T-shirt was drenched in deep red blood. I had never seen so much blood before; I wondered how much blood that really was. One barrel? Two? Barrels were pretty large. There's no way his blood would fill up an entire barrel.

He had a large tattoo of the Virgin Mary on his arm. That meant he was in a gang.

"*Vamonos*," my mom said to my sister and I. She covered our eyes and led us back to our tiny house. She turned on the TV and started to pray.

I lived in El Salvador from 1992 to 1998. It was just my older sister, my mom and me. We lived in a small neighborhood in San Salvador, the capital. The houses were all close together, separated by thin tall fences and brick walls. Our windows were barred, cockroaches roamed the kitchen counter (and my bed at night), but I didn't mind them. The ants were intrusive and lizards were eavesdroppers.

In El Salvador, going to church was the thing to do. Everybody did it. Everybody believed in God and everybody preached His word. I loved going to church. I always got to sleep and wear pretty dresses and eat. They always had vendors who made *empanadas* out of plantain and rolled in sugar. Those were a treat for my older sister and me.

The church we frequented was big. The walls were white, the doors were black and Jesus Christ graced us with his presence on the cross hanging above the pastor in the front of the room. It was a huge cross and every thorn, every nail, every drop of blood was detailed. Even His tears were blood. The crown of thorns looked menacing on His head. I was always scared by that man on the cross. He looked so sad.

Although we visited the same church every Sunday morning, my mother always found other church events throughout the week. One day, she signed us up for an overnight church event that took place right outside the capital. We packed blankets, sandwiches, pillows and of course, my rag doll.

The bus ride was long. We always took the bus everywhere we went. Smelly old men always sat in front of

us and loud young women behind us. I sat on my mom's lap, while my sister had her own seat. I didn't mind, my mom was always warm and I was always cold.

It was early in the morning so the bus was packed. I held my rag doll tight with one hand and held my sister's hand with the other. My mom's arm was tight around my waist and her other arm was around my sister's shoulder.

The bus made so many sharp stops that I felt sick before the hour was up. One sharp stop in particular almost threw me over the edge. I remember it so vividly: the bus stopped so sharply that my body slammed against the seat in front of me.

"Watch it!" the man in front of us said. His breath smelled like the dead rats in the sewer next to my school. His breath triggered bad school memories along with nausea; I felt myself almost projectile vomit on the back of his head, *The Exorcist* style.

"We're almost there," my mom said as she rubbed my back.

"Brothers and sisters, take out the Bibles," the pastor said at the beginning of the session. We bowed our heads and said a prayer. I knew I was talking to God and I had to close my eyes every time I prayed, but I was deeply distracted by a multi colored blanket that was spread across the floor a couple of seats down from us. Not only was it multi colored, but it also had tiny bears on it.

I suddenly felt a sharp tap on the back of my head, followed by a familiar low growl that uttered, "*Pon atención!*"

I closed my eyes, bowed my head and apologized to my mother. And God.

We sang songs, clapped our hands and stomped our feet. That was my favorite part of church. I loved dancing with my sister to the music. We got rowdy.

"Hold my hand and let's spin," my sister said. She was always the instigator and I always followed her lead. We spun, slow at first, then faster and faster. Next thing I knew, I was lying on top of the multi colored blanket with the tiny bears on it. I heard my sister's laugh but it was muffled by my mother's low growl, which I could still hear in the room filled with loud voices. At least I got to touch the blanket.

Monday morning rolled around and my sister and I were dressed in our usual sky blue uniforms. We were enrolled in a private Christian school and the dress code was anything but flattering. On gym days we wore a white T-shirt tucked into bright blue track pants so everybody knew that you had gym that day. But on that Monday morning, we waited for our bus, which was really a van with the word *autobus* scribbled on the side, in our traditional sky blue blouse and skirt combo.

We waited on the sidewalk across the street from a small store. I loved getting lollipops from that store. Sometimes my mom would let my sister and I go to that store with our neighbor during the day. We would buy ice cream, chips or candy.

I watched people go in and out of that store every time I waited for the bus. I didn't see the man with the white T-shirt and the Virgin Mary tattoo walk in. There was nothing special about him that stood out to me. Everybody had that tattoo on their arm. The men who raped, killed and stole had that tattoo on their arm. Maybe they prayed too.

It was really early in the morning. Too early to hear men yell. Too early to watch the man with the white T-shirt and Virgin Mary tattoo get shot by a man in black. Too early to see brain matter go on for miles and miles down the street, but maybe that was just the angle we stood in.

"*Dios mio!*" my mom said.

The Virgin Mary was covered in blood, no longer visible. My mother carried my sister and I back to our house. She turned the TV on and flipped to my favorite show, *Winnie el Gran Osito*. She began to pray. My sister and I just sat on the couch, glad we didn't have to go to school that day.

"Oh my God, are you okay?" Stephanie asked.

Nobody had ever asked me that. I didn't know what to say. Yes?

"You saw someone get shot when you were 6 years old. Are you okay?" she asked again. It was chilly outside. We smoked cigarettes as I painted a visual of what brain matter looks like, from a 6-year-old's perspective. Pink, mushy, kind of like a really slimy pink slug but drenched in blood.

She seemed alarmed, and maybe it was alarming but it didn't phase me. It still doesn't. I wasn't scared, I wasn't concerned. I was six. I was glad to get a day off from school. I was so accustomed to hearing gun shots and witnessing gang fights that it didn't bother me. Because that's all it was: a fight. Except the loser's brain matter was displayed this time.

Stephanie didn't ask me to go into detail and describe every single blood cell, every single skull fragment that I saw that morning. Maybe she was squeamish, or maybe she feared that I would break down and have an anxiety attack over something that happened so long ago.

But now and then I think about it. Not because I wonder if it'll ever hit me that I saw someone die, but because I wonder *how* he died. Sure, he was shot. But for his brains to be splattered on the dry pavement sounds a bit dramatic. One shot doesn't splatter brain matter everywhere, it just creates a small hole in the skull with tons of blood.

Except this wasn't just one shot.

My ears rang whenever I thought about it. It was several shots. Maybe the entire round in the pistol. But it was a lot, and it was loud.

It was like the man in black wanted to deliberately display losing, gross brain matter all over the damn place because he kept shooting and shooting until he got what he wanted.

Yes, he ran away, but not after admiring his work, even for a second. It was sick, really. I think I saw him smile, but I'm not too sure, that may be years of warped memory or years of not thinking about this shooting.

Either way, pink slugs drenched in blood oozed from a broken skull on the streets in front of my favorite shop. Before my mom picked my sister and me up and sheltered us away, I looked at his eyes. Two little black stars, faded away.

"You want another drink?" Stephanie asked me. "A Gin and Tonic?"

"Yes, but make it a double."

Everything we did revolved around our religion. My mother never allowed us to watch TV shows or movies that had any characters who were evil. I didn't actually watch *The Little Mermaid* until freshman year of college. Apparently Ursula was too evil. I remember we used to watch *Full*

House a lot. I always thought Tio Jesse was the most handsome guy on the planet. It was one of the only shows, besides *Winnie The Pooh*, that my mom allowed us to watch. It was light hearted, it taught us very valuable lessons and it was age appropriate. It had God's stamp of approval.

My mother always made us watch religious movies. One in particular was the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which scared the hell out of me. She made us watch it every Easter.

It was very graphic. Blood and all. Close-ups of the wrists being nailed to the cross. Very graphic. It's probably why I have a wrist phobia today. Seeing Jesus getting nailed to a wall every year up until I was 7 was really traumatic for me. To this day, whenever I see Jesus nailed on the cross, or even a painting of Jesus, it scares me.

But that movie was supposed to make us appreciate life, sin-free and all. He died for our sins, so we had to be good and preach God's word and go to church and do good things for people. We prayed every single night before going to bed. We prayed in the church attached to our school. We prayed during my mom's religious meetings where she invited every kid on our block, even the ones I didn't care for.

There was this one girl in particular, Andrea, who really just made me want to pull at her pigtails. She was loud and rude and she didn't even have a bible with her. I always felt bad whenever this animosity arose within me toward Andrea, especially during our prayer groups, but I couldn't help feeling that way around her. She always sat next to me too. I think she knew she bothered me because she would always fling her legs back and forth and she would *always* hit my knee as she did it. It never failed.

"Bow your head down," my mom said as she began the group prayer.

I closed my eyes and began to pray.

"Padre nuestro que estas en el cielo, sacrificado sea tu nombre..."

I felt a tiny foot touch my tiny knee. *Don't open your eyes.*

"Venga tu reino. Hagase tu voluntad en la tierra como en el cielo..."

Another tap of her foot to my knee. *Don't break the prayer.*

"Danos hoy nuestro pan de cada dia. Perdona nuestras ofensas..."

This time, the tap was harder and I couldn't stand it. I opened my eyes and slapped her foot away as it made its

way for another offensive round to my knee.

“Ow!” Andrea cried.

My mom looked at me, fury building in her eyes. I knew that look all too well. So I bowed my head, said “Perdon Dios,” and threw a tiny punch at Andrea’s arm. I figured, what more can my mom do? She had already given me the look and I wanted to show Andrea that I wasn’t scared.

But I was. Later that night, my mom made me pray for what seemed like a really long time. She made me pray for Andrea, which I didn’t care for but I did anyways. Then I prayed for school to be shorter. My prayer then turned to a conversation with God, as I prayed for more art supplies, more Esmeralda and Princess Jasmine printed underwear, prettier backpacks and more shoes Velcro shoes, because I admitted to being lazy and not wanting to learn to tie my own shoes.

As I talked to God, my stomach grumbled, so I said one last prayer: I prayed for more food. Sometimes bread was our dinner, sometimes we had nice warm *pupusas* and *empanadas* as a treat. Sometimes our neighbor invited us over her house for dinner, sometimes there was no dinner. But it was all part of God’s plan. He wanted us to appreciate what we *did* have. He tested our patience and we passed with flying colors.

“You mean you actually *like* this food?” Tiffany asked. Her nose wrinkled at the smell of the food creations in the dining hall. Cooper Hall isn’t particularly known for its gourmet meals.

“Yes, I appreciate this food,” I always responded.

“I know sometimes you didn’t have food when you were younger, but damn,” she said. “I swear this shit ain’t edible sometimes.”

It was pasta night at Cooper. The sauce smelled questionable, but tasted like sauce regardless. I poured some parmesan cheese on top of the sauce, mixed it with my fork and savored it. The bread was a bit hard, but it wasn’t anything butter couldn’t fix.

“I just can’t believe you’re eating that right now.”

“I appreciate—”

“I know, I know. You appreciate this food.”

Everybody in our neighborhood loved my mom. The woman who lived across the street from us owned a bakery. She used to give us free cakes when it was our birthday. Sometimes she gave us leftover treats she didn't sell that day. We made those treats last for days. It was better to savor the treats than to indulge.

My mother used to sew couch covers and sell them for a profit. She worked for Avon and she sold used clothing out of our house. She was very handy with the sewing machine. The women on our block used to knock on our door with ripped garments and broken hearts. My mother always sewed both of them up just right. The ladies loved her so much that they always attended our religious gatherings.

Once a week my mother hosted a Christian night. She invited all the kids on our street, along with their mothers, to join us for a night of prayer and fun activities. I was excited to see the kids on my street, but I was more excited to taste the hot chocolate my mother always made for these meetings. She made it from scratch. It was truly God's work.

One day during our regular meeting, we heard people talking and yelling outside our house. We all walked to our front door and saw a crowd looking up at the sky. It was almost sunset. The crowd pointed at something in the sky. It was a small saucer. Little lights flashed against a black background. It was tiny but the lights were bright.

"Son extraterrestres!" everyone said.

We stared at the small black saucer with flashing lights for what seemed like hours. It stayed in one spot. We were so caught up with the saucer that the sound of helicopters made us jump. A couple of helicopters flew above our house and dropped soldiers with parachutes to the site. Soldiers were always parachuting from the sky. I used to lie on the pavement in my backyard and pretend that I caught them with my tiny hand as they fell from the sky. But this time was different. It was urgent. They fell and the saucer disappeared. They still fell hours later.

"Let's go inside," my mother said. She guided us all inside our house for our last prayer as the sun set and soldiers fell.

"It could have been an unmanned aerial vehicle,"

Justin said. "But that would have scared me if I saw it."

"I don't know what it was, I was really young. I'd like to think it was an alien," I said.

I asked my mother about the incident but she said she didn't remember it. Something in her eyes told me she did.

When we moved back to the states where our dad waited for us, we attended one church. It was significantly smaller than the ones in El Salvador. Less people were in attendance and those who were physically present were mentally gone. Nobody clapped, nobody danced and nobody sang. They asked for donations before, in between and after prayers. They asked for donations while we dined in the small dining room in the basement of the church; they asked for donations while we ate dessert and drank juice; they asked for donations while we walked out of the church. We never returned after that.

Within the first week we moved back to the states we saw our first snowfall. My sister and I didn't know what to do with ourselves. We went outside looking like big marshmallows, wearing gloves and boots for the first time. We stuck out our tongues as my dad snapped pictures of us. We grabbed handfuls of snow and shoved it in our mouths, thinking it would taste like the snow cones from El Salvador.

"Don't eat it!" my dad yelled at us. He snapped another picture and we spat the snow back out. We laughed and played and made snow angels until it was dark outside. That night my sister and I prayed before going to bed. I prayed for more snow, but this time, I wanted it to taste like the snow cones from El Salvador.

"*Porfavor Diosito*, more tasty snow," I prayed.

"Great, more snow," I said as I looked out the window. "This Oswego weather is too much for me."

It was the day before Tiffany's birthday on a cold February day. She always does something unexpected for her birthday, and this year, she had her mind set on a tattoo. We talked about what kind of tattoos we wanted and why we wanted them. We discussed placement and size before

journeying over to a tattoo shop in a mild Oswego storm.

As Tiffany explained what she wanted, I had an impulse to get the tattoo I had planned to get for a while, that night. It was time and long overdue.

“Can I just get mine tonight?” I asked Stacy, the tattoo artist. Tiffany looked at me with a surprising look. I always think everything through. I always dissect every possibility of a situation. I always think of things that can go wrong, and things that can go right. I never do anything on a whim, I’m always cautious.

“What are you looking to get?” Stacy asked.

“I want the words *Ten Fe* tattooed on my wrist.”

“What does that mean?”

“Have faith.”

And with that, I always carry my childhood church days and El Salvador with me because maybe that was God’s plan all along.

Saying the Name of God

Jessica Ekert

Swaying along with the rhythm of the train's motion, my sister sat in the window seat, sleeping, her forehead pressed against the glass. I wondered how many other sweaty New Yorkers' foreheads were plastered up there before hers. My mother sat between us, her phone out in front of her, engrossed in another game of solitaire.

A lady on the other side of the train car kept shouting on her phone at a boyfriend. There was always that one intolerable passenger everyone silently wished would get off at the next stop.

A few seats ahead of me two Arab men sat together. They conversed with each other in hushed voices. I couldn't make out what they were saying until the older man said "Allah", and I knew it wasn't English. Under his seat I noticed a black bag, which was curious because he was holding a backpack on his lap. I stared at that abandoned bag; there was something in it. I was sure there was something in it. Above the two men a sign read, "If You See Something, Say Something."

Nobody else seemed to notice. Everyone was listening to music or sleeping with their heads cocked to the side. *Say something, say something*, I told myself.

The train came to a stop. The doors opened and the man reached down for the other bag and walked off. "Thank God," I whispered, wondering what on earth the man had said.

Snapshots of Papa

Jacqueline Blocker-Marshall

- 33A.D. - The humidity hung heavy at The Skull. Pins, Needles, and Thorns pressed against your braincase. Your open wounds soaked up brackish water. Obedience gripped agony, as you clung to that wooden base. Stripped and Humiliated for all to see. Then not present; Paid all for me.
- 1991- On the Gritty B cart with the red tassel hanging, down for emergencies only and flickering lights as we bypassed each station. Bike repairs and candied apples, these were no match.
- 1993- Tubes of the unknown streaming through the Blue Nile; you were deflated. Bubbles of dread, fear, and confusion crammed our ventilation. Water-- a constant flow through my lachrymal duct until I saw a light. Your lips pressed against my cheek as you uttered... "I Love You".
- 1986- It did not envy, boast, nor was it proud. It never failed. Love.
- 2008- Black and blue roses in the garden, my hind-sight transparent. Sealed with more than just a kissed, I was hemmed in. Way beyond bosom buddies. Rescued from muck and mire.
- 1989- Sliding down the wonder tunnel, right before my cranium hit the seat of this four wheel pickup. His protégé, a caramel chunk, birthed.
- 2012- I absconded from his presence, a prodigal child. He uttered heart wrenching parables of grace through my ears. And they followed "I am the vine and you are my branches. Remain in me, and then you will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing."
- 1995- You were ghost—No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind could fathom—
Until we reconvene.

Yaddo

Breana Iannotti



Jesus Breakup

Harry Christopher Moore

EXT. GOLGOTHA - DAY

*Jesus hangs on the cross. Mary
is below looking up at him.*

JESUS

I'm so glad you're here with me, it helps
take my mind off the pain.

MARY

Yeah...about that.

JESUS

What?

MARY

Look, Jesus, we need to talk.

JESUS

Oh no. What is it now?

MARY

I'm breaking up with you.

JESUS

WHAT!

MARY

It's just not working out. You're like
really committed to this messiah martyr thing
and...

JESUS

But, baby, I told you. I'm coming back.

MARY

Yeah well...I can't wait that long.

JESUS

This is BULL CRAP, Mary! BULL CRAP! Of all the days to spring this on me, too. You couldn't let me just die peacefully knowing that we're still together. No, you had to go and ruin my day.

MARY

There's someone else.

JESUS

WHAT! Who? Someone else? When did this happen?

MARY

It's been going on for some time. I mean Jesus Christ, what did you expect? I'm a prostitute.

JESUS

You're still Hooking? I thought you stopped all those crazy shenanigans. I expected a little more gratitude and loyalty from a girl I cured of all sexually transmitted diseases just from my touch. Thank you very much! Who is this guy?

MARY

It's not important.

JESUS

Is it Judas? I bet it's Judas. I know he doesn't like me and I've seen the way he looks at you.

MARY

Stop. It's no one you know. He's not even a Jew. He's a Roman, okay?

JESUS

What does this guy got have that I can't give you.

MARY

Umm...I don't know. I mean he's like older, rich, he drives a chariot, his place is huge

and stuff. He doesn't live with his mother. He like has his own business. You don't even have your carpenters job anymore.

JESUS

Hello! I'm up here sacrificing myself for the world. I'm doing this for you. You said you wanted me to be more ambitious.

MARY

I never asked for this. Besides, you're dying and I need a man who is gonna be around and take care of me.

JESUS

I said I'm coming back. God! You never listen to me.

GOD

Yes, son.

JESUS

Not now, Dad! I'm talking to my girlfriend.

GOD

Sorry J.C.

A Roman Centurion walks over.

ERECTUCUS

S'up.

MARY

Hey, baby. I'm just finishing up here. Can you give us just a minute?

ERECTUCUS

Cool. Hey...nice abs. I'll be in the chariot.

JESUS

He seems nice.

MARY

I gotta go.

JESUS

Mary, wait. Don't go.

MARY

I'm sorry, Jeezy, but I gotta turn the other cheek.

JESUS

Mary! Wait! Hey! Who was always there for you? Who turned water into wine for you when you were too broke to drink and wanted to get hammered? Huh?

MARY

Jesus, would you get off my back already? It's over.

JESUS

You know what? This is great...this is just great. The worst thing to happen to me today.

April Showers

Jeanne Marie Pungello

Every step resulted in a small burst of white around his ankles, as if he were walking through a field of flour. Little licks and wisps of mist would jump up, occasionally poking at his kneecaps, and evaporate into the stale air.

John glanced at his feet and grimaced.

He used to think the jumping tendrils of fog were fun and interesting, but the novelty of his workplace had long since worn off. Now it was just an interaction he didn't want, a reminder that he'd have been happier without.

"Mornin', John! I hear it's gonna be a wet one!"

John looked over his shoulder and offered a half-assed smile and a nod. The source of the voice was George, a rotund little man who was responsible for blowing hats off of the heads of people in Southern California. He always had a smile on his face, albeit a devilish one, and John associated him with some cross between a cherub and a leprechaun.

"Always is."

John's stride was consistent and stoic. It wasn't that he had a purpose in his direction so much as he'd rather not deal with office pleasantries. Nobody really cared how he was, or how anyone else was, or if it was going to be a scorcher in Dallas.

A haphazard wave would spasm from one of his hands every now and again, accompanied with some insincere response to some question from some person in some doorway. It was the same thing every day, and in the years that he'd been doing what he'd been doing – especially after his most recent promotion – he had lost the energy engage with these people.

John hated his job.

It wasn't always that way.

He used to have dreams, real ones, but his expertise with water kept him from the sunny future that he'd always figured he'd waltz into. He had worked his way up from morning dew to fog, from fog to sun showers, and from sun showers to thunderstorms.

He worked to obscure sunlight, not to provide it. Back in the days of dew all he worried about was making grass look prettier than it already did. He organized iridescent gems on foliage. He made sure everything was gorgeous for the groggy commuter and morning

runner. Aside from the stifled financial advisor who would occasionally rush through the wet grass when he was running late, nobody complained about dew. John didn't care for those financial advisors any way, they spent so much time in cubicles or schmoozing beside water coolers that it wasn't like they would ever appreciate what he did.

Anyway, it wasn't for them, it was for the happy people.

The smiley, content people – the ones who looked forward to waking up early and actually noticed the little things on the way to their unimportant jobs.

Fog had been a little harder to deal with, but John managed.

He loved making it roll in, slow and thick, as if it were the star of an old western. He always pictured fog to be the surly cowboy with a penchant for good whiskey. It never moved quickly, and while it was an interesting presence to bask in and examine, people always took their time with it. It gave commuters, parents, and even airplanes pause.

Then it would retreat, curling and rolling in sluggish heaps and bounds, disappearing into the sky or simply continuing its trek to who knows where.

The fog that came after rain was John's favorite.

The way it rose out of asphalt and tumbled down the sidewalks, like a hoard of trapped spirits rising from their paved graves and grasping clumsily at the overcast skies. It was really just fun to choreograph.

At that point, John was somewhat wary of his future. He loved what he'd been doing, as fog wasn't really all that intrusive and he wasn't responsible for any particularly treacherous terrain, but it still wasn't partly cloudy days. Or picking the color pallets out for sunrises and sunsets and bickering with the art department over which gradient should come when.

Then he was promoted to sun showers.

'The best of both worlds!' was the department's motto. He didn't mind these so much, they were interesting. A little bit of rain never hurt anybody, and it was always only a little bit of rain. Every now and then he got to collaborate with the rainbow people; those were his favorite days. The entirety of that department seemed to float around the office, sipping hot teas and swishing about in flowing skirts and scarves. They belonged on the cloud that they worked on.

John spent quite some time in sun showers. A step in the right direction, he had told himself. After all the word 'sun'

was in the name of the phenomenon he was responsible for. He was happy with himself and happy with where he was going. He was so happy he even looked at the faces of the people who waved to him in the mornings. Half of the time, John was the one doing the initial waving.

Then John was promoted to thunderstorms.

Corporate had been really impressed with his finesse when it came to waterworks and they decided that they absolutely needed him in the thunderstorm department. They knew it hadn't originally been part of his career path, that he wanted to find himself in the coveted Sunshine Department – that was a large part of his office-talk – but they were convinced he would fit right in where they put him.

He did not.

Now, he crossed over into this department, and everything seemed darker. Grayer almost, like color wasn't allowed to exist in this part of the building. This happened whenever anybody crossed the threshold. In the beginning he tried to continue wearing his colorful cable-knit sweaters, but even those seemed muted in the department. His sense of style only continued to deteriorate, and he now only found solace in bland grays and washed-out browns.

The thunderstorm division of the Waterworks department was perhaps the dreariest of the office's responsibilities. It was where the quiet writer-types would be scooped up, alongside the constant complainers, philosophers, and borderline sociopaths. There was a division for every personality type and this one in particular was where those who didn't have the stomach for The Department of Natural Disasters would end up. That's what it was known for anyway, people who had a weird fascination with sitting in corners but would never even kill a bug.

Certainly, this isn't where John ever thought he'd find himself, but now that he'd been there for the better part of the three years he wasn't so sure. He accepted it, got quite good at it, and lost himself somewhere along the way.

Nature, in spite of its necessity, was an erosive power, and seemed to affect more than just the earth.

Towards the beginning of his time in the division he asked Corporate if they thought he could be replaced at some point. They would usually nod their heads and give some kind of vague response, but three years later it was obvious that they'd never let him out.

John kicked his door open and let his coat fall lazily to the floor beside his desk. He only began to sip his coffee as

he sat down, now that it was tepid and bitter, and logged in to the system.

As the hourglass icon appeared on his screen, turning every now and then in an attempt to reassure him that some progress was actually being made as far as his logging in went, he leaned back in his chair and glanced out of his window.

White cottony expanses for as far as the eyes could see. Chunks and tendrils of white would escape into the crisp air, twirling away or diving lower than John's world allowed access. All over there were people, bustling and hurrying. They looked much like what John assumed a colony of ants would look like, little and full of communal purpose. He wondered how many colonies drowned as a result of his work over the past few years; he grimaced.

The ever changing landscape provided new walkways and stairwells every few minutes, paths to different portions of the sky-islands would open up and disintegrate, and everyone seemed to know exactly where they were going in spite of the constant movement.

John figured this was probably what traffic was like, another one of those things that he would never have to deal with. The idea of getting around without the help of your surroundings, the idea of living on the surface of the earth, he had no idea how those people lived for more than two weeks.

A sort of cry came from the speakers of his computer, a mangled mix between a bleating and the song of a malfunctioning printer. His eyes were torn from the hustle and bustle of his world and pasted instead on the screen of his computer, where he expected to see the Doppler radar he was to send to the earth below in a few hours, peppered with dark green systems.

Instead, there were blotches of black and white.

John stared for a minute, expressionlessly baffled, and then slapped the monitor. A distorted wave flowed through the screen, but nothing changed. He tried a second and a third time with the same lack of results.

Within a few moments John had summoned one of the IT guys. These folks were responsible for lightning bolts and electrical storms and, for whatever superficial reason, were all taught how to fix the office's tech. Perhaps the most ridiculous part of their employment was that a handshake from one of them would almost always include a static shock.

This one's name was Travis, and he was as sweater-vested and stout as one could expect. He was very chipper, and punched John in the shoulder as he waltzed into the bleak space, "What seems to be the problem, Johnny m'boy!"

"I'm in Thunderstorms. This computer," he gestured towards his screen, jabbing at the monochromatic swirls, "is giving me the wrong instructions."

Travis glanced at the monitor, pursing his lips, "You sure you're in thunderstorms?"

"Yes, Travis."

"You sure they didn't promote you?"

"Yes, Travis."

"Well I'm not! This here's a screen for hurricanes! I mean, it *is* that time of year again. Or, wait, maybe it's rainbows? I, uh, hold on..." The little IT fellow swung into John's chair and set to work, shrugging off John's silent protests, "I always get such a weird feeling when I come to Thunderstorms, you guys are all so, like, monochromatic," he continued typing, "and I feel like half the lights don't work. I mean, rain's not that bad, is it – ah! See!" He gestured at the screen and pushed back from the desk, the wheels of John's chair screeched across the floor.

John looked at the monitor. "What the shit am I looking at, Travis?"

The IT guy beamed and leaned back in the creaky old chair, "Well John, it looks like you won."

"...Won? Won what, Travis?"

"You get to be whatever you want today, John. You're not in thunderstorms, you're in the Division of Whatever-Tickles-Your-Fancy," Travis grinned and turned back to the computer, "You get to be today's chaos factor."

"So, what, I'm responsible for random torrential downpours or something?"

"I mean... yeah... if that's what you want. Or you're responsible for an unforeseeable hail storm, or a weird morning frost, or making it the sunniest day of the year. I think you can do just about anything that isn't a natural disaster – you get to be the dude who makes everybody hate the weatherman!"

John was still for a moment.

Travis spun in the chair and snapped his fingers.

John frowned slightly and brought a hand up to his stubbly chin, "So... anything? Even if it's not water?"

"Yep! Anything! A handful of 'chaos-factors' are

randomly selected throughout the year. I think it's just a way to remind the little people that they really have no idea what's going on."

John scratched his face and nodded, keeping silent until it was uncomfortable enough for Travis to want to see himself out. Which was almost two full minutes. John remained sedentary for quite some time. He had a decision to make. He had a bunch of decisions to make. He was in a position of power over himself, for the first time in some time, and he had legitimately no idea what to do with it.

Eventually, he sat back down at his desk. He started scrolling through the plethora of commands and options that were suddenly available to him, pausing every now and then on commands for departments he didn't even know existed. He could increase the dew point, change the types of clouds in his part of the sky, hurry El Niño up a tiny bit, and even redirect currents of wind that birds were making their annual thousand-mile-trips on.

His screen was soon overtaken with the Department of Sunshine's commands. John's stony gray eyes flickered blue as he looked over the numerous prompts, and some pink flowed into his cheeks. He dragged his chair closer to his desk with a few childlike footsteps and drummed his fingers on his mouse.

Something resembling hunger colored John's face, and he set to work making his portion of the globe the sunniest it had been in quite a while.

Hours passed as he clicked away. The drenched clouds for which he was usually responsible dissipated into nothingness. Mid-sixties took the place of frigid forties, several rainbows popped up here and there, and everything was rather pleasant for the little people of his region.

His face started hurting about halfway through his work day and only then did he realize that he'd been smiling. Soon enough John found himself trying to fend off the sunset-division with some rather conspicuous clicks, but was eventually overcome by the supposed natural order of things and his computer returned to the rainy settings he was accustomed to seeing.

His screen returned to normal, but John didn't have a personal reset button. His brow wasn't quite as furrowed, his sleeves were unevenly rolled to their respective elbows, his feet were unable to stop tapping.

He'd gotten a taste of something that he'd forgotten he ever wanted, and now he didn't know what to do.

He stared at his screen for a little bit, and the blue evaporated from his irises. He began to roll his sleeves down, straightening his cuffs, and reached again for his murky cup of joe.

The mug had a smiling storm-cloud on it, with the words “Three years!” written underneath. John looked at his mug. He read the words and inspected the nonsensical cloud. “Three years...”

They were never going to let him go. He knew this, somewhere in the deepest nether- regions of his heart, but it only really came to the surface just then. He’d been in the division for three years, with no sign of leaving, and only a cheesy mug and an identity-crisis to show for it.

He rolled his sleeves back up. The blue ran back into his eyes.

John opened up his computer’s word processor and started typing, the same smile from before pulling at the corners of his mouth.

February View of Bridge Street
David Owens



So Long

Cassidy Carroll

You sat quietly, the air tank clicked with every breath you took. You used to come outside and watch us swim in your pool, but it became too hard.

You used to bring us kids out for lunch. You'd pop the top off your jeep to let the warm air swarm around us. You used to walk me to the garden and explain how to pick vegetables by the root, and when explain they were ripe. I never told you I already knew how because my mother taught me, and you taught her.

At Thanksgiving we made sailboats out of walnuts, candle wax and toothpicks. We didn't float them, just sat there and stared at the mini boats we made, so proud of our work. At Christmastime we poured maple syrup onto snowballs and devoured them like ice cream.

I used to swim in your pool to find the frogs that the pool cleaner couldn't pick up. When my aunt and uncles came into town we went out for ice cream at Stewart's every day, multiple times a day, always trying different flavors. You sat in the booth with your hand under your chin, just watching us laugh and talk.

I cleaned your Hoveround. It was like magic, turning from dusty red to brilliant ruby after I'd finished. And then we sat on your porch and drank lemonade with crushed ice. We talked like friends for the first time.

I remember all these moments but I wish I could forget how I didn't spend more time with you at the end. I wish I would forget how my mother had told me to clean your Hoveround and how I said I didn't have the time, when I did. I wish I came over to play cards more or asked to go out for ice cream even when relatives weren't in town. I wish I could tell my friends that I flew with you before you retired, when you were still a pilot.

The last time you said so long your fingers rested on my shoulder. "You're a good kid," were the last words I heard you say.

Rage
Emma Johnson



No Chance in Hell
Megan Mullen

INT. BENNY'S BAR - NIGHT

It's a slow night with just the regulars lined up on the bar stools. The rest of the room is scarcely filled.

A BLOND GUY, looking barely legal, stands out amongst the older lot. He's boyishly handsome with nerdy glasses, and is overly dressed given his location.

He sits alone on one side of a booth, nervously glancing at his watch. He checks his breath while nobody is looking, and runs a hand through his mop of hair. He sips from a Peach Tea Snapple, eyes constantly on the door.

BLOND GUY

She must have run into traffic...or something. Just... calm down, Matt.

Matt (Blond Guy) takes a deep breath and exhales, steadying himself. He picks at his cuticles, biting at them between glances at the door.

A BELL DINGS as a HOT CHICK (25) clad in black leather and scarlet lace strides into the bar. She's wearing steel toed combat boots, dark skinny jeans, and chains around her neck.

Her shirt looks shredded, revealing glimpses of her cami and lingerie beneath. Her leather jacket is perfectly form fitting, and her jet black hair is cut on an angle.

In one swift motion, she crosses the room, puts out her lit cigarette in the bar

ashtray, grabs another man's shot of vodka, downs it as she strides, and SLAMS the EMPTY GLASS down on the table in front of Matt as she halts, meeting his eyes.

HOT CHICK

Wanna fuck?

Matt stares up at her wide eyed.

MATT

What? Are you serious?

HOT CHICK

No, you caught me. I'm really selling Girl Scout Cookies. Hanky Panky is just a brilliant a metaphor for Mint Chip.

Matt recoils. He looks disgusted and a bit disappointed.

MATT

I guess this is what I get for thinking a blind date could actually pan out. Nice going, Matt.

He starts to stand up, shaking his head.

MATT

Look, this clearly isn't going to work. I have to-

The Hot Chick pushes him back into his seat and sits down across the table.

HOT CHICK

(sarcastically)

Aw, don't be cross, Sweetie. The night is young. You can't leave yet.

(eying him up and down)

And certainly not alone.

She folds her hands with her index fingers pointed in a triangle, studying him. Her fingers move back and forth, drawing his gaze.

MATT

(attempting to be polite)

Look, honestly, I'm just doing this because Justin said I should. And although I'm... uh... flattered that you're "interested", I don't think you're the type of person for me.

HOT CHICK

What makes you say that, hmm? You don't even know my name. For all you know, we're the next Christian and Anastasia.

He visibly cringes at the reference and throws up his hands.

MATT

No. Never. For starters, you didn't even read my bio! It clearly stated that I do not drink, smoke, swear, or fornicate.

HOT CHICK

(laughing)

Fornicate? Seriously? Who the fuck even calls it that anymore?

She leans back, arms draped high over the back of the seat. Her leather jacket is open wide to show off her breasts.

MATT

I do. As a pronounced Asexual, I find it far more straightforward that way.

HOT CHICK

An asexual? You've got to be kidding!

(making crude hand gestures)

Reality check, you're a man. It's your natural duty to hump, bump, screw, bang, nail, pork, boink, and fuck every dude or gal you can.

Matt pinches the bridge of his nose, scowling and annoyed.

MATT

Your total ignorance is maddening! What is

wrong with you, Alex?!

ALEX

(HOT CHICK)

I can't help it. I'm a demon. Guess I left that bit out of my bio.

(placing a hand over her mouth, she looks up at him innocently)

Oops.

Matt runs a hand through his messy blond hair as he exhales.

MATT

You're mocking me for being an asexual, yet you're claiming to be a demon? How am I the one out of touch with reality here?

Alex scowls back playfully, clearly bemused at his frustration.

ANGLE ON - UNDER THE TABLE

A thick shadow emerges, taking the shape of a black devil tail beside Alex. The tail snakes under the table, reaching into Matt's coat pocket.

It produces a wallet, carefully sliding it out onto the booth beside him, shuffling through until retrieving a driver's license. The tail slithers back with the ID, flashing it into Alex's line of sight.

CLOSE ON - DRIVER'S LICENSE - NAME AND ADDRESS

states his full name to be Matthew G. Taylor, and his address as 36 Clayton Ave. #17, Glensbrook, NY 13895.
BACK TO SCENE *The tail replaces the wallet and ID, but snatches a tiny journal in Matt's bag, placing it on the booth seat beside Alex out of view. The tail dissipates back*

into shadow.

ALEX

Well, you're never going to get laid with that attitude.

MATT

That's kind of the point.

(standing)

Look, I'm just going to go.

ALEX

So soon? Don't you want some company, Matty?

MATT

Not from you. I'll fair just fine on my own, thanks. All I need is a good book. Heck, even a bad one is better than you.

ALEX

Suit yourself then. But I swear, you'll come for me, sooner than later, Sweetie.

She grins devilishly.

ALEX

All men, and women, fall victim to my fiendish charms eventually.

MATT

Not while I'm still breathing. There's no chance in Hell. I'm immune to smut and cheesy demon seductresses.

ALEX

Ouch, don't go breaking my cardiovascular system so soon, love.

MATT

Love? You wouldn't know the first thing about love. You're just like all the other women!

ALEX

Nah, I'm much prettier than them.

Matt grumbles, pressing his fingers against

his temples.

MATT

Why is everybody with a sex drive such an idiot!

Alex smiles a bit. She blows back her bangs and reaches forward to grab Matt's Snapple, drinking a few mouthfuls before replacing the lid as she listens.

MATT

You people wouldn't know the first thing about love or romance, about truly caring for someone, or having a true relationship. You just don't understand.

He looks away from her, folding his arms across his chest.

MATT

Ugh, I hate this! Why can't I just meet a nice, logical, romantic, asexual?!

Alex leans back, scratching her chin, pretending to ponder his rhetorical question.

ALEX

Maybe it's because love, in reality, never quite lives up to your imagination.

She leans in towards his face as she speaks, emphasizing each adjective slowly.

ALEX

Face it Matt, we're all just Dirty. Skeezy. Lust-bitten. Horny. Fucking-machines. Searching for a temporary escape from our boring ass lives.

Alex moves forward to kiss him, but Matt jerks his head away in time, wide eyed he shoves her and steps back.

MATT

You're insane, clinically insane! I... I

need to go.

Matt staggers forward, hands fumbling to collect his bag and push past her. Alex just waves, grinning as he storms off.

ALEX

Ta ta, Sweetie. Until we meet again.

CLOSE ON - ALEX'S LEFT POCKET

contains Matt's tiny leather bound journal. Her fingers play with the silk string bookmark.

BACK TO SCENE Matt ignores Alex as he shoves past a *SHORT WOMAN* entering the bar. He keeps his head down in a rush to escape.

The Short Woman is knocked to the side. She dusts her jacket off, bringing it closer to her chest as her eyes scan the bar from behind thick glasses and straight cut bangs.

She frowns, as she checks her phone for the time. With a sigh, she walks further into the bar, passing Alex's booth.

ALEX P.O.V.

CLOSE ON - *SHORT WOMAN'S* JACKET

is maroon and pressed. Over the left breast pocket is an embroidered name. It says ALEX.

END SCENE

Encounters With an Omnivore

Naomi Chalfin

Your beard smells like bacon
when my bare
chin skims
its bristles. And though
I've forgotten
the specific salty taste
I punish myself with visions
of my childhood bedroom.
Lavender carpet, lavender walls
and clusters of pink stuffed
pigs; easy souvenirs
and gifts.
When we first met,
You bought me one too.

The concrete wall is
abrasive to the grass
alongside this river, but smells
of thirsty Tempera paint,
children's visions. With
abandoned chalk I add ears, eyes and a nose
to an incomplete
painting—I pause—
my own senses activated.
Getting chalk on your right
hand, you block
the view to our
left. Punctured, squirming
gills filling with air and
strewn about by hasty fisherman

Olive oil bubbles under tempeh
seasoned with onions, garlic
pepper and expectations.
"I think the texture is
just right this time,
will you try some?"
I cover the pan,
set it to simmer, glaze

your brown corduroy
belt hoop on my way to the spices.
But you're steady,
cutting the skinned avocado
in uniform slices.
"I was always going to,"
you reply, now
washing my swine-shaped
cutting board in
soapy warm water.

Untitled

Breana Iannotti



Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now

Susan Velazquez

“O Great One, we thank you for your boundless mercy,” Maite prayed as she knelt before the sacred shrine. “We are not worthy enough to be in your presence. Thank you for the blessings you have bestowed upon us.”

“And we’re sorry for not converting to vegetarianism sooner,” added Sylvia Thomas, Maite’s best friend. “Although I think I might be becoming anemic.” She squirmed as she tried to shift her weight from one knee to another. Maite’s closet was small and could hardly fit the two girls, let alone the elaborate display Maite made to show her love for The Smiths.

The closet was getting stuffy so Maite decided to wrap it up. “In Morrissey’s name we rock, amen,” she said, crossing herself. Sylvia handed her the concert ticket as they stood up and Maite pinned it on the board, next to her favorite clipping of Steven Morrissey, the lead singer for The Smiths and Maite’s all-time favorite person.

“I can’t believe we’re going to get to see them for real!” squealed Sylvia as she threw herself onto Maite’s bed. Maite grinned, a rare occurrence for the usually deadpan teenager.

Maite and Sylvia both discovered The Smiths in eighth grade and felt a connection to Steve Morrissey’s voice that neither of them could truly describe. “It’s like I’m not alone anymore,” Sylvia explained once, and Maite felt that was the best way to describe her feelings about the band. It was pretty easy for them to feel alone too—Kimball High was still pretty segregated between the black and white kids, and the few Latinos there didn’t really fit into either group. It was especially hard for Sylvia, who was half-white, so she and Maite formed their own group.

“Do you think we’ll get close enough to give Morrissey my letter?” asked Maite as she slid onto the bed as well.

“I don’t know. We’re kinda in the back,” shrugged Sylvia. “Maybe you can go up in the aisles and like, throw it like a paper airplane.”

“I can’t throw a paper airplane at Morrissey! That’s so disrespectful.”

“I don’t know why you care so much. He’ll probably never read it anyway,” said Sylvia, sounding bitchier than she intended to sound. “What’d you write anyway?”

“Nothing I’d show you,” snarked Maite. Truthfully, she hadn’t written her letter to Morrissey yet. She wanted to pour

her heart out to Morrissey and let him know exactly how much each note and each lyric meant to her but every time she put a pen to paper, her words came out in embarrassing clichés. She wanted to sound cool, not like a psycho fan girl.

Just then, the door to Maite's room opened to reveal her mother Ansiedad carrying a basket of laundry.

"What are you doing here?" she asked in Spanish.

She seemed surprised to see the girls even though Maite and Sylvia had been hanging out in Maite's room after school for the past three years.

"Mo-o-m, why can't you knock?" whined Maite in English as she took the basket away from her mother.

"Why should I knock?" demanded Ansiedad. "What are you girls up to?"

"Nothing," they chorused together. Ansiedad surveyed the room and she saw nothing out of the ordinary except for the crooked crocheted table cloth on Maite's dresser. She straightened it, which made Maite roll her eyes. "Put away your clothes. *Nicely*," she told Maite before leaving.

Just to spite her mother, Maite scrunched up the tablecloth. "I hate when she does that," she complained.

"She's not so bad," said Sylvia as she reached over to flip through the *Sassy* magazine on Maite's night table.

"You don't live with her. She can be so annoying about the house."

"Maybe she should get a job or something. To like, give her a purpose so she doesn't freak about stuff like that."

"She doesn't want to. I think she's embarrassed that her English isn't good enough."

"That blows."

"Tell me about it."

Sylvia checked the clock on Maite's nightstand and then sat up. "Well, I have to go home now. Did you ask your mom if you can spend the night yet?"

"Nah, I'll do it tonight. Are you sure your parents are going to be out of town?"

"Uh-huh," said Sylvia as she put on her backpack.

"They're going to my aunt's wedding in Oklahoma so they're going to spend the night there, so we can come from the concert whenever we feel like."

"Awesome," breathed Maite. "This is going to rock."

"Bye Mrs. Martinez!" called Sylvia into the house.

"Don't forget to ask your mom," she reminded Maite as Maite escorted her to the front door.

"I won't," promised Maite. "I'll do it right now, actually."

"See you tomorrow night then!"

Maite waved good bye as she watched Sylvia walk to the end of the block to catch the bus to her side of town. Then, she turned back inside to find her mother to ask for permission to spend the night at Sylvia's.

Maite had been waiting for the right time to ask since their sleepover wouldn't actually be a sleepover—Maite and Sylvia were planning on staying out all night after the Smiths concert with Jimmy Blane, a neighborhood punk kid. Neither girl particularly liked him but Jimmy Blane had a car and he was going to the show too and so it worked out if they just carpooled together. Plus, Sylvia's parents were going to be out of town all weekend so they could come back any time they wanted, no questions asked. It was going to be a kick ass night.

Maite could've technically asked her father but he would have just said, "Did you ask your mother?" Everyone in the Martinez household knew that Ansiedad held the real power when it came to stuff like this. Therefore, Maite had to make sure her mother was in a good mood where she would say yes to anything and distracted enough that she wouldn't ask too many questions like, "Is Sylvia's mother going to be there? Does she want you to bring something? Let me talk to her mother and let me see if she wants you to bring something."

It had been a lot harder than Maite anticipated since Maite's grandfather, Sergio, was dying of cancer back in Mexico. All week, Ansiedad had been in an anxious mood that fit her name perfectly—she was on the phone at all hours, trying to stay updated on her father's situation and debating about whether or not the Martinezes had enough money for her to make a trip to Mexico to see her father one last time. Maite didn't really know her grandfather; she only met him once when she was five, but she knew that her mother was his favorite and the two had a very close bond.

"My mother died, when I was about thirteen," Ansiedad had once told her. "So I had to take care of my brothers and sisters like I was the new mother because I was the oldest. I had to drop out of school and get a job—"

"You got a job when you were thirteen?" interrupted Maite. "And they didn't try to make you go back to school?"

"Who would've? Nobody cared; we were in a small town. Everyone had to work to make money."

"And Abuelito didn't want you to finish school?"

"I had to work to help out with the kids. There were six of us and I was the only one who could work. We didn't have a lot of money. So every day I woke up around five, I got

everyone ready for school by six, and then I was at work by six thirty and I worked all day and then came back to the house to make dinner.”

“Why didn’t Abuelito help you?”

“Because he was working in the mines all day and he was too tired to do anything. But every day, he would buy me a piece of candy or a chocolate just for me. I didn’t have to share it unless I wanted to.”

“And?”

“¿*Cómo que ‘and’?*” Ansiedad’s eyes lit up and she pursed her lips, annoyed. “It was his way of showing how much he appreciated me. He knew it was a big responsibility for me to take at thirteen. I would have stayed with him for the rest of my life, if he wanted me to.”

“But then you married Papi, right?” asked Maite, frowning her brow. “Why did you leave home then?”

“Well, everyone was growing up and everyone was able to take care of themselves so they didn’t need me to do everything as much. And Abuelito didn’t want to me be a—¿*Cómo se dice?*”

“Like an old maid?”

“Uh-huh. *Una soñera*. So when Miguel asked me to marry him, my father told me, ‘Go with him. He’ll take you to America and you can have a better life there.’”

“And did you? Are you, I mean?”

“I don’t know, *mija*. I don’t know yet.”

A little insulted, Maite had let the conversation topic change back then. After all, she was supposed to be part of the “better life in America”. Looking back on it, she realized that it was probably the most personal conversation she and her mother ever had. Most of the time, Ansiedad and Maite were like strangers who happened to live in the same house.

Maite first went into the kitchen, where she could smell dinner cooking, but her mother wasn’t there. Next, she tried her parent’s bedroom where she could hear her mother talking on the phone. She quietly tiptoed closer to eavesdrop and was pleased to hear that her mother wasn’t on the phone with her siblings from Mexico for once. Instead, Ansiedad was on the phone with a telemarketer, trying to explain in broken English that she did not want a timeshare in Amarillo.

“Ma?” Maite poked her head into the doorway. “Can I spend the night at Sylvia’s tomorrow night? Her mom already says that it’s okay and I don’t have to bring anything.”

Ansiedad nodded and went back to her conversation. Maite doubted that her mother would remember this but she

wasn't going to push her luck. She went back to her room and tried to finish her letter to Morrissey but quickly gave up in favor of figuring what to wear. She'd try again tomorrow.

Dear Mr. Steven Morrissey...

No, that was too formal.

Dear Moz...

No, that was too *informal*. Maite couldn't even remember if Steven Morrissey liked being called 'Moz'.

Dear Morrissey...

That was better. Maite took out her nicest pen and began to write. It was finally Saturday and she had two hours to finish her letter before she was supposed to head over to Sylvia's. She heard the phone ring and ignored it—it was probably for her mother, anyway.

Maite heard the distinct click of the phone being picked up and could make out the quiet murmur of her mother's voice. She turned her attention back to her letter and tried to think of a way to tell her favorite musician that she loved him with all of her heart and soul without sounding like she needed a restraining order.

Then, there was a knock on her door. And then a pause.

That was weird. Ansiedad never paused—she just barged into Maite's room whenever she felt like it in the annoying, presumptuous way that all mothers did.

"Come in," said Maite, a little confused and for some reason, a little afraid. Something bad had happened, she could tell.

Ansiedad appeared in the doorway and Maite could see that her eyes were red from crying. "Maite, your grandfather is dead," she whispered.

"Oh Mami, I'm so sorry." Maite sprung up from her desk to hug her mother, something she hadn't done willingly since she was eight. "Was he—did he—Was he okay in the end?"

"My sister told me that they went to the hospital and he was already—he died in his sleep." Ansiedad sniffled and Maite felt another surge of affection.

"Oh, Mami. *Pobrecita*," Maite murmured as she hugged her mother again. As she held her, Maite wished that her father hadn't decided to work that day. Now how was she supposed to leave for Sylvia's when her mother was like this?

"You can't spend the night at Sylvia's tonight," said Ansiedad, as if she could read her daughter's mind. Maite pulled away, confused.

“Why not?”

“Because your grandfather died. You can’t go out.”

“I made a promise to Sylvia!” protested Maite. “We’ve made plans for weeks! I have to go!”

“Your grandfather died, how many times do I have to tell you—“

“I didn’t even know him!” snapped Maite. “Why do I have to be sad for someone I didn’t know?”

“Because I told you to!” Ansiedad’s face was turning red and Maite felt her cheeks flaming up as well.

The phone rang again but neither one of them moved to answer it. They just stared at each other, neither willing to back down. *Let me go, let me go*, thought Maite furiously. *This isn’t fair. You can’t do this to me.*

Finally, Ansiedad turned away and Maite hoped this meant that she won but then her mother said, “You can spend the night at Sylvia’s some other time.” She left the room without another word and in a childish fit of rage, Maite slammed the door closed.

“Goddammit!” she cursed quietly, as she fought back the tears. Maite dove for the telephone on her nightstand and dialed Sylvia’s number.

“Hello?” answered Sylvia. She sounded cheerful and happy, like she didn’t know the world was completely over for Maite. Maite closed her eyes and tried to fight back the tears.

“Hey, it’s me,” she managed, trying to keep her voice from shaking. “I have some shitty news.”

“What? What happened?”

“My grandpa died today. Or last night. I don’t know when, but we got the news just now.”

“Oh shit. I’m so sorry, Mai.”

“That’s not the worst part. Now my mom won’t let me go to your house because we’re supposed to be in like, mourning or something.”

“You’re kidding!”

“Uh-uh. She totally wiggled out on me when I tried to beg her to let me go.”

“But this means you can’t come to the concert!”

“God, I know,” sobbed Maite. “Don’t remind me.”

“Well, can’t you sneak out or something? I bet I can get Jimmy to pick you up a block from your house and then we can go to the concert and we’ll bring you home straight after. Your parents wouldn’t even know you were gone!”

Maite sniffled. She hadn’t thought of that. Sylvia could be so smart sometimes. All she had to do now was make nice with her mother so Ansiedad wouldn’t try to do some-

thing annoying, like come into her room in the middle of the night to lecture about the importance of family. She smiled into the receiver.

“Yeah, I’ll try. I’ll call you to let you know if I can do it.”

“Okay, well if not, I bet I can get Jimmy to bootleg it and then I’ll bring you it and we can listen to it together.”

“God, you’re like the best friend ever.” Maite felt herself cheering up already.

“If you can’t come, do you want me to pick up your letter for Morrissey?”

“No, because then you’ll read it. And I *am* coming, so don’t get your hopes up. I’ll call you in an hour.” Maite hung up, feeling determined. She had been waiting for this concert all her life and there was no way she was going to let anything stop her, not even her mother.

She sat up on her bed and prepared to make nice with her mother. She was going to pretend to be very sorry, and then make an excuse to go to bed early so her mother wouldn’t try to talk to her for the rest of the night. She left her room to go find her mother, who was back in the bedroom, on the phone with her Mexican relatives.

“No, she took it very well,” her mother was saying in Spanish. “Maite made plans with her friend but then she cancelled them to stay with me.”

Maite furrowed her brow, confused. That wasn’t what happened. Why was her mother saying all that stuff?

“No, she’s a very good girl,” Ansiedad continued. “All the American girls so spoiled, but not Maite. Papa would have liked her. I wish he could have seen her one more time.”

That explained everything. Ansiedad was just trying to make her daughter fit the image that her grandfather would have liked. Maite felt simultaneously guilty and annoyed with her mother. Guilty, because she felt bad that she wasn’t the good girl her mother wanted and annoyed because who the hell said she had to be a good girl anyway? Maite decided that if she *did* get caught sneaking out, she would refuse to feel bad. Even if her mother’s father did die that day.

She tapped on the door lightly and poked her head into the room. “Ma?”

Ansiedad noticed her and said, “I’ll call you later,” into the phone before turning her attention to her daughter. “What is it, Mai?”

Shit. Maite had completely forgotten what she wanted to say. “Uh, I just—I mean,” she stammered. “I just wanted to see how you were doing?”

Maite thought it was a dumb, generic thing to say but her mother must have thought it was the sweetest because Ansiedad enveloped her daughter in a big hug despite their argument earlier. Maite resisted the urge to squirm out of the embrace. *Be nice, be nice*, she instructed herself. She allowed herself to be pulled to sit on the bed next to her mother.

“Oh, I don’t know,” sighed Ansiedad. “I know he’s gone but a part of me thinks he’s still in his rocking chair out on the porch. Or sitting on the couch watching soccer with my brother. Or eating in the kitchen. Or—”

“Just somewhere else,” finished Maite. “Just not here.”

“Why are we alone so much?” asked Ansiedad.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s so lonely here,” sighed Ansiedad. “Nobody knows each other like they did back home. Everybody just passes each other on the street and they don’t even look at each other. Nobody listens to each other. I don’t know why Miguel thought America would be so great.”

“There are some good parts here,” argued Maite.

“Like what?”

“Like me, for instance. I’m American.”

“No, *mija*. You’re Mexican.”

“You’re Mexican,” corrected Maite. “I was born here so that makes me American.”

“*Pero*, whose language do you speak? What culture is yours? Whose food do you eat? You think they make *chilaquiles* in McDonalds?”

“Then maybe I’m both,” compromised Maite. “Although I don’t like being both.”

“Why not?”

“Because people don’t let you be both. You have to pick one or the other.”

“¿*Cómo*?”

Maite shifted awkwardly in place. “Like, the kids at school. You know, me and Sylvia like this kind of music but the Mexican kids don’t like it so they tell us to go with the white kids because they listen to it but the white kids say we can’t like that music because we’re Mexican so we should go listen to the Mexican music.”

“What kind of music?” asked Ansiedad, her brow furrowed.

Maite opened her mouth to explain but then she decided to show, instead of tell.

“Wait right here,” she told her mother. She got up and

went to her room and looked through her records before finding the one she wanted. It was a 7 inch vinyl single that she had to pay extra money to special order since it was only released in the United Kingdom. She also went into her closet and unpinned the concert ticket from her board to take the picture of Morrissey along too.

Maite arrived back to the other bedroom where a very confused Ansiedad was sitting and waiting. Maite placed the record in the portable record player that her mother had on the nightstand and lifted the needle to play it.

The first notes of *Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now* filled the room and Maite bit her thumbnail anxiously. *Please like it, please like it*, she begged silently as she watched her mother's face.

"Who is this?" Ansiedad asked.

Maite went to her mother and showed her the picture of Morrissey.

"Who is this?" repeated Ansiedad. "Is this your boyfriend?"

"No, Ma."

"Look at him, he has funny hair."

"Ma!"

"And he's too old for you," continued Ansiedad but she was smiling so Maite knew she was joking.

"Well anyway, his name is Morrissey and he sings the music that I like. He makes me feel less alone. I thought maybe you'd like him too."

"What's he singing about here?"

"Well, um..." Maite bit her thumb-nail as she thought of way to translate the song meaning in Spanish. "The song is about how like, he thought he was happy for a little bit but he knows deep down inside that he's sad. He just sees people who are like, way happier than him and the people around him don't treat him nicely and he's just like... sad. And it kinda makes me happy in a weird way that I'm not the only sad person in the world."

She and Ansiedad listened to the song for a little bit more. Ansiedad was the one to break the silence first.

"I like him. I can see why you like him. He has a nice voice."

"Yeah he does, doesn't he?"

They looked at each other for a moment and Maite hugged her mother once more.

"My poor mother, she's all alone in the world."

"No, I'm not. Does he sing anything else?"

Maite let her go and asked, "Do you want me to get

his other stuff?"

"Sí."

Maite went back to her room to gather her Smiths records and then she remembered the unfinished letter on her desk. She grabbed a pen and hastily scrawled down what she wanted to say before she forgot.

Dear Morrissey, she wrote. I wanted to write you a letter to tell you how much your music means to me. I bet you get a lot of letters like this but I just wanted to tell you my story anyway. You'll probably never read this—in fact, the only person who will read this will probably be my friend Sylvia even though I told her not to.

Anyway, my mom and I don't always get along. She moved here from Mexico when she was young 'cause she got married and she misses home a lot. She doesn't feel like she belongs anywhere, really. Kinda like me. I don't always fit in at school either.

Anyway, today she was sad because her father died and she didn't get to see him one last time so I played her one of your songs because I thought it would make her feel better and you know what? It kinda did. I think it made her feel less alone, especially from me. It's something that we can both share now.

I have to go because she's waiting for me in the other room so we can listen to more music together. I hope that if I can't see you in person than maybe this letter will get to you.

Thanks for the music,

Maite Martinez

Microns
Lana Slinkard



Asking For It

Linne Ebbrecht

When people choose not to believe the words
coming out of your mouth, like your mind is only fluent in
fiction.

You stop believing them, too.

Everything you say is a lengthy novel titled,

“This is Me: Asking for Attention”.

The thing about attention, is that it’s usually needed and
when it’s not given,

you usually abandon yourself, too.

Road to Revelations

Luke Parsnow

For seventeen years, this road had run by my home. This black, cracked slab of asphalt called Route 38 that lies next to my front door had taken me many places in my time. It had always been there. In one direction lay two big hills and a Christmas tree farm before rolling into the hardly-existent hamlet of Sterling. The other passed trees, a few houses, a mailbox shaped like a bear head, and a whole lot of nothing before coasting down hill into North Victory. And yet it had always remained a stranger to me.

So one day, I decided not to drive on it, but to walk it. I realized that I had never actually walked down the road whose name I had written countless times under the address bar on college applications and those emergency contact sheets you sign in high school after the first day.

This October day was blessed with June winds and a July sun, almost like the world wanted me to see something that I had missed during the summer months. I decided to walk.

I strolled, one of my feet on each side of the faded white lines. I thought, how many times have I traveled down this road riding in a car, concentrating on what lies ahead of me instead of where I am at that moment? There is so much that I have passed by.

I walked up a steep, short hill and all of a sudden, I was a foreigner in a different land. I couldn't believe how much I had missed when zooming by at fifty-five miles an hour. It wasn't like clearing up a blurry vision, but like I was opening my eyes for the first time.

Had that green house always been there? Hey! I know that old lady that always has a bun in her hair. She's a substitute teacher at school sometimes. Has she always lived there?

I didn't know there was a brown pond behind that wall of parsnip.

How long had that red Mercedes been for sale? I walked down a long hill and stepped around the numerous potholes and the fly-infested possum corpse that had gambled all it had to make it across the road in time, and lost. Everything was rather quiet and still, the norm for living so far from anything that might be considered "a village."

I passed by the dusty forgotten path that disappeared into the family of apple trees, all in neat rows like soldiers at

attention. The aroma of harvest time was everywhere. The red blinks from the light at the top of the cell tower miles away barely hovered above the tree line and the wires of the telephone poles glistened in the sunlight.

I saw something ahead of me and noticed that it was a worn out tan-colored hat. It had a picture of an animated mushroom on it, with "Nintendo: 1985" written beneath it. Not too far from it was a yellow and purple doughnut box with "Bayside Deli" written on it, the colors drained from rain, no doubt.

I couldn't help but notice the amount of holes and cracks in the road, the victim of too many harsh winters and too many cars. They had just repaved this road the summer before I started kindergarten. Could it be this far gone already?

I wandered about a mile and a half into the unexplored territory, and then decided to turn back. I passed the orchards and dead animals once again, from a different view, and back up the long hill. I reached the top and watched as a flaming red Chevrolet raced by me, and I felt the wake of the air it sent out hit my face and shake the tall weeds behind me.

Those people were missing it all. They were only seeing a fragment. They were just skimming pages of life's book of beauty.

As I walked back, I saw people. I walked past a green and white house with an old wooden swing set out in the yard. There was a tall thin man who looked to be about thirty-five years old watching a young toddler, his son most likely, play on the swing set. I studied the man's face closely but I didn't know him. These people were my neighbors. I lived five houses down the road from them and they could mind as well be strangers I pass on a street in some city.

"Five more minutes, Hunter. Then we'll go in and see if Mommy has dinner ready," said the man, who then saw me passing by and waved. I waved back.

Then the little boy waved to me as well, quickly so he could re-grasp the chain holding the swing. It made a high toned squeak every time the boy reached his feet toward the sky.

I went on to pass the next house, an older gray one, and as I walked by, I almost had a heart attack when I heard a dog's bark erupt from the nearby bushes. I had no warning that there was a dog in my presence. Then I heard a rustle in the bushes and a chocolate lab started running toward me. It wasn't long before the chain attached to his neck snapped him back into his territory. He yanked at the chain but the tree

that it was tied to was not going to let go. I was almost by the house when I heard a cry from inside the house.

“Tucker! Shut up!” The dog’s bark lowered to a whimper and finally vanished as I wandered out of sight of it.

I never knew a dog lived at that house. I had never heard a bark come from the yard before. Then again, I probably wouldn’t hear it rushing by in a car all the time.

I passed a woman I didn’t know puttering in a garden and a man I didn’t know stacking wood.

And then, I saw it.

I was nearly in sight of my own home when I looked into a field. The grass was dark green and painted with a few autumn leaves that had already fallen to their deaths.

It was just a field. That’s what any truck driver or mailman would’ve seen, if they happened to look at all. But if they looked closer, slower, they would’ve seen a driveway.

Part of a driveway. I looked at my feet.

I saw that blend of the newer fresher tar of the main road, and then the older, grayer tar of a beginning of a driveway. I looked toward the field and saw that the gray driveway stretched about seven feet into the field. After that it was followed by about four-and-a half feet of sandy rocks and dirt with small patches of grass popping up from the earth. After that, it was followed by only tall green grass, the point where nature had re-conquered, had hidden the man-made driveway.

This driveway used to lead to a house. Yes, there used to be a house here.

It was a small, light blue double-wide mobile home. Complete with a worn front deck where a cigarette-smoking woman sat, rusted panels along each side of the foundation, a white swing set, four dirty windows, and a small red car parked in the dusty driveway.

This house had a family. A small brown-eyed girl with brown hair was part of that family. Despite the warm, blowing winds, I shuttered for a moment while standing there, and in my memory I heard a large school bus engine roaring.

It was the fall of 1998. I had left my toys and games behind and begun kindergarten. I don’t exactly remember when I met her. But she was the girl who lived in that warm house. She always jumped off the bus at that driveway, which was a darker black color back then.

We often sat with or near each other and we talked all the time, me in my tiny jeans and her in her velvet dresses and tall stockings, swaying our young feet as they couldn’t touch the floor yet.

She was my friend, my first friend that I ever had in school. Day after day, season after season, we would see each other and I would see her walk off the bus and skip up the driveway to her mother who was waiting on the front porch with a cigarette. Her little heels kicked up clouds of dust in September, splashed through puddles in November, dug through snow in January, and left mud tracks in March.

From September leaves to June buttercups, she and I shared our stories of our simple lives every day on that bus. I can't even remember what we talked about. I remember her walking off the bus on the last day of that first year of our journey to maturity.

I never saw her again.

When September rolled around again and that yellow school bus drove down that steep hill to pick me up, I couldn't wait to see her again. But she wasn't there.

No more did we engage in conversation after a day of finger painting and building blocks. No more did I watch her kick up dust as she ran to her waiting mother.

A year later, the house also vanished.

A year after that, my feet didn't swing anymore. They touched the ground.

And as learning letters changed to writing papers, counting one to ten changed to long division, and cops and robbers changed to boys chasing girls, it was like she had never existed.

A strong southwest wind against my face and a horn from an approaching tractor trailer brought me back to reality. I looked at the empty field and in a ghostly way could still see the worn front deck where a cigarette-smoking woman sat, rusted panels along each side of the foundation, a white swing set, four dirty windows, and a small red car.

I couldn't believe it. I had passed this spot every day for years riding the same school bus and had never even stopped to remember her. I couldn't even remember her name. It may have started with a "K"—Kailey, perhaps? Katie? I don't know.

I looked at her driveway, fresh and strong, then a shaded gray, then loose rock pieces and finally, to complete emptiness.

Time had let me forget. But this one moment had helped me remember. Nothing ever just fades away. Nothing is ever completely gone. There are always remnants, memories, and clues.

And I wonder.

How many other faded driveways have I walked by?

Choice

Tom Rigney

Why do today what can be done tomorrow?

It's time.

Time for what? You may ask and it would be wise to ask it.

It is time to get your shit together.

No procrastinating now, it was the time a minute, an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year, and more ago.

Just do it already, time only moves one direction for you earthly creatures and you've just lost another minute reading this.

Too much for you?

Too melodramatic for you?

Too metaphysical for you?

Fine, try again tomorrow.

Not making one is making one

I wake. I get dressed in the same uniform as yesterday, the same one I will wear tomorrow. I get in my car, I drive the same route I drove yesterday, the same I will drive tomorrow. I get to work, park, walk inside, and punch in. I setup the department as per company standards, the same setup as yesterday, the same setup as tomorrow. I help the usual customers. I leave when my relief shows up. I go to the bar and drink, the same bar as yesterday, the same bar as tomorrow. I go to bed drunk. I sleep. I wake.

It's easy; it's already laid out before you

He rows against the current feeling his muscles burn with each stroke. The GPS cut out and he missed the fork in the river. Now that it's back on, the cursed thing shows him he's well passed it. To get back on the proper route he needs to go back upriver and against strong current.

Stroke, breathe, stroke, breathe, str...

He stops. He lets the kayak drift a moment. He wonders, drifting back down, *where does this branch lead?* He tosses his GPS into the river and points his kayak downstream.

Debaser

Alex Hollowell



I Bet It's Snowing in Houston

K.M. Alleena

I tend to take gambles.
There are long odds
stacked against me.
If we're talking
the tiniest chance
for a flake to fall
that close to the
Gulf of Mexico –
I'll advocate for it.
I stand for the underdogs.
I root for those
who are convinced
their time to shine
has long since passed.
In that sense,
I am the skyscraper –
tall, steely, daunting –
that will stand
time and again
after earthquakes, strayed
far from where they belong,
fight to topple it.

You know –

I'll even bet that
this urban sprawl –
so *out there*
so *foreign*
to a Northerner –
has a voice of its own,
a collective, a choir –
and until now,
no one
thought to listen.

You see –

I take gambles;
place bets I
can barely afford.
I'm the one giving
second chances,

seeing some spark
in such darkness.
I pick those
most in need
of favor.
I always do.

Someone has to.

Starstruck

Amy Lipsky

“We are looking directly into the past,” I told her, stretching my arms wide to the starstruck sky. She grinned at me because she understood, we understood, that we were looking at more than just holes in the sky, more than just the lost sparks caused by two people brushing up against each other. “We are made of star stuff.”

Later I would catch her in a moment of vulnerability, rubbing her forehead as she wondered out loud the pros and cons of closing the gap between our chapped lips. As she spoke, taking deep breaths to calm her shaking fingertips, I realized - not for the first time that - she was beautiful. She sighed, offering her hand to me, pulling me in to close the space between us and with her hands at my waist and my fingers in her hair, she kissed me, smiling as if she knew; as if she knew that she also was just a half of a whole. I was a puzzle piece, the dark side of a yin yang, shaping into each other, our sides worn smooth from years of abuse. I couldn't help but wonder in that fleeting moment if people who were meant to be come from the same stars.

And she smiled, because she knew that they did.
That we do.

March Looking North

David Owens



Faded

Leah Cunningham

Begin pen to paper
and the ink runs dry.
The loops and curves
of every word so smooth,
until I get to you.
Only the imprint is left
with a black splotch
at the top of the 'Y'
and I'm not supposed
to find another pen.
Leave this unfinished
verse between the blue
lines of a story untold,
blank space filling every
orifice of imagination,
let our ending be
anything, and nothing
all at once. Let our story
become something
between 8.5 by 11 inches
of dead trees, layers
by layers. But we're
not done yet, just dug in
scratches from a broken
pen, never ready to face
the end.

Looking Ahead
Breana Iannotti



Photos
Ji Wang

EXT. NEW YORK - 103 STREET - DAY

A nice sunny day. Several people are out walking their dogs on the clean street.

A MAN(30s) steps out from a Mini Cooper, and then walks on the street. He wears a clean shirt with a striped tie and black pants. His left hand lifts a business bag, and his right hand stays in the pocket of his pants.

When the Man goes to cross the pavement, AN ELDER in rags appears from another street. The Elder staggers in front of the Man.

The Elder has messy hair, with a beer can in his right hand. He drinks and looks up to the sky. He closes his eyes. The sunbeams shoot on his wrinkly face. He shakes his right hand up and down to check if the can is empty and then throws it over his head.

The can flies in an arc in the air and rolls to the Man's foot.

The Man stops. He bends down to pick the can up and walks to the nearest trash can.

At this moment, the phone rings. The Man quickly drops the can and grabs his cell phone in his bag. He slides the call on the screen.

MAN

Hi Linda...Yes, I know... Don't be afraid to jump the gun. The reasons to buy are certainly here... Yes...Pay more attention to Sonic Corporation. Its shares jumped 2.31 to 23.23. The net income rose under this kind of harsh winter weather... Yes, just do what

I said. Okay, bye.

The man puts his cell phone back into his bag and continues to walk. He sees the Elder sitting on the stairs of a small restaurant, smoking.

MAN

A nice day, isn't it?

The Elder ignores the man and focuses on smoking. The Man sits down beside the elder.

MAN

Today is the best day in my life. There's no better day than today.

The Elder still has no reaction.

MAN

Do you know why? Because I gained a project today. As a foreign worker on Wall Street, it's a big gift to have such a project! Don't you think?

The Elder keeps smoking.

MAN

Believe it or not, one day, I'll be one of the best VC (Venture Capital) managers on Wall Street! If I decide to, nothing can stop my steps to success!

The Elder breathes the last cigarette and throws it on the ground. He steps on the cigarette with his shoe and stands up.

A wallet drops from the Elder's pants pocket.

MAN

Hey, sir.

The Elder keeps walking and doesn't look back.

MAN

You left your wallet.

The Elder still walks forward.

*The Man catches up with the Elder and stands
in front of him.*

MAN

Hey, you left your wallet.

*The Elder seems nervous when he sees what is
in the Man's hand. He grabs the wallet
immediately and opens the wallet.*

ELDER'S POV

*There is a black and white photo in the
wallet with a handsome man and a
beautiful woman, and a child who is
standing in front.*

BACK TO SCENE

*The Elder looks at the photo and doesn't say
anything.*

MAN

Are they your family?

*The Elder takes the photo out from the
wallet and touches the woman's face, along
with the child's face, with his dirty thumb.*

*After a while, the Elder looks up at the Man.
He takes ten dollars out of his wallet and
gives it to the Man.*

MAN

(smiles and shakes his head)

No, you don't have to give me money.

*The Elder takes back the ten dollars and finds
another two ten-dollar bills, giving these
three ten dollar bills to the Man.*

MAN

(smiles and shakes his head)

You don't need to give me money. Really.

The Elder takes back the three 10 dollar bills and frowns. Then, he takes out all the money in the wallet and gives it to the Man. The money is dirty and altogether is no more than one hundred dollars.

MAN

Did you hear what I said? I really don't want your money.

The Elder puts the money back in the wallet.

MAN

But, can I have a look at the photo? Can you believe it? The woman in the photo looks so much like my grandma.

The Elder doesn't move.

The Man pats on his pockets and then takes out his wallet. He opens the wallet and shows it to the Elder.

MAN

You see, this is my daughter. So pretty, isn't she? This is my son, who is now eight years old. This is my wife and her sisters.

The Elder looks at an elder woman in the photo the whole time, not moving his eyes.

MAN

She is very beautiful and elegant. Attracted by her, are you? It's my grandma. She was more beautiful when she was younger.

The Elder still looks at the the Man's grandma's face on the photo. He slightly touches the face of the elder woman, and then takes out his photo from the wallet, putting it beside the Man's photo.

Tears roll down from the Elder's eyes.

The traffic light turns green. A GIRL with a backpack runs across the street, towards the Man.

MAN

Emily! Be careful!

(Picks up Emily and kisses her cheek)

Oh my sweetie. How was school today? Was it fun?

EMILY

(nods)

I learned how to read on my own today.

MAN

Grandma picked you up today?

Emily turns her head to look at GRANDMA, who is crossing the street. The Elder looks straightly at Grandma, trembling.

MAN

(yells across street)

We're over here.

Grandma turns when she hears the Man's voice. She looks at the man's direction. Upon seeing the Elder, she stops walking.

A surprised expression appears on Grandma's face. She keeps walking, crosses the street, and stands face to face with the Elder.

GRANDMA

Michael?

The Elder can't help crying. The grandma hugs the Elder.

GRANDMA

God bless. You're still living.

The Elder cries harder.

GRANDMA
(looks at the Elder and cries)

I was afraid you would die at that time.
Where did you go these years? Are you okay?

THE ELDER'S POV

*The Grandma's lips moves slowly without any
sound.*

BACK TO SCENE

The Elder opens his mouth.

ELDER
(tries hard)

Marr...

GRANDMA

Michael?

ELDER

Marr...

EXT. VIETNAM - CAMP - DAY (1960S)

*On the field, a bullet flies against the A
SOLDIER (the
Elder)'s ear.*

SOLDIERS'S POV

*Everything becomes blurred. The ear was
buzzing. A bullet shoots directly to the
body. The world becomes dark.*

CUT TO

EXT. NEW YORK - 103 STREET - DAY

The Elder and Grandma stand face to face.

ELDER
(tries harder)

Mar-ry.

*Tears roll down from the Grandma's eyes.
The Man takes out his photo. On the photo,
there is a big space beside his grandma.*

Kokoro

Aaron Golish

In the spring-time valley. Between mossy hills.
I spot a gentle rabbit: alabaster, and bounding

through bountiful botanicals and into

a thicket that gives way to bright
pastel flowers. A soft hum of honey-bees

drones wistfully overhead. Their sweet nectar intoxicating.

The small rabbit; her heart races, as does mine.
I lay my head upon her plush, downy breast.

Our hearts beat in tune; a most beautiful symphony.

Warm rosy cheeks and shallow breaths
betray her shy demeanor. I ask for

a kiss, only a kiss. One kiss is all I ask for.

Though she is silent, no words are needed.
I coyly rest my lips upon hers. Silken as chrysanthemum

petals. Soft as a turtle dove's coo.

With our mystical cavort, we gallivant the night away.
I offered her my heart on the mossy valley floor.

Thirteen
Naomi Chalfin



Dining for Memories

Amy Popper

We arrive at the same diner every couple months, and although we have been coming here for seven years the menus have not been updated. The pink fake leather seats still stick to my bare legs and I move around uncomfortably looking down at the black and white ads on the placemats. His navy jacket hangs on the side of the plastic booth, and I wish this time around that he would have gotten a haircut. The faint smell of tobacco and paint fumes lingers through the air from his coat, and although I hate cigarettes I love the smell. The smell reminds me of him, and I wish I could capture the smell for a little longer than the forty-five minute dinner.

He grabs my hand and I look at the dirt encrusted under his fingernails. The wrinkles in his hands show that days have not been easy, and I hold on tightly attempting to let him know these dinners will not stop.

“You look more and more like your mother every day.” He states, staring deeply into my eyes. I cannot tell if that stare is him feeling proud or sad.

He has told me this since I was fifteen. Every inch in me wishes that I could love him for that comment, but a feeling of emptiness overcomes me. If someone says something enough, does it make it true? When I looked in the mirror that day, I didn’t see my mother, but a little girl going out to another dinner.

He starts to draw on about how he wishes I went to school closer. He even offers his one bedroom apartment to me again, saying that I will always have a place with him. I wish I could shake him at this very instant and aid him in understanding that a one bedroom apartment is no place for a twenty one year old girl and her father, but the love in his eyes never ceases to amaze me.

Our in ground pool took over most of our tiny yard on Long Island, and our back gate was left open for the neighbors who would be swimming in it before we even arrived home. My mother never cared, she enjoyed the company. My father had just lost his job and explained to me that he wanted to have a summer home.

“This summer is about spending time with you and your brother, no more dinners without your father.”

I couldn’t help but feel lucky. This summer my mother would be waking up for work in the morning, and my father

would already be by the pool playing the Beatles top one hundred songs as he read one of his books. My father would wrestle my brother down in the pool with a wacky noodle, and I anxiously would look for the quarters that my brother dropped for me to find.

I heard my mother asking my dad that night when he was going to quit relaxing. She needed his help and I sat by the door listening. My brother left on his bike that night, counting the street lights knowing he could only go so far. Although I knew my mother would not have had a problem, he always went out his back window. It's almost as if he didn't want to have to tell anyone, or say goodbye to me. As I heard my father state that he would look for a new job when he was ready, my mother slammed the door only to see me sitting there. She picked me up and hugged me hard and my father walked out behind her. He picked me up over his shoulder threatening to throw me in the pool. I squealed with laughter.

"Put me down!"

"I will never let you go until you say it."

"I have the best Dad in the world."

"Are you two ready to order?"

The waitress looks pleased to see us back again. Her brown curls hang loosely in front of her face with her hair pulled back in elastic. Her frills aligning her apron add to a pleasant tackiness, the kind you expect to see at a diner. He always tips generously at these dinners, calling the waitress sweetheart and bragging about me.

"My daughter is on the Dean's List... my daughter is the first one to graduate from college... my daughter is going to Australia, she's traveling the world."

Compliments make me extremely uncomfortable, and I can't help but think that these dinners have aided that. The thought of having someone tell a complete stranger any form of success you have had recently makes me wonder how that could possibly make them feel. The same waitress has been here since my seventeenth birthday when we came here in late June. She probably doesn't even remember my name, but I know she has to be tired of hearing my accomplishments as much as I am.

"I haven't seen her in a couple months, and now my baby is leaving me to go halfway around the world." He states while squeezing my hand on top of the cold counter top.

I smile, and wonder if I even told him that I went

on spring break a couple months ago. Did I even mention my latest trip to California? Most people tell their parents the moment they book an airplane ticket, but I can't even remember if I bothered him with that information. Independence is something I've grown to value, but sometimes the word itself sounds more riveting than it actually is. Independence can have its dark days too, not having anyone to tell you that what you are doing is not the best. Maybe I too, just want him to tell me no, to stay home.

"You are so incredibly lucky to have such a great girl." The waitress smiles at me, and I can't help but smile back.

I walked home from school and the sun was blaring down my street and the church bells accompanied that weather, chiming their 3:00 reminder. I lived around the block from my school, and my mother picked me up when it rained, letting me walk home if it was nice. My father's car was in the driveway, and the back of the truck was left open.

I could see him from down the street walking up and down the gravel pathway. He was packing up his things, and although I knew this was coming I had blocked it out of my mind. He was getting ready to move into a house on the other side of town. Starting next week I would start spending weeks on and off, switching between my mother and father.

I walked towards our fence and my father ran up to me, hugging me and then pushing me away grasping my shoulders.

"School was great today? Did everything work out as planned?"

I had forgotten that I told my father I was in a fight with my best friend the night before. I had crawled next to him on the couch and cried, saying I didn't want to go to school the following day. My brother blatantly told me to suck it up while my father put down his book and wiped away my hair.

"The one thing I learned in life is that girls are plain mean Amy, and that's why I am raising you to be the opposite."

"I will take the French onion soup and a side salad." I said, closing my menu and handing it to her.

"Are you sure you don't want anything else? You have this whole menu to choose from." He flashed the large laminated book towards me.

"I'm sure." I rearranged the utensils in front of me nervously.

He always had a sense of confidence about him,

and although I knew he didn't have the money for us to go anywhere but this diner, I felt at this point he was financially secure. The waitress took the menu out of his hand and he sipped his coffee, completely black. I used to hit the button on the coffee maker in the morning before leaving for school, knowing that black coffee was the way he started his day. I wonder who has the responsibility of doing that for him now.

"I want to come up to your school for your graduation in the spring. I have been talking to your brother about it and we all want to be there."

"I would love that."

As those words rolled off my tongue, I knew they were completely true. I would love to see him in the audience, standing up proud with the same navy jacket draped over his shoulder. I knew my brother and his wife would be there, probably a couple days before to over compensate for absent family members.

As he spoke, I could see the crows feet next to his eyes and it reminded me that we were all growing older. His face was tired, but longing for my approval. He too, would love to be in the audience. For a second while the waitress came back to hand me my soup, I think we both truly believed he would be there.

The smell of homemade mac-n-cheese drowns the dining room and kitchen. My Pop-Pop brings down several dishes to the dining room table, wiping the sweat off of his brow, displaying the hard work he had accomplished in the kitchen that afternoon.

"Do you mind me asking when the last time you talked to your father was?" My Pop-Pop's wife Joanne asks as she tossed the salad at the table.

Joanne's nails are longer than most, fake plastic but just boisterous enough that you couldn't help but admire her ambition. Tossing a salad with large fake acrylics was a daunting task. Her died platinum blonde hair is teased three inches above her head and the dark red lipstick imprint rests on the tip of her glass. My Pop-Pop's wife is not one to necessarily hold back.

"If Amy doesn't want to talk about it then don't make her talk about it." My Pop-Pop is always weary about these situations. However, if the question is already brought to the table, how can it be truly avoided?

"I would say a couple weeks ago." I said while scooping the salad onto my plate. I wish this conversation would end. My father is my Pop-Pop's son, but he too was

done with his antics.

I never knew the exact moment when him and my father had stopped talking, cut all ties, only to leave me as the middle ground. After the divorce my father had moved back into my Pop-Pops after he lost his first house across town. He stayed in his old bedroom, which only made me depressed. I could never understand how one could have a home, children, and wife to only revert back into the bedroom they grew up in several years later. Years seemed to just be eliminated from his life, as if he was back to square one in the four walls of his room. The walls hadn't changed since my father moved out, and you could still see the shag carpet seeping out of the closet door. The carpet never left, and it almost seemed that neither had my father.

"We went to dinner, right after my birthday." I was attempting to justify him.

"Did you get a card? Anything from him? You know, he owes everyone a lot of money, it's just a shame." My Pop-Pop says, and I can tell there is more to this but he too is carefully choosing his words.

I never even thought about the fact that I hadn't received a card for my birthday. I hadn't expected anything but a dinner with him. I tried to remember the last time I received a gift, and no present came to mind. I didn't feel any anger. A card is the last thing I could possibly want. I couldn't help but picture my father in his old bedroom down the hallway and I wish I could have walked in to see him there, tell him that this room was temporary and there is always a way to make this all work out.

"Work just won't give me a raise, and it's been four years since they have even brought it up to me. I just need to get out of New York. Maybe move to Pennsylvania to be closer to your brother." He cuts his burger in half.

"I'm sure there are job opportunities in Philly. Remember the signs you built for the Disney Store in NYC? I bet if you showed pictures of those you could make a portfolio..." and as my words trailed on I knew I brought this up every dinner. Last time when I arrived to New York, they had taken those signs down and replaced them with newer improved logos.

"When am I going to meet your dad?"

The awkward relationship question I was attempting to avoid. I knew I couldn't much longer. I assumed that for any boyfriend it could possibly be a blessing that they don't

actually have to meet a father.

"I don't know, I don't know the next time I'll actually see him."

"Hasn't he been calling you though?"

The truth is my father calls at least a couple times a month. He calls me his princess, tells me how proud he is of me and showers me with compliments and I tell him how much I love him right back. The phone calls mask anything that I could possibly be feeling, but the love I have is not a lie.

"If he doesn't actually meet up with you more than a couple times a year, why aren't you mad? You answer the calls like nothing's wrong."

I hated these pressing questions. Inevitably I felt he needed to mind his own business and figure out his own family issues; however I could hear the concern in his voice. He didn't want me to be upset, he just wanted answers which after a year of dating I assumed he was entitled to. To others family relationships seem simple, black and white.

"You can't be mad at someone for being sick."

"Where did the time go? People ask me how you and your brother turned out so good, and I wonder myself." He was finishing up his plate, talking about his friend's daughter running away from home.

"I don't know. Sometimes a parent can do everything right but it still comes out wrong." I said. I didn't know what advice he truly wanted from me.

"Promise me you will send me a postcard from Australia. I need proof of these accomplishments!"

I nodded and smiled in agreement. Although I would love to send him a post card, I knew at that point in time I probably would not know his address.

For the first time in my life I realized that I could control who I told my story to. No one knew that my father who once was a large part of our neighborhood had turned to drugs over a summer home in the in ground pool. The neighborhood used to buzz around my father's disappearance, to the point that my mother needed to get out of the area. A place she once enjoyed thoroughly, she couldn't stand to plant flowers in the front yard. She hid the court hearings and child support battles, trying to shy me away from any form of uncertainty in life. I heard the telephone calls, and the long morning talks she would have

with my Aunt over coffee and bagels. I could tell she had a strong hatred toward him, for leaving something they had built together. Part of me always feels as if she missed who he once was, strumming his guitar to the Beatles and sitting me on his knee.

“Did your parents try and visit too? It’s crazy my parents will be here in only a couple weeks.” Leah put her sunglasses over her eyes, attempting to mask the sun.

Australia was warm, dogs walking leash-less down the city sidewalk, and people cheering at their nearest pub. Leah and I had grown to be inseparable the past five weeks. She knew nothing about my personal life, but only the things I had accomplished in Australia.

“My parent’s wish they could come, I think taking off of work is just a lot for them this time around.”

“I totally get that, my Dad’s so lucky he is retired.”

Simple as that the conversation had ended. I had no open ended questions that I was attempting to tip toe around. However, even if the question was asked what my father was doing for a living, or where he was at the moment, Leah would know just as much as I did that very moment.

The meal was coming to a close. The waitress came by one last time to refill his coffee.

“I just love this diner here because of the service. You go to these higher end restaurants and they just want to rush you out.”

“I love diners because you can get breakfast at any time.” I stated in return. I hated breakfast food but I was attempting to make conversation.

I hated that I was attempting to force conversations while the words were just so easily coming out of his mouth. He squeezed my hand again, a sign that the dinner was over. Before he went to put on his coat, he looked at me.

“Amy, you hate breakfast. Every time I made you breakfast you would weasel your way around the food and politely throw it in the trash.” He said nonchalantly. He knew, and knowing such a miniscule detail I saw his eyes change.

Right then and there he was my Dad, and I hugged him, taking in the smell of paint and tobacco.

Public Viewing

Mike Bifaro

Monday, the funeral parlor. Jack and I arrive and skip the holy water.

Not many people here.

What a god damn disappointment.

But, then again, it is getting late.

I walk to the body first. Closed casket, hiding the injuries,

the burns on his face,

the broken limbs,

the eyes scooped out of his skull with surgical precision,

the discount wire finally keeping his fuckin' lips quiet.

These "lessons-in-keeping-your-mouth-shut" stay hidden.

We kneel, say a prayer, bless his passing soul. Jack smirks.

Behind us, somebody sobs. Older lady. Looks real torn up about the dead kid. Must be his Ma.

A younger guy, almost my age, dressed in a shitty thrift store tux, puts an arm around the old broad. He comforts her as she looks up.

Our eyes meet...and suddenly I'm upset, a foreign feeling, a brief glimpse of clarity. Suddenly I'm fuckin' nauseous, like I had bad fish on the way inside.

I look to Jack next to me and my eyes start to water.

Jack looks back, stone-faced, cold, indifferent.

Jack puts his hand on my shoulder.

He leans in and says, "Motherfucker had it coming."

Thoughtful
Taisha Laird



Isa

Cassidy Carroll

The rhythm of your breathing,
So close to my own,
I can't imagine you leaving,
But you have to go home.
So small and plump,
Your face in front of mine,
I remember you were just a bump
But soon you'll be wearing Calvin Klein.
You smell of baby powder,
And a hint of your mommy's milk,
She couldn't be prouder,
You precious baby, with skin of silk.
Picking you up, your dark hair drips sweat,
But you don't care,
Oh; and your diaper is wet,
But I'll change it, I swear.
You've exhausted me, Little sweet pea,
I'll miss you when you go,
And it will always be just so.

Farewell

Jessica Ekert

That night the shore was deserted except for the two of us. Mom was back at the campfire drinking her beer, but I ran. I ran and I ran, following the tire tracks left in the sand. With every stride I dug and I curled my toes in the cool sand, as if to hold onto the skin of the earth itself. Under the cloudy night the moon hardly lit my path in front of me. Soon following the tire tracks didn't feel good enough anymore. I closed my eyes, quickened my pace and allowed my feet to take me where they wanted. They took me in a large circle that became smaller and smaller with every lap until I ran into the sandcastle I'd built that afternoon. I tried to make it the way that dad taught me, except I couldn't remember how he made the castle windows. My castles will never be like dad's used to be. It wasn't something my mom could teach me.

I stayed there in the sand, out of breath and exhausted. My hands were grasping the remains of the sandcastle. I held on tight. I looked up in front of me; my mother, a dark silhouette in the nothingness of the night, was haloed by the glow of the fire. Her hood was up, her arms wrapped around her knees. She sat there staring past the angry flames. I made an uncontrolled whimper and she turned around to see that I had fallen down. She got up and walked over to me.

"You're okay," she said. She picked me up off the ground and held me in her arms. "We'll be okay."

New Girl
Julia Brennan

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

The chatter of students fills the room. They sit at their desks, gossiping and comparing homework answers.

LONDON (15) sits alone in a corner. She is wearing an entire outfit composed of clothing by Ralph Lauren.

She is drawing on a sheet that is filled with detailed graphite depictions of various spiders. She pulls out her iPhone 5s and takes a picture of her latest spider drawing.

She sends the picture in a text message to her father. Her text reads: "Thinking about entering these into the contest."

JILL (14) walks over to London, accompanied by DAN (15). Jill picks up the sheet of drawings and looks at it, as Dan peers over her shoulder.

JILL
Ew. What the hell?

Dan snatches the sheet away from her.

DAN
Damn, new girl. This is sick.

JILL
If by sick you mean, like, mega-disgusting, then yeah. It's sick.

DAN
Get a grip, Jill. It's cool.

Dan gives London a crooked smile. London puts

her hand out.

LONDON

I'd like that back, if you wouldn't mind?

DAN

Oh, sure thing.

Dan goes to hand London back the drawings, but then quickly pulls the sheet away from her.

DAN

Hey, actually, you think you could draw one of these for me? It'd look totally sweet on my locker door.

London puts her hand back down on the desk.

LONDON

You're asking favors and you don't even know my name. Plus, you snatched my drawings up from my desk without asking my permission first. Who exactly do you think you are?

Jill takes the drawings from Dan.

JILL

Um, I think we should be asking who you are, new girl. What's your name? And why are you so good at drawing this freaky spider shit?

Jill holds up the drawings and points to them.

LONDON

I don't think you're entitled to either of those answers until you've given me back my drawings, which you've very rudely taken from me. I've been patient so far, but it can only last so long.

JILL

Excuse me, bitch? Fine, you want these back?

Jill rips the sheet in half and crumples

*them up. She tosses the pieces into the
trash.*

JILL

Go get them.

Jill walks away.

DAN

Jill! What the hell?

(to London)

Look, I'm really sorry about her. She's kind of a bitch.

LONDON

Really. And what gave you that idea?

DAN

Well, she's usually pretty -

LONDON

Sarcasm seems to be a lost art these days.

Jill turns and glares at Dan.

DAN

Uh, see ya, new girl.

Dan hurries away.

LONDON

Typical.

London goes over to the trash and pulls out her crumpled drawings. She walks back to her desk and tries to smooth them out.

LONDON

That bitch.

She sighs and pulls out her sketchbook. She continues working on her other spider drawings. The teacher walks in, and class begins.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY London approaches Jill at her locker.

LONDON

So, Jill, I was wondering. For exactly how long have you had that stick up your ass?

JILL

I'm sorry, what? I don't speak freak.

LONDON

I'd like an apology.

JILL

For what? Oh, for your little weirdo bug drawings? Yeah, I don't think so.

LONDON

They're arachnids, actually.

JILL

Whatever. Get out of my way, new girl.

Jill tries to walk away, but London steps in front of her.

LONDON

Apologize.

JILL

What are you going to do? Web me to death?

LONDON

Was that supposed to be funny? This generation's speech, in all forms, is severely lacking.

JILL

Um, yeah, I don't know what you're talking about, but really. Back off.

LONDON

Not until I've gotten my apology.

JILL

You're really starting to freak me out, freak. But yeah, whatever. Sorry. Now will you get off my ass?

LONDON

Sure thing. But there's actually something I wanted to give you. As a peace offering.

London reaches into her backpack.

JILL

What? Okay, yeah, sure. Just hurry it up, new girl.

After fumbling a bit in her backpack, London pulls out her hands, one cupped over the other.

JILL

Uh, you want to show me? Hurry up, I have cheer at three.

London opens her hands to reveal a tarantula. Jill screams, and London tosses it at her. It clings to Jill's shirt and crawls up towards her face.

JILL

OH MY GOD! YOU PSYCHO BITCH, GET IT OFF! GET IT OFF!

LONDON

I'd be careful if I were you. If you squirm too much, he might bite.

Jill jumps around even more.

JILL

YOU FREAK! GET IT OFF! PLEASE!

LONDON

Apologize. For real.

JILL

I'M SORRY!

LONDON

Look at me when you say it. And calm down.

JILL

I'M REALLY FUCKING SORRY!

LONDON

If you don't calm down, I'm not going to take him away. He's going to get nervous. And then he'll bite.

Jill stops jumping around, but she still fidgets a little.

JILL

I'm sorry, okay? I-I'm really, really sorry.

LONDON

Apology accepted.

*London takes the tarantula from Jill's shirt.
Jill cries.*

JILL

You freak!

LONDON

It's London, actually.

Archibald in His Natural Habitat
Brigid Myers



Realism in Video Games
Tom Kline

You can't hit the X button to reload a gun in real life, dumbass.

Dancing Phalanges

Laurie Jackson

trying to move
to pick up
to grab hold.

Printed
unique to each
individual.

Swirls this way
looped around
seen up close
and studied.

From there,
indented at knuckles
bend and wiggle
cross hatched down
to the palm.

Long life,
great wealth
reading lines
and ones
in between.

Washed under soft,
bitten down nails,
which occasionally
get dirty from
who knows.

Time takes its toll.
Crinkles of age,
the skin detracts
slowly

from pink
fresh to
gray mush.

Telling many
stories that

Move
Pick up
Grab hold,
finger laced
with the hand
that swings next
to you in
the toll of time.

Edgar ventures into central London, his physical appearance slightly out of place among the well-dressed business men walking through the town square. Shuffling barefoot on the cobblestone, the dirt embeds under his toenails as he passes carriages and store fronts. Women in casual dresses and veiled hats call after their children who've run ahead. A ship's horn echoes from the Thames as it prepares to dock into the harbor. Bakers advertise baguettes by waving them in the air. London has not changed since Edgar was thrust aside. It's simple as he remembers, but no longer can he enjoy the charm the village has to offer. London is no longer a land of prosperity. It has grown into a cruel caste system reminding him of his failure.

Edgar reaches his destination, London Printing Company, the publishing house that gave him his break years before. Edgar grasps the copper door handle, catching a reflection of himself in the window.

The interior is exactly as he remembers. The wood paneling of the walls lacks shine and the lone window in the back offers a bleak view of the alleyway. The smell of newspaper wafts through the building, trumped only by cigar smoke coming from numerous ash trays scattered around the office. Edgar gently knocks the door of his former editor, Barney.

"C'mon in," Barney calls from inside. Edgar walks in cautiously. He brushes his beard with his fingers and readjusts his belt buckle before Barney looks up from a pile of papers, his glasses resting on the bridge of his nose.

"Well, I'll be damned." Barney rises from his seat and extends his hand. Edgar immediately feels embarrassed by his appearance but shakes Barney's hand regardless. Barney offers a confused smile and motions towards a wooden chair.

"Take a seat, kid."

Edgar sits, fidgeting with his soiled hands. Barney is oblivious to Edgar's discomfort, placing his glasses on top of his head before tidying his desk. Signs of aging have crept onto Barney's face since Edgar has last seen him. His stomach now bulges over his trousers but despite the minor changes in appearance, his mannerisms do not differ.

"What can I do for you?" Barney asks, leaning back in his chair while propping his feet on the desk, prepared for a

reason regarding Edgar's visit. Edgar sits silent, his emotions feel lodged in his throat, restricting him from speaking.

"I want another opportunity," Edgar blurts. "I can't go on living like I'm living Barney, I just can't. I'm homeless, I'm hungry. I am nothing, just nothing. I need to be published again, I need your help. Can you help me? Please, Barney, please."

It is not the most articulate request but it was all Edgar can manage. Barney's eyebrows rise, clearly surprised by Edgar's eagerness and desperation.

"What happened to you, Edgar?"

"Pardon?"

"I remember the day you first set foot in here. You had this charisma about you, this confidence. I cannot explain it. You stood tall and you had a solid handshake. Now I look at you and I cannot help but think where did that go? I mean, son, what has happened to you?"

"I don't know," Edgar shakes his head. "I got caught up with the rewards of labor and in the process lost sight of my integrity, I guess. But I promise you, Barney, if you can give me another chance, I will hand you the best damn story ever written, you can be certain of that. I have it in me still, I know I do. Give me the opportunity to find it."

Leaning forward on his desk, Barney clasps his hands together and rests his chin on his ink-stained knuckles.

"Have you written any stories since I last heard from you? Completed pieces?"

"Yes," Edgar lies. "I don't have them with me but..."

Barney raises his hand as a gesture to silence Edgar.

"Tomorrow morning, I want one on my desk. If not, the opportunity is gone."

Edgar cannot celebrate yet. He does not have a story in his possession, or even in his mind. Perhaps the newly granted chance is enough to ignite an idea but tomorrow is too narrow a time frame.

"I might need a little time more time than that, Barney, just to polish..."

"Nine years and you still need time to revise?" Barney interrupts with a cackle, "Tomorrow, bring me what you got. Take it or leave it, kid. Now, excuse me, I need to go to lunch." Barney rises from his seat, grabbing his suit jacket from the coat hanger. He places a light slap on Edgar's back before yelling to a colleague outside his office.

Nine years ago Edgar reached the societal limit of a writer's potential. Riches were his and his name was the toast of London. He was fresh off the release of his novel, Agony, a piece he devoted much of his adult life to writing that eventually became the subject of conversation among many. After years as a struggling writer, Edgar was satisfied with his new found fame. He grew accustomed to the daily compliments from strangers, the lavish parties for the wealthy and respected, and the envy other authors had over his success.

But as time proceeded the novelty of the book wore off as did praise. It wasn't too long before Edgar was unable to keep a grasp on the extravagant lifestyle his novel had brought him. He no longer defined himself through talent, but through his success. No longer did he write with passion, if at all, and dedicated his focus to keeping alive his appearances with London's upper class. By 1940, his careless spending left him with little wealth and the attempt to maintain his luxurious lifestyle left him as a penniless man roaming the streets.

Every night Edgar went to a church for shelter and left before dawn, not wanting to risk being seen by anyone. The church was always unoccupied, providing him with much needed solitude. He would occasionally attempt to write, but his words were lost. He had been unable to reinvent a story that had the equivalent quality of his first successful novel.

The wind often beat against the bricks and lifted drapes into the air. Edgar would lie on his back, gazing through the open window. One evening a lifeless bird lay on the sill. Insects burrowed into its body. The population was large enough for Edgar to observe the movements of their march along the carcass.

"I can no longer live like this," he whispered. A gust of wind extinguished the candles scattered along the church altar. Edgar was left in the dark, except for the moon's luminosity spotlighting the bird.

After leaving the London Printing Company, Edgar rushes to the town library a few streets west. It was sure to be a secluded place to write. The library is dim, similar to Barney's office, and an aroma of mildew overwhelms patrons when they first enter as shown by the crinkle of their noses. Endless shelves covered with thousands of books border the walls. Edgar has never liked libraries or more so what they represented- years of effort and imagination only to end

up on a shelf forgotten. However, he dives into the stacks immediately, skimming the book titles until he comes to a familiar one. The bind of the book is worn from frequent use but the title still stands out. Agony. Edgar E. Edwin. London Printing Company. Call number FIC ED 1935. Edgar shimmies the book from its place and flips to the pocket in the back. His book has not been checked out in ages.

He continues to roam the walls until his eyes creep upon an unusual red notebook, clasped shut with a gold buckle. Charred pictures fall from the pages as he removes it from the shelf. Picking them off the floor, Edgar places the pictures back in their place without much of a glance. His attention comes more from boredom than inspiration. The texture of the book is smooth. The carved engravings of nonsense on the front are only noticeable when Edgar scratches his nails against the cover. He thumbs through the pocketbook, gazing over the tiny notes in the margins and then turning to the front. With a half-hearted sigh, he props his weight against the shelf end.

Edgar is pulled into a world of fantasy, grasped by the characters and pushed through by the content. The beauty of the language is enviable. It is literature at its finest, pulling him with such force that for hours he is unable to break from it. Without looking up when done, Edgar intensely scans the book for the name. No identification is available, no initials, no address, no marking of ownership. The writer responsible is one to generate awe and Edgar cannot conceive a reason why such a powerful work would go unclaimed. It would have been sure to bring the writer much praise. An idea bothers Edgar yet he cannot dismiss the possibilities of sacrificing his integrity. He lacks a moral compass due to desperation.

The two years that follow are a whirlwind for Edgar. His book is a success; far exceeding his first. He has catapulted back into the elite society, much to his satisfaction. His appearance replenished, his reputation restored, his happiness rescued.

An afternoon reception is hosted in Edgar's honor by the London Printing Company, where wealthy attendees toast to his name and he is unable to travel even a few paces before stopping to engage in fond exchanges. Barney, instantly intoxicated by the book when Edgar eagerly slapped it on his desk two years prior, is drunk from the wine and the sensation of being surrounded by his cohorts. With

his arm wrapped around Edgar's shoulder, his belly jiggles violently as he ruptures into laughter at anything said by Edgar that has even the slightest undertone of humor.

When the festivities begin to calm, Edgar makes a graceful departure so he is not the last one remaining at his own banquet. He feels the frigid weather while making his way through the lobby; the glass doors of the entrance have continually pushed cold air towards the marble walls. Edgar, energized from the adoration, closes his jacket and puts his leather gloves on before braving the weather. Before leaving, Edgar notices the library across the street. A chill overcomes him briefly, but he disregards the feeling by blaming the wind. For a reason unknown to Edgar, he makes his way across the street to the library.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Edwin, sir," greets the woman at the front desk.

Edgar nods. There is not much that has changed in the library since his day of desperation. He walks, at a slower pace than he did his prior visit, over to the thousands of books. He occasionally pulls one off the shelf and thumbs through it. A green cover catches his eye and he grabs it while perching himself against the stack.

"Garbage," he whispers after skimming the first chapter.

"My father loved that book," says a meek voice from his right. Edgar glances to a scrawny young man sitting at a nearby table. His eyes are tired and his hair stands in every direction. His clothes are dingy, his coat missing several buttons and the elbows patched together with pieces of fabric.

"Pardon?"

"My father loved that book," the young man repeats as he clears his throat.

"Oh," Edgar nods, rolling his eyes. He turns his attention back to the book.

"You are Edgar Edwin, no?"

"Yes, I am," Edgar says with a tone expressing superiority.

"I'm Arthur." The young man extends his hand but Edgar ignores the gesture, still unwilling to engage in conversation. "My father read that book close to a hundred times, he was always reading the same things continuously." Arthur chuckles at the thought. "He loved reading and writing. He can't do either anymore."

"How's that?" Edgar asks with no enthusiasm, hardly lifting his head from the book.

“He died.”

“My condolences.” Edgar replies, insincere but bound to etiquette. Arthur shrugs. He briefly gazes into the distances as he bites his lower lip, holding in his thoughts.

“One man’s expectations can drive him to absolute madness. Can’t you imagine? He tried, oh goodness, how he tried. He mustered every word, every situation, every character but could not conclude with an adequate story. Do you know of the book *Pens & Pencils* by Eugene Staples?”

“Yes, I know of it,” Edgar states, “Very successful story years back, spectacular even. The book was the toast of the literary world for months. Not a single person that I know of is unaware of that book.”

“Eugene Staples was my father.”

Edgar turns on his heel, fully facing Arthur, his eyes wide with inquiry. Arthur refrains from looking directly at Edgar; the exhilaration in Edgar’s voice was too much for Arthur to confront. He knew once he had confessed his father’s achievement that Edgar’s questions would flood over him. Edgar had that persona, the kind of man who only respected the respected. The kind of man who chose to only converse with the successful, the elite, the people who had something to offer and gain profits in the process.

“Your father was brilliant! That book holds a predominant position amongst the literary community, even to this day! That book holds an indirect standard for us writers. It is such a pleasure to meet you, son!” Edgar reaches for Arthur’s hand. “Tell me, son, what was your father working on when he died? I am intrigued.” Edgar pulls a chair and takes a seat. Arthur still withholds eye contact, instead scratching paint off the desk with his fingernail.

“He hadn’t written anything substantial in years, or so he told me. The last year of his life he used to come here every day and write in a journal. He loved that journal, I’ll tell you that. He used to tell me of this story that he was working on, he never disclosed the plot but I remember the gleam in his eye, the regained confidence in his ability.” A grin emerges on Arthur’s face as he recalls the memory of his father. “He left that journal behind in this library, one that he hid amongst the books. That’s why I come here; I can feel his presence amongst these desks. In some ways, it gives me a sense of tranquility.”

Edgar fidgets. It couldn’t be.

“He always hid his writings; my mother didn’t offer kind words towards his work, even after he obtained success. She believed that real men relied on hard work to

bring income into the household, not on pure talent. So, he came to this library to write in peace. However, he couldn't. The voices in his head were too dominating, forever torturing him with his past success and how he would never write another celebrated story. He felt like a failure for most of his life. He died feeling like a failure."

Edgar hesitates but his curiosity cannot be composed. "How did he die?"

Arthur grimaces. "He...he...hung himself." Bowing his head almost in respect, he sighs. "He had been suffering from writer's block with his story, some days he would only be able to string together several sentences and for the following hours he simply sat here and tried to think of new ideas. But he couldn't, writer's block drove him to insanity. The night he hung himself, he had come back from here, enraged because his journal had gone missing. He turned this library upside down, he looked everywhere. He took it as a sign to stop writing. All signs led him to believe he was not supposed to write. His battle with a lack of ideas and then his beloved journal, though may not have held much, had vanished."

Edgar is paralyzed in his seat. Eugene's adored journal rest in his coat pocket. Barney had returned it to Edgar once the book had been released. Eugene's journal had brought Edgar back to life, but killed Eugene.

"He used to tell me every man has a purpose on Earth, but when my father realized the passion he had lived for was no longer his divine purpose for being alive, he didn't see a reason to live any longer."

Arthur continues chipping the white paint from the table desk, oblivious to the guilt in Edgar's body language. Edgar sneaks several glimpses at his coat pocket, wondering if he should return the journal and confess to Arthur, and himself, that his newfound success was an act of thievery.

"I must offer you my praise though," Arthur says.

"Me?"

"Yes. Your latest story was magnificent, to say the least. You definitely deserve the recognition it has garnered you. It was a beautiful piece of work, indeed." Arthur pauses. "My father would have loved your story."

a quarrel between lovers

Daniel Land

Suddenly, you were glowering
and prancing alone as I lean
back in the chair, disappointed
for a change. But in that last
ditch effort, you grab me up
and force me in tune with you,
and for a minute, it was more

than I could've ever dreamed for.
But your constant poking me
in the chest pushed me back
and caused me to wobble.
Eyesight again sharp and pulsing

with realization... When something
doesn't work, it quickly becomes
clear, and something was certainly
amiss. I notice you pointing
out how much I'm sweating,
and how harsh my breathing is,

but I quiver away and fall
into the chair again, shaking –
and I don't mean to shake,
but I'm pretty much urged to.
Looking down, I shed my last
tears for you, and it hits me once
more. Pulse, leaving rings in my

vision; breaking that mold into
a really bad headache.

Is this how it should be...?

You stand there, all stern, waving
puffs into the air. Telling me to
"clamor down." But it wasn't
happy, like it used to be, wasn't
playful.

Pulling myself up, I feel my
heartbeat; a crowded

street, and all the hustle
and bustle getting quicker and

quicker... Hard breath. Sweat
in my eyes. Drowsy a bit. I could
fall asleep in an instant.
Is this the heartbreak?

Flagellation
Lana Slinkard



“You’re very lucky to be receiving this opportunity.” The nurse sticks a needle into my hand. She connects the IV to my supply bag. “Only a few are given this amazing chance, Meeka. Of course,” she smiles, “there aren’t many who have done what you have, either.” She wags her finger at me like I’ve been a naughty child.

I growl at her and tug on my restraints, but the titanium cloth keeps me down. The nurse shakes her head, tightening the straps with the push of a button. “I was like you once, I think. Rebellious. Soon that won’t matter anymore, dearie. No more war, treacherous parents...dead siblings to mourn.”

I bare my jagged teeth at her as she looks away, tugging on my restraints. They creak under the force as I smile at her, licking my lips. I can feel my eyes dilate, becoming thinner—vertical. I’m gonna rip your mouth off your face.

“I’m gonna cut your head off.” I laugh, banging my head against the cold steel table. “When I’m done with you, you’ll be nothing but stains on the floor.”

“Welcome.” Its not the nurse whose talking, the voice is too masculine. I look up and a screen appears from a hidden panel in the ceiling.

“Meeka Namar, Plague of the former planet Devka, presently colony of the Muren Empire. Age: sixteen, parents: sympathizers of Muren, sibling: deceased, age five—”

“Don’t you dare say his name!”

“You are convicted of mass murder, torture, and cannibalism. You have therefore been selected for our recovery plan. Congratulations! Deemed unfit for other methods of disposal you have been submitted specifically for displacement.”

My eyes narrow. “What do you mean by displacement?”

“It’d be such a waste to simply execute you, sweetie.” The nurse points to the IV supply. “This solution is going to erase all the naughty things you’ve done, along with your personality and...unusual skill-set.”

I smile tauntingly for a moment, making sure to show her every jagged, sharpened tooth. She stares at my teeth and shivers visibly, but smiles all the same. My face

drops when it hits me
—what she meant.

Like hell.

I pull against the restraints, the titanium bonds creaking and bending against my face. The nurse is already across the room when I get my right foot free. The room door opens and the guards swarm in. I break my right arm free as a guard jumps me. I scratch his face, leaving deep furrows with my black talons. Grabbing the collar of his uniform before he can run, I sink my teeth into his neck and rip his flesh, throwing him into the other guards.

A sharp pain hits my hand and I look down. A blue liquid flows from the supply into my

IV. My body suddenly drops on the edge of the table

“Just count back from five, and you’ll be brand new.

No parents...no more baby brother to mourn.”

Four. I make my hand into a fist. “I’ll kill you!” I scream at the screen.

Three. A hammer pounds in my head.

Two. “Kill me, but I won’t let you take him from me!”

One. “Benny.”

Familiar

Sarah Fessler

Sitting in this place,
The air,
Crisp and Cold,
I can feel time rewind.

The wet grass beneath my feet,
Brings me back to greener times.
Until the frigid cement where I sit,
Grounds me back to today.

But then the familiar scent,
Of cologne,
Once adorned by a long lost lover,
Snaps me back to nights,
Filled with endless moonlight.
When meteor showers that filled the sky
With wishes that never came true,
Turned to broken promises
And broken glass, scattering our world.

When soft, sweet whispers,
Turned to
Blood curdling,
(Silent) Screams.

Suddenly the heartbeat,
In my ears,
Distracts me for a
Moments
time. Slapping me back,
To this moment, right here, and now.
To the taste of bitter menthol,
Inhaled deeply,
Contrasting the sweet sip of wine.

The Monster Underneath the Stairs
Samantha Feldman

A petite, frail woman stands before me on a stage with a twisted microphone on a long, narrow stand. Her hair is freshly combed and as dry as the half crooked lips that lie on her pale tinted pink face. She must have power in her warm house to have been able to dry her hair; unlike my mother who had to go to work this morning with a soaked head. I realize she got to go to work today; unlike the teachers from my old elementary school whose grade books lie somewhere in a sewage filled town dumpster. She must have a warm house, a job and nothing to do on a Monday but stand on a high school auditorium stage next to a twisted microphone on a long narrow stand. Our principal tells us to give this women our attention but all I see is *water*.

* * *

We moved into our 100 year old colonial home in 2001. It had three floors with three bedrooms and one and a half bathrooms. I remember walking into my new home for the first time and thinking it was gigantic; having lived in a tiny Brooklyn apartment for the first five years of my life.

The most special part about my new castle, however, lay underground. My mom and dad led me and my twin brother, Zach, down a flight of creaky stairs. As we walked I noticed I could see the floor beneath me. The stairs had slots in between each step and I could feel wind passing through each of them. It made me shiver.

“That’s the laundry room,” she said as she pointed to the left. “And that’s your new playroom!” she said as she pointed to the right.

* * *

The meatballs I made were lopsided. I couldn’t master the perfect ball like my mother could. For God’s sake, the woman was on the phone and watching TV yet her meatballs were the perfect shape and size of a tennis ball. I kept mashing the meat between my greased up hands and starting again. Slowly rolling back and forth just as she had taught me how to do years ago.

“What’s the matter with you?” she would joke every time I wasn’t completely happy with my creation.

It probably didn’t help that while we were rolling our balls the newscaster read, “A tropical storm flood warning is in effect for all Long Island residents south of Sunrise Highway.”

* * *

It took only the unloading of a few moving trucks for my basement to be filled to the brim with toys and games. Barbie's Dream House laid next to NASCAR's racetrack and Fisher Price's City Hall connected the two territories in peace. Zach and I spent hours on end playing in our own wonder filled imagination. Together, separate, it didn't matter. It was our world down there, our safe haven.

We only stayed until nightfall hit and my mom would yell down that dinner was ready. We never returned until daylight the following morning.

* * *

I used to love going outside on my bike, where I would chase the canal that surrounded my little neighborhood. Not counting my house as a starting point, I would set myself a mile down north on my long narrow street to where only beach could be seen behind houses. My bike would guide me as I'd ride that same mile in the opposite direction, peeping my head over the tightly spaced houses and trees to see the *water* rise closer and closer in sight. I'd know the chase was over when street and side walk was replaced by docks and boats. Breeze would escape through the tiny holes of my helmet and I would think how beautiful it was to live here.

* * *

"They say it's just going to be a tropical storm, Sam, relax," my mom promised.

"I know Ma, but what does that even mean?"

"A lot of rain and a lot of wind. I think we can take it, don't you?"

"Yeah I guess. But I think we should still evacuate. They don't stop saying it on the news." The meat became mush in my hands once more.

"I promise. We are completely safe here. Look." She grabbed the meat from my hand and in seconds made a perfectly round ball and splashed it into the homemade sauce.

"This sauce will last us for a few days if we can't leave the house. If we can, the cars are all filled with gas and daddy's going to put them on lifts so they don't flood. We are going to be okay."

* * *

When the sky grew dark, I used to have nightmares that there were monsters under my basement stairs. I feared that if Zach and I didn't run up to the main floor as fast as we could, the monsters would drag us through the wide slots in

between each stair. I used to wake up in a cold sweat only to hear the stairs that haunted me. They creaked so loud that I could hear them two floors up in my bedroom. I was all tucked under my blanket, afraid to move from safety, until I finally couldn't take it anymore and would run to my mom's room asking if she heard the noise that rattled me to my core.

One night they creaked so loud from the wind escaping through a basement window that I ran out, only to find my brother was running to the same place I was.

* * *

"Good morning," she says.

The room grows more silent than it was before. There is no need for her to touch the tangled microphone.

"My name is Dr. Rosen. I am a grief counselor."

"Oh. So they've called in the shrinks to fix us," I say quietly. The girl next to me giggles uncomfortably.

"Your school has asked me here today to discuss what has happened to your community over the last few months."

"What happened? I have no idea," I mutter to myself.

The girl next to me has no response. Her phone has replaced me for her entertainment.

"I've placed microphones in both of the aisles. If you feel comfortable enough you can just walk up the microphone and tell a story about Hurricane Sandy."

The entire senior class twists uncomfortably in their seats.

"Since I'm only one person, I want this to be an open environment, where we can help each other heal," she says.

"She's kidding me right?" The girl next to me looks up from her Twitter feed for a moment and then shrugs her shoulders. She must wish she had chosen somewhere else to sit.

* * *

My family sat on our enclosed porch that night together for hours, given a clear view of the destruction through our front windows. Bored and terrified, our entertainment became Long Island News channel 12 and placing bets on how high the water would go up the stairs outside. Within every hour, all four of us lost our bets until the water was finally just a single step away from our front door and we stopped playing. Food passed the time. Cookies and milk, nachos and salsa, anything that took our minds off the fact that this was no "tropical storm."

We told stories about our beautiful, dysfunctional basement, almost in memorial. We laughed about the nights we would overflow the toilet and the carpet would be soaked all day. We told horror stories of the mornings after a big rain storm where we would have to hop over wet patches just to get to our freshly washed clothes.

We couldn't figure out how there was only one foot of water down there, but then again no one had checked since the last batch of nachos were consumed. Our spirits were high, so high that we even laughed when the lights went out.

* * *

"I know we are going to be okay. Everyone at school said they weren't evacuating either," I said.

"Did they evacuate for Hurricane Irene like we did?" my mom said.

"Not really. We were one of the only ones who did."

"See? And the news said to evacuate for Irene too and nothing happened. It was just loud rain."

I rolled the last hunk of meat into perfection and plopped it into the sauce. My mouth was watering from how good everything looked.

"Take the sauce downstairs and leave it in the basement fridge. I'll heat it up tomorrow," my mom said.

* * *

The monster had finally arrived at approximately 7:00pm on October 29, 2012. We lost power in the entire house. It was so dark, I couldn't even see my pale hand in front of my sweat soaked face. We all knew we should have left. We huddled together on our small couch until my brother jumped up and screamed, "My keyboard! I left my keyboard down there!"

Within seconds he was running towards the basement, my dad quickly ran after to help. My mom and I kept watch of the porch, unable to move.

"Deb!" my dad screamed.

My mom and I sprinted towards the stairs.

"They're breaking, the windows are broken, oh my God, shit, shit, Deb! All of the water is coming in."

All I heard next was screaming, but I didn't know it was coming from me.

I cupped my hands over my eyes and collapsed. My body felt like it was drowning. It felt like I was drowning and no one would be able to save me and I couldn't breathe. I couldn't breathe. I wanted someone to save me. All I saw

was *water* slowly coming up the stairs and into my living room and no one would be able to save me.

I wanted it out of my house. But this monster was real, not just a creak in the stairs that could be vanished by a blanket and hugs. This had the momentum to destroy anything beyond my worst fears. My childhood nightmare had come true.

My mom ran me to the sink and I dry heaved until an ounce of air finally entered my body. She held my ears so I wouldn't have to hear the running water coming from the four broken windows of my basement. So I wouldn't have to hear my brother cry when he realized all the things he stacked on the highest shelf was now buried under six feet of ocean. So I wouldn't have to hear all three of my car sirens go off and then suddenly stop. So I wouldn't have to hear the sewage spewing from my basement toilet. So I wouldn't have to hear the crash of my fridge being completely turned upside down by the force of the water. So I wouldn't have to hear the creaking from the stairs stop because the water simply had no where else to go.

* * *

When Zach and I would make it to our mother's room she would hold us tight until the fear subsided.

"It's just a scary noise," she'd say. "No monsters will ever hurt you."

* * *

The water continued to spin and shift, destroying every proof of existence prior to its arrival. When it reached the top of the basement stairs that led to the main floor of my 111 year old mansion, we had nothing left to do but go to the third floor and wait for the monster to overtake the entire house.

My mom contemplated how we would get on the roof if we needed to and the meatballs floated next to Zach's keyboard. I only hoped that Barbie evacuated her Dream House.

* * *

I woke up at approximately 10:00am on October 30, 2012. My dad told me when I walked out of my bedroom that most of the water had receded, but yet it left a scum incrustated line marking seven feet in my basement. I refused to go see it for myself, instead I walked outside desperately hoping that my perfect neighborhood was unscathed. I made it to the sidewalk and found myself in a new world of destruction. Oil piles lay fresh in the street next to unidentified garbage and cars tipped on their side. I turned

my head south towards the canal only to see tree branches leading to broken docks and upside down boats.

I ran back inside to my family who sat hovering over a battery operated radio. We heard from the news channel that they were calling it a category one Hurricane named Sandy.

* * *

It's December 17th 2012, the first day back at school in months and I'm being suffocated by this silence. Dr. Rosen has not stopped rocking back and forth on the stage. It's clear she doesn't know what to do. I guess the death of a home, not necessarily a person isn't in her forte. Two minutes pass, no one moves from their seats, no one speaks and I'm about ready to walk out. Finally the creak of an auditorium chair forces all of our heads to move at once. A large red headed boy from the last row stands up and walks down towards the mic on my right side. I recognize him as my neighbor from down the road. He used to throw rocks at any car that passed his house when we were young. My eyes follow him the entire walk down the steep aisle.

He turns on the microphone and Dr. Rosen is overjoyed at the sight of him.

"What's your name?" she says.

"Mike."

"Nice to meet you Mike. Go ahead and share your story when you're ready."

Mike takes a deep breath and looks down. I hear his stammering through the microphone.

"I don't really know what to say."

"Say whatever you want to say, Mike, we are all here for you."

Mike takes a deep breath and begins. "Well, I'm homeless right now. My water damage wasn't so bad but the power company turned my power on and..." he steps away from the microphone and looks up towards the light; almost for guidance on what to do next.

"...The house caught fire, didn't it Mike?" Dr. Rosen said.

His head tilts back down, now looking straight at Dr. Rosen as if the reality had just hit him. "Yeah it did," Mike agreed.

* * *

I know nothing about this woman standing on stage in front of me. Maybe she had aspirations of doing more on a Monday morning than talking to damaged high school students who can't see past the pictures in their mind to

listen to her. Maybe she sat on top of her basement stairs with her twin brother, wondering when the monsters will finally grab them by their ankles and pull them into the underworld between the slots. Maybe whenever she drives down the streets of her neighborhood she thinks of the pile of lost possessions that once paved the sidewalks. Maybe a year later from today, she'll sit on her newly renovated stairs without slots and wonder if the monsters are gone for good. Maybe whenever something traumatic in her life happens all she'll see is *water*.

With a Bow
Joel N. Dodge



Liebe Krieg und Opfer
Aaron Golish

EXT. OUTSIDE NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - NIGHT

PRISONERS in white striped uniforms sprint through the dark. Snow falls. We hear indistinct shouting. Then silence.

A gunshot pierces the night. We see a beautiful violet-eyed FEMALE PRISONER(22). A horrified look on her face.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

A large, bald, and imposing superior OFFICER (40) hails for WILHELM STEIG (20), a slender young guard with mousy brown hair and grey eyes. The officer's uniform is of a noticeably lighter hue from wear.

OFFICER

Wilhelm Steig?

WILHELM

Yessir.

Wilhelm salutes.

OFFICER

Alright new guy, one of the guards at the gate is sick. You are ordered to supervise the incoming prisoners in his place.

WILHELM

At once sir!

As the Officer turns away, Wilhelm sneaks a few rolls into his pockets before hurrying to the gates.

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - GATES - DAY

As the new prisoners are being filed in and processed without incident, Wilhelm has a defeated look in his eyes as he shifts about uncomfortably. The cries and yelling of the incoming prisoners drown out most other sounds.

Wilhelm watches as some children and elderly are dragged off, begging for their lives and sobbing profusely before being shipped off to another camp.

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - LATE AFTERNOON

Wilhelm turns around and begins to walk through the camp. He walks by a couple of GUARDS harassing a FEMALE PRISONER. She is the Young Female from the opening.

GUARD 1

So where in the hell do you think you're going?

Guard 1 shoves her. She looks at the ground and doesn't respond.

GUARD 2

Why don'tcha fuckin' answer him?

GUARD 1

Yeah! Quit being such a bitch.

Guard 1 rests a hand under the Female Prisoner's chin.

GUARD 1 (cont'd)

Don't you know copping an attitude like this could get you killed?

The Female Prisoner continues to avoid eye contact. Guard 1 breaks away and hollers.

GUARD 1 (CONT.)

Look at me when I'm talking to you.

*Wilhelm turns his head towards the commotion.
Guard 1 raises his hand over his head.
Wilhelm prepares to intervene. He is
interrupted by Guard 1 smacking her across
the face.*

*Wilhelm rushes in. He drives his fist into the
face of Guard 1, causing Guard 1 to fall to
the ground. Wilhelm shakes his fist in pain.
Guard 2 looks on, flabbergasted.*

GUARD 2

What in the hell's wrong with you!

*Guard 2 takes a swing at Wilhelm, landing
square in the chin. Wilhelm flinches.*

*Wilhelm swings at Guard 2, landing a punch in
the gut as Guard 1 stands back up.*

GUARD 1

(rubbing his jaw)

You're gonna regret that.

*Guard 1 punches Wilhelm in the side of the
head and as Wilhelm falls over, Guard 2
catches him and pushes Wilhelm back towards
Guard 1.*

*Guard 1 kicks Wilhelm in the gut, causing him
to double over. Guard 2 kicks Wilhelm over so
that he is facing up, and Guard 1 stomps his
nose. There is a sickening crunch.*

WILHELM

(in a blood curdling scream)

AHHHH

*The Young Woman backs away as the superior
Officer comes to break up the fight.*

OFFICER
(*enraged*)

What in the hell is going on here?

GUARD 2

He just came up and...

OFFICER

... Can it.

The Officer looks at the two guards.

OFFICER (CONT.)

Just get the hell out of here.

He looks at Wilhelm, sprawled out on the ground.

OFFICER (CONT.)

(*cont'd*)

And you. Get the hell up, dust your ass off, and go see the damn doctor.

The Officer glares at the Young Woman before walking off. Wilhelm sits up, using one hand to unsuccessfully try to stop the blood flow.

WILHELM

(*nasally*)

Sorry about that.

He stands up and offers his bloody hand to shake. His nose is bent at an unnatural angle. He quickly realizes that his hand is covered in blood and switches hands.

WILHELM

(*cont'd*)

My name is Wilhelm, Wilhelm Steig. What's your name?

She pauses for a moment before answering; looking at her forearm.

YOUNG WOMAN

1-4-2-8-5-7.

WILHELM

No. Not your number. I mean your real name.

YOUNG WOMAN

Why does it matter?

WILHELM

It just does.

YOUNG WOMAN

What's your angle?

WILHELM

There's no angle.

He steps closer to her.

WILHELM (CONT.)

I just saw someone who needed help, so I helped them.

YOUNG WOMAN

But you're just one of them.

Wilhelm looks sad and faces the ground. The Young Woman lets out a small sigh.

YOUNG WOMAN

(cont'd)

My name is VIOLETT BRAUS.

WILHELM

See, that's much prettier than 1-4-2-8-5-7.

She lets out a bit of a laugh but tries to hide it. Wilhelm smiles. There is blood on his teeth, and still some blood running down his face. His eyes are beginning to blacken.

VIOLETT

You should probably go see the medic.

WILHELM

Yeah, I guess I should. I'll see you around then?

VIOLETT

I can't exactly go anywhere.

Wilhelm covers up a slight chuckle.

WILHELM

You should probably hurry to your barracks. Wouldn't want anymore trouble.

Wilhelm stands up unsteadily, and waves before leaving.

INT. MEDICAL BARRACKS - LATE AFTERNOON

Wilhelm stumbles into the medical barracks holding his nose. He is getting blood everywhere. The DOCTOR walks in and sees Wilhelm bleeding.

DOCTOR

Ahem! Excuse me. You're making a mess.

WILHELM

Sorry.

The Doctor walks up to Wilhelm and tilts his head back.

DOCTOR

Jesus! What happened to you?

WILHELM

I... fell. I tripped and fell.

The Doctor gives him a puzzled look of disbelief.

DOCTOR

Well, can we at least step into the office? We should probably get this taken care of?

The Doctor leads Wilhelm to his office. He sits Wilhelm down and turns to the medical supplies on the wall. He grabs some tools and bandages and turns back to Wilhelm.

DOCTOR
(cont'd)

This might hurt a little. Alright, on the count of three. One. Two...

The Doctor quickly snaps Wilhelm's nose into place.

WILHELM
(in pain)

Ow ow ow ow ow...

The Doctor plugs Wilhelm's nose and makes a splint.

DOCTOR

Sorry about that.

The Doctor turns around and grabs a bottle of pain pills and tosses them to Wilhelm.

DOCTOR (CONT.)

That's going to hurt for a while. You should take some every few hours or so.

Wilhelm palms the bottle and looks down at the label.

WILHELM

Thanks! I owe you one.

DOCTOR

I'll say. How about you start by mopping up your little mess out there?

Wilhelm stood, a little dumbstruck. The awkward silence is interrupted by the Doctor's laughter. Wilhelm joins in.

DOCTOR (CONT.)

Don't worry. I got it. It's not even the

worst thing that's been dragged in here. Just make sure you come back if you need anything else.

Wilhelm leaves the office and heads back to the barracks before laying down to rest. His eyes close as he drifts off.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - MORNING

Wilhelm is on a beat around the camp. He messes around with the nose splint. His eyes are black and swollen. He stumbles onto a FRAIL LOOKING MAN (35) coughing and wheezing. He is on all fours. Wilhelm helps him up.

WILHELM

Are you alright?

FRAIL MAN

(with disbelief)

Yeah, I just... I just haven't eaten in a while.

WILHELM

(with concern)

Why not?

FRAIL MAN

Well my... Wait. Why do you care?

WILHELM

I just want to make sure everything is alright. Please. Tell me.

FRAIL MAN

Well, my daughter. You see, she's sick. I've been giving her my share of food. She's... She's not getting any better.

The Frail Man begins to sob. Wilhelm consoles him and offers him a roll from his pocket.

WILHELM

You still need to eat. You need to be strong for your daughter.

FRAIL MAN

I just don't know what to do.

WILHELM

What are her symptoms?

FRAIL MAN

Well...

CUT TO:

INT. MEDICAL BARRACKS - EARLY EVENING

Wilhelm is sitting in a chair. He is facing The Doctor in a somewhat worn lab coat. His hair is slicked back and his glasses are resting on the edge of his nose.

DOCTOR

Back so soon? So, you've been experiencing fevers, restlessness, vomiting, and?...

WILHELM

...Body aches.

DOCTOR

Okay then.

The Doctor reaches behind and shuffles through some medicines.

DOCTOR (CONT.)

Now, it sounds like you may have the flu. Now, it could be anything from a common cold to pneumonia, so I'll just give you these to help with the symptoms. Let me know if this doesn't help. We may have to try something else.

The Doctor hands Wilhelm a bottle of pills with instructions.

WILHELM

Thanks! I should have mentioned it yesterday but...

Wilhelm points to his nose.

WILHELM (CONT.)

I was a little preoccupied.

DOCTOR

You may want to take a break and rest for a while.

WILHELM

Can't do that. The boss would kill me.

They both chuckle as the Doctor turns to exit the room.

DOCTOR

You should lay down for a bit.

After the Doctor leaves Wilhelm sneaks some medicines into his pockets after carefully choosing. After a few minutes he walks out into the main office.

WILHELM

Sorry, I'd love to stay but I've got work to do.

The Doctor waves goodbye as Wilhelm leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - NIGHT

Wilhelm finds the Frail Man. He passes the medicine to him, carefully looking over his shoulder to make sure nobody is watching. The Frail Man shakes Wilhelm's hand before giving him a quick hug.

FRAIL MAN

Thank you. This means so much to me. I only wish that more of them could be like you.

*Wilhelm offers him a smile
before retreating.*

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

*Wilhelm sneaks a few rolls into his pockets
again as he is leaving.*

CUT TO:

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - DAY

*Wilhelm is on his usual beat. He encounters
the Frail Man from earlier. He is looking a
bit better. He comes up and shakes Wilhelm's
hand.*

FRAIL MAN

Thank you so much.

WILHELM

Is the medicine working?

FRAIL MAN

She's still sick, but it's starting to clear
up already. I don't know how to thank you.

WILHELM

It's fine, really. I'm just glad I could help.

*Wilhelm puts a hand on his shoulder to
comfort him.*

WILHELM (CONT.)

I've gotta go. You take care now.

*Wilhelm and the Frail Man part ways. Wilhelm
continues his route through the camp. He sees
a group of laborers breaking up rocks and
carrying the rubble. There are several guards
armed with MP38 sub machine guns. A couple of
them turn to look at Wilhelm.*

As one of prisoners trips and falls, all of the guards turn to face him. One of them raises their gun. Wilhelm continues as they yell indiscriminately.

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - DAY

Wilhelm passes out some food to some of the more elderly prisoners and collects letters from a few of the other prisoners.

Wilhelm passes out some of the stolen medicine to the prisoners.

Wilhelm thumbs through the prisoners' letters before placing them in his jacket pocket.

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - LATE AFTERNOON

He walks up to the fence as a LITTLE BOY (10) with dirty blond hair hidden under a flat cap rolls up on a bicycle. Wilhelm looks around before handing him the stack of letters with a German Reichsmark on top through the fence.

LITTLE BOY

Thanks. My pop will get these out as soon as he can. I'll be back next week to pick up the next batch.

WILHELM

Same time?

LITTLE BOY
(smiling)

Same time.

WILHELM
(smiling back)

You should probably get out of here before they catch you.

The Little Boy tips his hat and begins to

pedal away. Wilhelm waves.

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - NIGHT

Wilhelm stumbles into Violetta. She has a smile on her face as he bumps into her.

VIOLETT

Oh, there you are. I never got to thank you for yesterday.

Wilhelm and Violetta walk through a secluded area of the camp. They sit down and look up at the full moon.

WILHELM

You know, I never wanted this. My dad fought in the first Great War. I just wanted to help my country. I'd rather have been put on the front lines. But here? After seeing all of this? I'd never wish this on anybody.

VIOLETT

My parents used to own a flower shop. We even had a little dog. He was a little black Scottish terrier. His name was Wolfie.

WILHELM

After my father died my mother ended up in a hospital. After that I joined the military and I've been sending just about all of my pension to cover her bills.

VIOLETT

I haven't seen my family in two months.

Violetta turns to look Wilhelm in the eyes. She has tears in her eyes.

VIOLETT (CONT.)

I never even got to tell them goodbye. I don't even know if they're still alive.

Wilhelm places a hand on her shoulder to comfort her. She turns to Wilhelm and embraces him.

*They stand up and hug each other again.
Violett plants a small kiss on Wilhelm's
cheek.*

*They are interrupted when a GUARD comes
around a corner. Violett and Wilhelm separate
from each other.*

The Guard clears his throat.

GUARD 3

Excuse me, is everything okay?

*Wilhelm turns to face the other guard
nervously.*

WILHELM

Everything's fine. I was just...

Wilhelm fidgets.

WILHELM (CONT.)

Escorting her to the prisoners' barracks.

GUARD 3

Well you should hurry. It's getting late.

*The Guard tips his hat before turning around
and walking away. Wilhelm and Violett sigh
with relief.*

Wilhelm walks Violett back to her barracks.

EXT. PRISONERS' BARRACKS - NIGHT

*As Wilhelm opens the door to let Violett in,
they interrupt a couple of the FEMALE
PRISONERS in the middle of their
conversation.*

FEMALE PRISONER 1

-- and then we can escape. All we've got to
do is...

She notices the others looking shocked and

looks over her shoulder.

FEMALE PRISONER 1 (CONT.)

(slowing down)

... get some others to help us.

FEMALE PRISONER 2

Oh God no!

*The Female Prisoners cower into the back of
the room.*

WILHELM

Oh no no no no. It's not what you think. I
was just walking Violett back.

The other prisoners are still cowering.

WILHELM

(cont'd)

I won't say anything, I promise!

*The prisoners look confused. Violett steps
forward.*

VIOLETT

It's okay. We don't have to worry about him.
He's with me.

FEMALE PRISONER 1

How do we know we can trust him?

VIOLETT

He's the one that's been helping the others.
And he saved ME!

*Wilhelm stands silently and awkwardly near
the door.*

WILHELM

Um. If you don't mind, I'll be leaving now.

Wilhelm starts to leave.

WILHELM (CONT.)

I'll see you later Violettt.

Wilhelm leaves and starts to walk back to his barracks. He ends up at the barracks and lays down to sleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - NIGHT

In a dreamlike sequence, we see Violettt turning in slow motion, smiling. Wilhelm embraces her.

CUT TO:

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Wilhelm is sleeping. There is a large grin on his face.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - DAY

In a montage we see Wilhelm helping various prisoners. He is assisted by Violettt. They give out food and medicine. They also help the prisoners send and receive mail.

Between helping prisoners, Wilhelm and Violettt talk and hold hands. When he brings her some violets, she springs forward and throws her arms around him.

The montage ends as the season transitions into winter. There is frost on the ground.

The superior Officer walks up to Wilhelm.

OFFICER

Good morning soldier.

Wilhelm salutes the Officer.

WILHELM

Morning, sir.

OFFICER

I have a very important job for you. Follow me.

The Officer leads Wilhelm through the camp.

OFFICER (CONT.)

It seems as though we've had a thief. Medical supplies have been disappearing from the facilities, and we've found contraband on several of the prisoners.

Wilhelm gets noticeably nervous.

OFFICER (CONT.)

(cont'd)

We are trying to get them to rat out the perpetrator, so we are having them dig their own graves.

They arrive in front of several scared looking prisoners. Violet is among them. One of the other guards hands an MP38 sub machine gun to Wilhelm. The Officer turns his attention to the prisoners.

OFFICER

You have three days to dig your graves. If you try and run away; you will be shot. If you refuse to dig; you will be shot. If you disobey these guards; you will be shot. At the end of the three days, if you still haven't ratted out the one who has been stealing from us, you will all be killed. Now start digging.

The PRISONERS start to dig. Some of them are emotionless, while others sob quietly to themselves.

Some are having difficulties digging the hard frozen soil. Day quickly transitions to night.

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - NIGHT

The prisoners are dismissed and Wilhelm leaves as they are climbing out of their holes. Wilhelm goes to retrieve his mail. He is uneasy and grey in the face.

INT. MAIL ROOM - NIGHT

There is a letter from a hospital. There is a cheerful expression on his face. It is quickly fleeting as he opens the letter and reads its contents.

Wilhelm falls to his knees sobbing. He drops the paper and we can see a large red stamp reading 'DECEASED' on the letter. Another guard pats him on the shoulder to try and console him.

FADE OUT:

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - DAY

Wilhelm is back to watching over the digging prisoners. He has an empty look on his tear-stained face.

There is a changeless expression on Wilhelm's face as there is a transition from light to dark.

EXT. NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - NIGHT

After the prisoners are dismissed, Wilhelm follows Violetta. He puts his hand on her shoulder.

WILHELM

Listen. I'm getting you out of here tonight. I'm going to help you and the others escape.

Violetta gives a slight nod and smiles.

WILHELM (CONT.)

I need you to get everyone to meet up at the south gates. I'll unlock it for you.

VIOLETT

We'll meet you there!

Violett kisses Wilhelm tenderly on the lips.

WILHELM

Please don't get caught.

VIOLETT

Don't worry, we won't.

The two separate and run off. Violett heads deep into the camp while Wilhelm runs towards the gates.

CUT TO:

Wilhelm standing at the south gates, slightly winded.

CUT TO:

Violett frantically collecting people to escape.

VIOLETT

(cont'd)

Come on! We're getting out of here!

CUT TO:

Wilhelm unlocking the gates. A heavy snow begins to fall. As he waits for the escapees, whistles start to blow and guards can be heard shouting.

The prisoners bolt through the open gate. Violett is close behind them.

Violett stops in front of Wilhelm. Before she can say anything he pulls her up tight to his body and kisses her hard. Flashlights are now noticeable in the distance.

WILHELM

Go. Go now before they catch you.

A single tear rolls down his cheek.

WILHELM (CONT.)

I'll see you on the other side.

Violett runs through the open gate as Wilhelm closes it. He locks it, tosses the key, and removes his swastika armband; using it to tie off the gate to slow the guards.

Several Guards rush up to the scene just as he finishes tying the knot.

GUARD 1

I should've known the goddamn traitor was going to be you.

Guard 1 pulls out a Luger and points it at Wilhelm. The superior Officer takes the pistol out of the Guard's hands and continues to point it at Wilhelm.

OFFICER

(yelling)

Do you have any idea what you've done? You've committed an act of high treason! You've betrayed your country.

WILHELM

(yelling)

No. My country betrayed me!

Wilhelm takes a few steps towards the Officer. The Officer cocks the gun.

OFFICER

Halt! The punishment for your crime is death.

Get down on your knees.

Tears start to roll down Wilhelm's cheeks.

WILHELM

No. I will die standing up like a man; not down in the dirt like one of your loyal mutts.

The Officer points the Luger directly at Wilhelm's forehead.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE NAZI GERMAN WORK CAMP - NIGHT

A group of escaped prisoners are running through the dark. The snow is falling hard.

As a gunshot pierces the eerily quiet, cold night air we zoom in on Violetta as she turns around, a horrified look is on her face. She screams.

VIOLETT

NO!

She wipes away tears as she is forced to continue running in the cold, dark, night.

FADE TO BLACK:

Propaganda

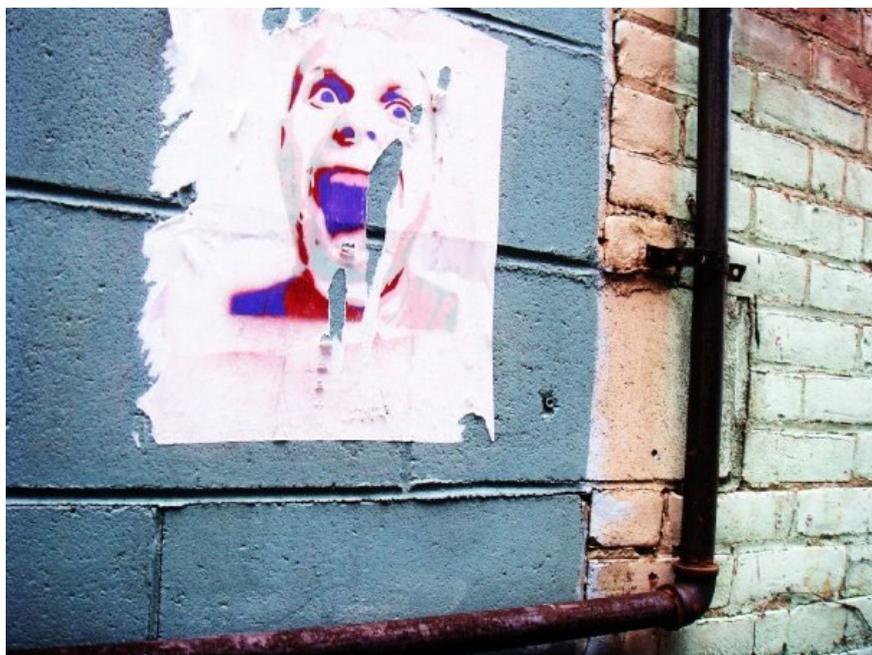
Leah Cunningham

Between the 13th and 15th of February, 1945 during World War Two, 722 heavy bombers of the Royal Air Force, and 527 from the Americans, dropped more than 3,900 tons of high explosive bombs through 4 air raids, destroying 15 square miles of the city of Dresden, Germany.

Bombs fall,
with victorious song.
stamped with heroics,
and a royal salute.
blackened out skies,
eclipsed in your eyes
drop on evil homes
found bare.
silencing you beasts
with burning tongues.
death canvassed streets bury your young.
fires erupt, engulfing the brutes.
decay slaps your face
as the skin on your limbs,
slowly
 slips
 away

that's all we see,
our grand victory.
while turning blind eyes, away
from the men dressed in ties
and women with babies
and children's loud cries.
as their families burn
alive, alive, alive...
a city turned rubble
just a bubble of flame.
30,000 dead, no trouble
no blame.
one lonely door
standing tall on a heap,
a note on the knob
claiming for keeps.

Scream Until You're Gone
Breana Iannotti



For Jenny

Breana Iannotti

We once were young
Without any worries
My big sister
My best friend

Years passed
Later the nights became
I'd wait up for you to get home
With your arms punctured and bruised
You'd stumble in and whisper,
"Don't tell mom and dad"

Iron bars became your new view
The only thing I feared was losing you
No longer home, no longer free
You were no longer with me

October you came back home
I wish I could've been there so you didn't feel so alone
The addiction set back in
We all knew your body wouldn't win

You told mom you put your clothes in the dryer
And stated that you were going to take a bath
Who knew that it would be your last

Seven missed calls in the early November morning
I didn't want to confirm what I already knew
Mom said they found you, broken and blue
A needle on the ground
A tub of cold water now surrounding you

The sun doesn't seem to shine as bright with you gone
My dark dampening days continue on
I can't seem to shake these terrors at night
I think of your voice and all the words you once spoke
I think of how you'll never see me dressed in all white
But mostly, I think of that contagious laugh of yours

Oh, what I would give to hear that glorious laugh just once
more

Life is one great big fight
That we all lose in the end
You just lost too soon

I live vicariously through you
I fight this life for you
I feel you with me everywhere I go
I carry you on my back and in my chest
You're not heavy, you're my world

May you fly higher
And may I see you again where the skies are brighter
Living a life
That doesn't fight back
Rest In Peace, Jenny.

Dedicated to the Putzer Family

Death of the Game

Mike Bifaro

There was something to be said about the day the end came.

There were four of us then, five if you counted Stevie, but he was late. We were all starting sixth grade that year, filled with thoughts of braces and acne, but none of that mattered much. All we really cared about was ball.

I'd pitch and Stevie hit while Goober, Jon John and Bucky covered bases. It was all we needed until Stevie hit the ball over the fence.

"I'll go." he said, and hopped over to get it. He didn't come back right away, but when he did he was grinning much too wide. The next day he did the same thing, smiling like a mad man the whole time.

The day after, *she* showed up.

Her, Natalie Baker, snapping her gum and winking at Stevie from the bench. Nobody could catch a damn ball that day. Stevie walked her home that night and every day since then she was there. Then today, Stevie was late.

After an hour of waiting Goober started to sweat and decided to quit.

"Asshole's gone Awol." he said and stomped home. Jon John left after, leaving me and Bucky to walk home together.

Along the way we passed Natalie Baker's house and Bucky said, "You think he's in there?" but I didn't respond.

The game was over. There was nothing else to say.

H2nO

Summer Cluette

Water and I are not friends. I'd describe our relationship as that kid who all your friends love and you just sit there glaring at them thinking "fuck that kid", but you're forced to spend time with them anyway because all your friends like them. But y'know, maybe water and I could have been friends if it wouldn't have tried to kill me as many times as it has. Trust me, it's hard to make friends with something that is out to get you.

Though in water's defense, I had it coming the first time. In my defense, I was only five so water should have taken it easy on me. My mom had taken me and her new boyfriend to the beach on a rather windy day. Usually, Lake Champlain is pretty calm which makes sail boats a common sight but that day, the waves were high and lifeguards were advising people not to swim out too far. My mom told me not go past my knees in the water while her and her boyfriend went out for a swim.

I was stubborn. And not too much of a fan of my mom's new boyfriend. Even though my floaties were gone, I decided after a few minutes they had spent too much alone time together and I needed to go and get them. So I waded into the water and right away, my trusted doggy paddle failed me. The waves were strong and had knocked me over when I was just up to my knees. My feet were unable to touch the sand, it was hard to make it far without going under. I knew how to swim underwater, thankfully. I was told to blow air out of your nose to keep the water from going in and swim like you would above water. That's what I did while I tried to find the surface. But the waves were overwhelming and every time I managed to get my head above the water I would be pulled back under by another wave. Pretty soon, I wasn't able to get enough air when I broke the surface and I started to breathe in water. Which burnt, it burnt like something I had never felt before. I tried to yell but no one could hear me under the water.

What I remember most wasn't the feeling of drowning. It wasn't the crushing weight on my chest or my vision fading or the ringing in my ears. It was the fact I could see people when I was under water. I could make out the shape of legs in the muddy water was; they had to be close to me. But they weren't helping. Here I was, about to drown and these

people were off going about their merry way. And props to that lifeguard who forgot how to do his job.

I was lucky though, I'm not even sure how but my mom must have seen me trying to get to shore. I was suddenly lifted out of the water, coughing and spurring while my mom did this little laugh and carried me to shore.

I don't remember much else from that day. My mom told me I kept crying until we went home. If I ever bring it up, she'll say I'm exaggerating and I didn't almost drown. But either way, I haven't been able to swim since. Not even doggy paddle, which I was such a pro at. Score one goes to water.

Although let's be honest, keeping score when it comes to water isn't entirely fair. What would we base it on? I took a successful shower this morning so is that a point to me? I drink water a lot. Which turns into pee. I make water into something gross, there's that on my scoreboard. Although, sometimes I choke on it so that probably comes out as a tie. The water not the pee. I don't drink that. Anyway, what I'm trying to get at is being enemies with water is a losing game and keeping score is almost impossible. Sometimes I slip and fall in the shower, so water might win those rounds. But I have more successful showers than failed ones so water is in a severe losing streak now.

I don't know why keeping score is so important. But I've been doing it ever since that incident with the beach. I slip and fall into a puddle? I'd yell out dramatically about how water won that round and get forced laughs from all the adults around. It was just a game when I was a kid, but now if I fall into a pool or get caught in the rain I make a mental note to add a point to water's chart. Not that there really is a chart, but if there was, I would like to think I'm in the lead.

But, as you might have guessed, it's not just large bodies of water that is out to get me either, oh no. Water will find always find a way to get at me. Even if it's frozen. Determined little shit. Again, I have to give water some wiggle room because in this case, I was doing something fairly stupid. My cousin, Brittney and I were both 10 and one of our favorite games was to get on the four wheeler, tie a toboggan on the back and see how long it takes for someone to fall off. We hadn't broken any bones yet, but that's not without having tried. After Brittney did this splendid wipe out by going six feet into the air and landing in a snow bank, it was my turn to get on the toboggan. We were both bundled up well. Snow pants, winter jackets, gloves, helmets, snow boots. All that not only helped against the snow but helped

cushion the fall.

She didn't start me off with the jumps right away. Instead, we went on a pleasant ride through the 86 acre field. It was daytime, which made the trip much less frightening. One time, we had been doing something just like this and ran into a bear. And let me tell you, being on the back of a toboggan at night while going 40 miles an hour away from a bear is about as fun as it sounds. But, there was nothing to see this trip. No deer, no rabbits, no field mice. It was... rather dull. I spent half the time trying to grab dead plants out of the snow as we went by them. When you grow up in nature, you can only take in the beauty of it so many times before it becomes uninteresting.

When she looped back to the front yard for the jumps, I was more than happy to finally get the show on the road. And for awhile, it was all going well. I was doing a good job hanging on, which was without a doubt irritating Brittney. She kept on finding puddles of melted snow to run me through so I was hit with the icy water. I tried to yell a few insults at her but she couldn't hear me over the sound of the four wheeler. Her tricks were paying off, the next jump I went off the toboggan and it was only lucky that had me landing back on it. The water was making my hands cold and I had already been damp from the snow.

Brittney had one last trick up her sleeve. She picked up the pace on the fourwheeler, going around the house and aiming for another puddle before we'd hit the speed bump her father made with the snowplow earlier. Clearing the pile would have been a challenge in itself, which was why she had been going as fast as she could in the snow. But unfortunately for me, I wouldn't make it to the pile. Despite the warm weather, the large puddle we hit had iced over. Which, combined with the sharp turn my cousin took, caused my toboggan to miss the pile and instead slammed me right into the picnic table head first.

Oh, almost forgot my favorite part. My helmet had fallen off from the sharp turn earlier. So I hit the corner of the picnic table, head first, with no helmet, going forty miles a hour.

I promptly blacked out.

I don't remember much of what happened next, exactly. It was all black but I could hear the yelling. I felt someone pick me up. Then I thought "oh, shit I must be blind" and then I started crying.

The rest of the night was uneventful. I had a concussion but good ol' redneck logic was I could just walk it

off if I didn't sleep that night. So that's what I did, I spent the night watching Disney movies and being poked and prodded by aunt and uncle to keep me from falling asleep.

My mom and I discuss my feud with water a lot. It came more into play when she bought a house on Lake Champlain and I came to visit. We were sitting on the patio overlooking the lake when she asked, "Do you ever think you're going to go swimming in the lake again?"

"Probably not. Plus, what about Champy? He lives in there." For those not native to the Clinton County region or aren't up to date on monster lore, Champy is the rumored lake monster to live in Lake Champlain. There is no proof he is actually there, the idea of a lake monster itself is almost laughable, the lake probably isn't deep enough for a lake monster of that size and who knows what he could be living off of food wise. But do I believe in him? You bet your ass I do.

My mom, meanwhile, didn't react. She was a little too used to my smartass replies so carried on like I hadn't said anything, "We're going to have most of your cousins over today to go swimming. You really don't want to join them?"

"The oldest one going to be here besides me is twelve. I'm cool with sitting on the sidelines," I replied.

"Maybe if it was a pool or something. Then again, with my luck I'd get my bottoms stuck on the grate and drown that way. And I feel like there's a lot of pee in pools. I don't want to swim in a giant toilet, personally."

"You're so unreasonable."

"Most of the time."

My mom took a drink of her wine while I leaned back in the beach chair, putting my feet on top of the outside table, much to my mom's dismay. She slapped my legs a few times until I put them back down on the ground. Brushing the grass and dirt off the table from my shoes, she asked, "I don't see why you put up such a fuss. You know how to swim. You've been in swim classes since you were young."

"And I never passed to the next level," I sighed.

This was a topic brought up a lot and I was growing tired of explaining myself. "I was twelve and swimming with six year olds."

"You went to a girl scout game in the H2O lovers section!"

"I don't know how I got into that one," I quickly defended. "Plus, I was in the lowest class. I was lower than the low."

"You were not."

“Mom,” I said, seriously. “There were three groups. Tunas, sharks and dolphins. I was so bad at swimming, they made a new group for me called tadpoles. I wasn’t allowed in the water past my ankles. ... I was eleven.”

My mom took another sip of wine. After thinking it over, she just nodded and said, “This is pretty pathetic.”
“I know.”

It always makes me wonder when people tell me how obsessed they are with swimming or water sports or boating. In sort of an unnecessary side note, water sports is also apparently a really weird sex thing which also helps prove my point that water is bad. Getting back on track, there are people out there who make their living to do with water. Even though they can very easily drown. Or get eaten by a lake monster. And that simply blows my mind. Why would anyone want to willingly want to go deep sea diving and risk having something go wrong and you die a horrible death? Some people are weird.

What boggles my mind more is when people willingly go to water for their death. I was at work the other day and we were talking about something that happened last year. I overheard one of my co-workers talking about how strange it is he has to drive over the bridge someone once killed themselves on every day. So curious, I perked up and asked, “Which bridge?”

“The one right out the window,” he said, pointing toward it as he spoke. It caused me to groan, since I had to walk across that bridge to get to work every day. The rushing water below me already bothered me and I didn’t want to think about someone jumping off of it.

“What happened?” I asked, knowing whatever the answer was I wouldn’t like it. But I would rather know than make up all these terrible situations in my head.

“Nobody really knows. Not like we can ask him,” my co-worker replied. “I think his girlfriend dumped him that day. And something else happened and it was too much. So he just took off his shoes and jumped. Which is sad.”

Sad was a bit of an understatement. I didn’t reply and let everyone else go back to talking. They mentioned how his mom used to come into the store a lot. After the death of her son, my co-workers said it was awkward to cash her out because they didn’t know what to say. She eventually stopped coming to the store. I wondered if she stopped coming because she moved away or because the cashiers made it awkward. I wouldn’t want to come to a place either where people stared at you and the only thought in their

mind was “her son killed himself”.

I had to walk across that bridge that night. It was ten past ten at night and there wasn't a car on the street. The fresh snow from the day had been pounded down into a rough path by everyone who had walked across it today. Which got me thinking, how many people walked across this bridge and had no idea someone had jumped off it and died? That this was the last solid surface someone had stood on before dying.

That thought is what made me stop in the middle of the bridge. I pushed some of the snow off the railing and leaned over to look down at the water. It was loud, fast, and completely black. Endlessly black, it seemed. It made my stomach turn just looking at it.

Seemed weird to me that someone could choose that way to die. I spent my whole life avoiding water and the thought of falling into something like that was my worst fear. He choose that death over all the other ways to go. Maybe he thought it was painless. Or he thought it was fast. The thought made me sick so I kept walking.

When I got home that night, I sat down and googled something that had bothered me about the story. The shoes. What did it matter he took off his shoes before he jumped? It's not like he should be worried about them being ruined. Google bluntly told me that there was no real way to know why people take off their shoes before they kill themselves like that. But guesses were it was so people could find their bodies easier or it was sort of a last attempt to leave a mark on the world.

It brought me back again, how do we keep score on water? Did water really win anything in that man's case? He choose that way. Water just helped him along. Either way, I decided trying to decide a point score on that was wrong and probably insulting to the man's memory. Still, the idea of it all still bothers me.

I think fate agreed, because karma gave me a nice big bite on the ass when I came into work the next day. Nobody was talking about it, it was old news to everyone but me. The snow from the night before had melted which made the vestibule of the store slippery and the rugs drenched. So I was sent out with the rug doctor to dry the rugs. All easy enough and sucking all the water out of the rugs and watching them come out completely dry was really satisfying. But the problem came when I went to unplug the rug doctor from the extension cord. I was rolling up the cord to the rug doctor, unknowingly pulling the extension cord out of a

puddle of water it had been sitting in. I started to unplug the rug doctor from the extension cord when it happened.

I got a really nasty shock. Literally. I was unable to let go for several seconds and when I did, my left arm was completely numb and unable to move. My heart rate had increased and I felt like it had dropped to my feet. I even swayed for a second but was able to catch myself on the nearby bottle machine to keep from falling onto my rear. But I didn't panic. My arm was completely limp at my side and I was just staring at the extension cord, which had been dropped onto the floor, in denial over what just happened. Then I gave my shoulder a little wiggle and thought to myself, wow I hope I don't lose that arm because that will be really inconvenient.

I went to pick up the cord with my movable hand, which in hindsight wasn't a good idea. I think I was still a little in shock over the whole thing. But when I moved the cord out of the way to keep any customers from hurting themselves, I realized the stupid mistake that caused me to get shocked. The extension cord had been sitting in a puddle of water. I hadn't been paying attention when I dropped it down after plugging it in.

But of course water, my old friend, would have a part to play in this. Angry, I went inside to let my co-worker, Kristina, know the extension cord was dangerous and that I couldn't move my arm. Which everyone else was more concerned about than me, but I stubbornly refused to go to the hospital and instead spent the rest of the night bagging groceries with one hand until the feeling in my arm came back.

"How are you feeling?" Kristina asked when it was getting close to closing.

"Pretty good," I answered. "I have Electric Avenue stuck in my head, though. I can't tell if that's in bad taste or not."

She chuckled and ticked away at her calculator for a few moments. Kristina had been working here for so long, she didn't have to look at the calculator anymore. She flipped through the checks she was adding up while ticking away without ever checking her work. Every now and then, she would look up at me. I think she was hoping I'd start up a new conversation, so when I didn't she tried herself. "It is weird going across that bridge now that you know what happened?"

I paused. Was it? I had to think on that. I don't think walking across the bridge itself bothered me. It was the

thought of what happened and the shoes that bothered me. But the fact I had to walk across it every night made me think about the story more than I normally would. Truthfully, I answered, "I don't know. A little, I guess."

"Don't let it get to you," she replied. "He wanted to die. His girlfriend left him, what more did he have? Well, in his mind, y'know?"

I bit my lip to hold back a reply. Kristina was one of those people who meant well but had a very untactful way of going about things. I didn't want to point it out, so I said nothing. I turned to pretend to sort through slips on my register. But after two minutes of holding back my tongue, I was unable to fight it anymore. "I don't think he wanted to die exactly."

"What?"

"I mean, like," I turned to look at her. "Do you know how busy Utica street is? Even at night, there are tons of cars. He took off his shoes, he jumped on a busy street... Maybe he didn't want to die but hoped someone would save him."

"You think he did it for attention?" She asked.

"No," I stammered. I wasn't sure how to get out exactly how I felt about it. I started to backtrack. "Just maybe he didn't mean to. Maybe he was thinking about and fell..." I trailed off. That didn't explain the shoes.

Kristina, not understanding my sudden dismay, shrugged it off as she finished with adding the checks, "Don't worry about it. It's all said and done now. It's not like you knew him."

"That's true..."

"Now what was that song you were singing?"

I knew she was trying to cheer me up, but it wasn't working. Still, I didn't want her to know how bothered I was by this. I forced a smile and started singing the chorus to Electric Avenue. I was always a pro at masking it all with a smile.

It was a tough walk home over the bridge that night. My arm was fine, by now. It had the prickly feeling in it for awhile, but it felt completely normal now. Which was a relief. I might not have panicked, but losing an arm would have been a huge challenge I wouldn't have been happy to deal with.

Arm woes aside, I stopped at my usual spot on the bridge to look over it again. I still couldn't shake the idea of someone wanting to willingly jump into something like that. I had just got shocked thanks in part to water and had enough

of it for one day. This guy let himself be surrounded by it in his last moments of life. It was just beyond me.

My roommate had mentioned the other night, in an attempt to cheer me up, that maybe the guy had been a swimmer or a boater. That he felt safe in the water and it wasn't some scary thing to him like it was to me. So when he jumped, he felt safe in the water and like he was at home. So his last moments weren't of dread and terror but of peace.

Watching the water now, I could see some of what she said. The sound of it, the way the waves curled, the colors it made when it hit along the rocks. It was calming in a way. I could sort of see what she was talking about. That was until I saw a few ducks land in the water and instantly get pulled under by a wave. That made up my mind.

Water was scary, dangerous and there was nothing beautiful or calming about it. It was dangerous in all shapes, sizes and forms and the fact anyone could feel any peace or calmness is beyond me. The fact people swim for pleasure will always confuse me. And I'm done trying to figure out why. People can go swim all they want, I'll stay on the sidelines where it's nice and dry. Up until water decides to have another go at me.

Woman Indisposed

Jenn Moss

But when I stop and notice-
I am disgusted.

The burning of a beautiful mane meant to be free.
Stings my senses.

The consistent clamping
Strains and pulls,
Strains and pulls.

She paints herself a new façade.
The slurp and click of her mascara,
Again, again.
In time her mask is firmly set,
Ready to be presented.

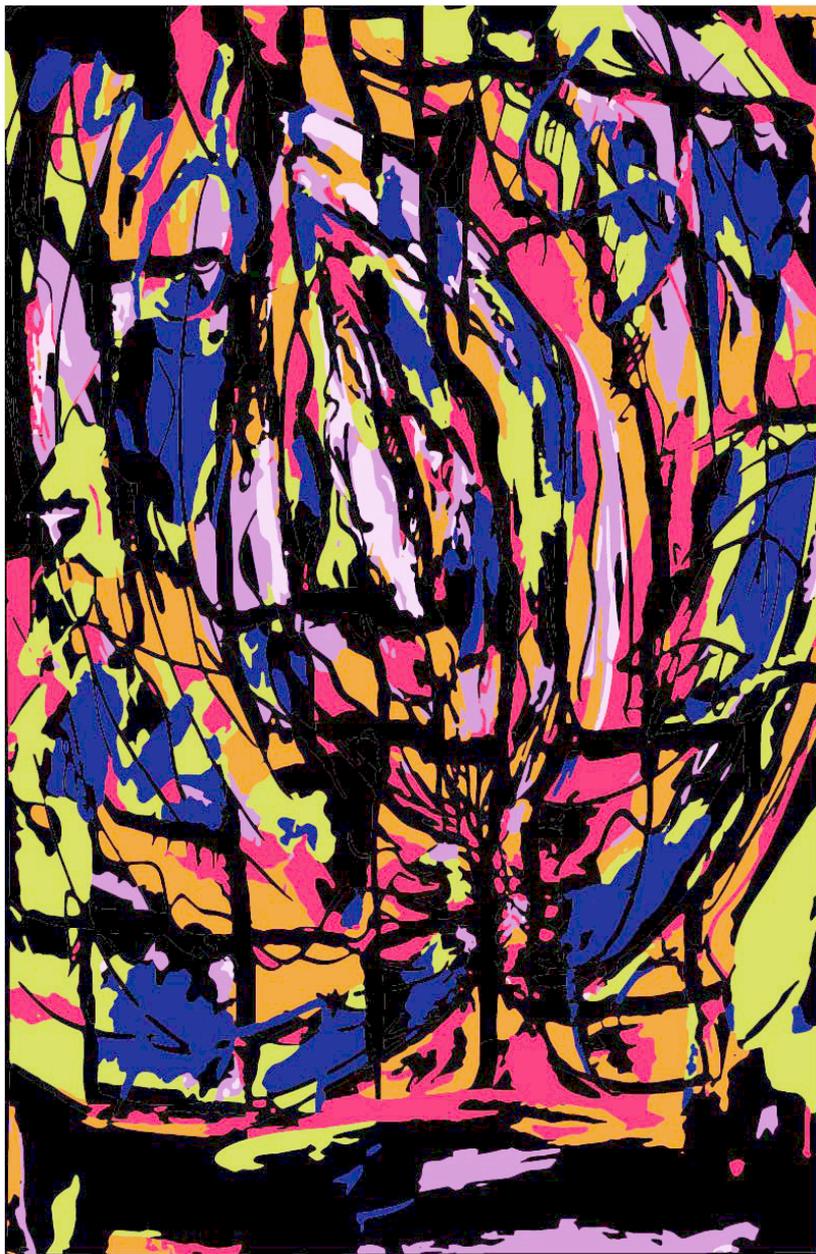
If only she knew that she
Was worthy,
But she only knows how to exist
When she feels wanted.

I know girls who are trying to fit into the social norm
Like fitting into last years prom dress.
Stomach and mind filled with nothingness
Like a barren lake after a strenuous drought.

I know girls who are playing Russian Roulette
with death.

This one is tongue tied,
Body filled with poison.
But when I stop and notice-
I realize we aren't all that different.

Woman
Taisha Laird



The White Party

Tarin Bonvino

She is worried about ashtrays. She's never had to think about ashtrays. Thirty years of evening gowns in eggshell, ivory, and cream. Thirty years of diamond bracelets dripping from slender wrists, thirty years of linen tablecloths smoothed over every surface, softly skimming the floor. Never once has that whiteness been disturbed by smoke. But times are changing.

The dinner has been prepared, it's waiting in the wings. Pristine porcelain, like hardened silk, is positioned on every table. Wine glasses with fragile stems stand at attention, silent and ready. Every detail bears her fingerprint.

In the end, she decides on a clear crystal ashtray. The glass catches the white reflection of the tablecloth, empty and expectant.

Guests arrive. She greets each one the same, an air kiss to both cheeks. She expects to identify the smokers immediately, to pinpoint the slight bulge of a cigarette pack in pocket or purse, but she is surprised some hours later to discover a young blonde hovering over the ashtray. It is smothered by dozens of spent cigarettes, smeared with red lipstick. The girl flicks her cigarette, the ash tumbles off the end and floats like a snowflake, down, down, past the crystal and onto the tablecloth.

Words From a Willow

Jacqueline Blocker-Marshall

Dark Bark Creek Eerily
Strolling around the lake
Sap on your hair, flowing—
Released through your draped curtains
Tapping the ground
40 ft. tall your open crown.
I admire your beauty—
For we are one.

Your allure through the rose window—
No snapshots or water based paint could gift such wisdom.
I knew you weren't sleeping,
When you invited me to dwell under the shadows of your
limbs,
Entwined by those tickly tear drop leaves.
As you nip the waters with grace,
I offered to listen and you spoke—

My stalk grey and strong, my astringent fragrance- alike,
Speaks balance in all things.
As I stretch my feather veined branches over you
They sway—
Flowing in sync with the song of the wind,
In pliancy we withstand the pressures of life
Be Rooted –
50ft. deep

This black, moist, clay grasped firm around my ankles.
Anchor your life—
“Impressive” I uttered. I knew grace rarely made sense for
those on the outside looking in.

Stuck With You
Megan Mullen

INT. HOTEL ELEVATOR - DAY

SHANE (23) stands in a tuxedo with a boutonniere in his breast pocket staring at his Blackberry phone. He doesn't look up as the ELEVATOR DINGS and three other passengers get on.

Two men holding hands, GARY and JERRY, (early 40s) dressed in suits board the elevator with a young blond woman wearing a quirky orange dress, JESSYKA (20).

The doors close and the elevator starts rising. Jessyka stares at SHANE as he CURSES at his phone. He looks up.

SHANE

Oh, fucking perfect, just the faggots I wanted to see. No wonder this day has gone to Hell.

GARY

What did you just call us, you little shit?!

Jerry places a hand on Gary's shoulder.

JERRY

Easy there, Gar-Bear. You know how he feels about us.

GARY

Do you honestly expect-

JESSYKA

Fuck off Shaneon. What, our dad isn't good enough to go to your wedding? That's such horseshit.

SHANE

Don't call me that! My name is Shane

dammit!

(laughs a bit harshly)

Our dad? Read my lips, bitch. I. Don't.
Have. A. Father.

*Jerry looks at Shane, his expression
crushed.*

JERRY

But Shane... You used to call me Dad all the time when you were little... I know I was with your mom then, but I haven't changed. I just have Gary now.

*Gary visibly tenses and grits his teeth,
hands working into fists.*

GARY

We should have never bothered coming. Let the bitch-spawn have his cake and eat it too.

JERRY

Gary! That isn't helping! I came to see my son get married, and I'm not leaving until he does.

*Jerry stands firm. He crosses his arms and
glares at Gary.*

SHANE

(sarcastically)

Well, I'd love to make all your dreams come true, but if you cocksuckers hadn't noticed, the elevator stopped and the piece of shit isn't opening.

*All four turn to look at
the elevator doors. The pushed
buttons are no longer highlighted, and
screen that tells which floor you're on is
blank.*

JESSYKA

Ugh, look at what you assholes did! All of your negative energy has corrupted the system!

All three guys look at her like she's crazy.

SHANE

(rolling his eyes at Jessyka)

Shut the fuck up, Jess-psycho.

(sarcastically to Jerry)

Well, oh father of mine, go ahead and do something. Show me how much you care and fix this.

(mutters)

Hell knows I'm already missing the march.

JERRY

Okay. We all just need to calm down and figure out-

STATIC BLARES from the SPEAKER SYSTEM as Gary pushes the Elevator Assistance button.

GARY

Hello? The elevator stopped moving. It appears we're trapped.

More STATIC.

JESSYKA

I told you, this is Karma's way of telling us we need a change. I read it in the lobby tea leaves.

Gary spins on his heels to face Jessyka and Jerry. He scowls hard, face turning red.

GARY

A change!?! Funny. You mean like the one Jerry underwent, going from fucking women to fucking men? Like some... some... Gay Betrayal!?

JERRY

Well, who's being the bitchface now? Maybe I'm just attracted to you because you act like a twat ninety percent of the time, Gary!

The two men face each other, fighting in the background. They aren't paying attention to Shane or Jessyka anymore.

SHANE

So, Jess-psych-a, regretting inviting them yet? Stupid bitch, ruining my wedding day.

JESSYKA

Ruining your day? You should be thanking me! At least you had parents that cared about you growing up! Me and the other orphans weren't that lucky. You heartless shit.

SHANE

Boo hoo for the little Orphan Annie!

(yelling over everyone)

You know, I'd rather be in Hell than stuck in this fucking elevator with you psychos!

The doors fly open, revealing a black vortex beyond. A grisly scythe shoots into the elevator. The blade hooks around Shane's right ankle and locks like a shackle.

SHANE SCREAMS and jumps back, but the scythe yanks him forward, causing him to lose his balance and crash to the floor.

Shane claws for anything he can hold onto.

*He grabs
Jerry's pant leg as
he's dragged past.*

SHANNON

Help! What the fuck is happening?!

The force of the scythe has Shannon half in, and half out of the elevator. His grip on Jerry is dragging the man with him.

JERRY

Don't worry, son, I've got you. Just hold on to me!

Jerry braces himself, grabbing one of the elevator hand rails, trying to keep them both from being sucked away.

JESSYKA

You tempted fate, Shane! You brought this upon yourself!!

(making the symbol of the cross)
The power of Christ compels you! Begone, demon!

Jessyka continues her frantic hand gestures, glaring at the scythe as Jerry and Shane struggle against its grip.

GARY P.O.V. - ELEVATOR BUTTONS

are glowing again. Gary glances out at the vortex and the solitary skeletal hand holding the scythe. His eyes linger on Shane who is already waist deep in the blackness. He returns his gaze to Jerry.

CLOSE ON - JERRY'S HANDS

are slipping as sweat slicks his palms. He loses his grip on the hand rail.

BACK TO SCENE

Gary mashes the Close Elevator Door button as Jerry is catapulted towards the vortex with Shane. The doors start to close, forcing Shane to let go of his father.

SHANE

Shit, no! Don't let it take me! Dad!

The vortex swallows Shane whole. HIS SCREAMS still echo as the door completely shuts.

The elevator begins moving upward again, SOFT HARP MUSIC playing from its' SPEAKERS.

Gary steps towards JERRY, holding him and kissing the top of his head as he begins to CRY for his son.

Jessyka stares at the floor indicator sign. It reads TOP FLOOR.

The ELEVATOR DINGS as the doors open to reveal a blinding white light.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)
... Our next story. Tragedy struck today as a groom got cold feet, in fact, very cold feet. Our reports indicate that he and three others were found dead on their way to up to the wedding after an unfortunate elevator crash...

CUT TO CREDITS

short lived

Daniel Land

People. People. Please.
We have no pleasure
because pleasure
is human. A form --
and so obtuse
a mind, the glare she
gives... the broken shade.
A thought she hands
you as the beggar,

little girl beggar. This pleasure,
such a contrary; brittle
bug. Condemned bit,
this pleasure-bound,
party shrug, screaming
hard. Grabs you in all
the wrong ways, becomes
a pleasure cruise.
Becomes your noxious name.
Name your very fears –
fear like the merrily used
prostitute girl. Simmered
shyly down.

Sake Tanuki
Alexandra Peretin



The Amulet
Dylan Woods

The entire stage is pitch black except for one spotlight which illuminates a kitchen. ISAAC is searching frantically through the cabinets, pulling drawers out and turning them upside-down. In the darkness there are strange noises: claws scratching against the ground, like some enormous dog is walking around, and strange sucking noises, like tentacles gripping the ground and being pulled off. They're scattered, a few seconds apart.

Isaac is dressed in a disheveled suit and tie, like a professor that got laid off and spent the night making regretful decisions. He stops for a moment and watches the surrounding darkness with mounting fear. Each second seems to bring them closer, like they're picking up on his trail.

Isaac renews his search with vigor, tearing through the place in his fervor. He flips over the table and checks its underside; he tosses chairs aside and lifts the rug. It's then that he finds it: a glowing jade amulet.

ISAAC

(whispering, chanting)

And he who owns the amulet of jade shall see beyond the veil. And when the final price is paid the Old Ones will prevail."

There's a scratching at the door. It sounds like a dog that wants to get in. Isaac backs away slowly, clutching at the amulet. The scratching becomes more vigorous, then finally becomes pounding, like the creature is throwing itself against the door. The sucking sounds of the tentacles are all around and constant now, echoing throughout the room.

Isaac faces the door and prepares to throw

the amulet at whatever is on the other side.

*At once: the door bursts open, Isaac throws
the amulet, and the lights go out.*

*Cabinets crash and items are toppled. Isaac
screams. A dog howls.*

Seven Minutes

Mike Bifaro

“Here we go, kids. Round two.” Chad says with a smirk. I watch him grip the bottle, testing the torque with his wrist, giving the thing enough momentum to really humiliate somebody. He lets it fly, and so begins our fucked little game of Russian roulette.

The bottle starts to slow and Ashley bites her lip. Charles starts scratching at his chin and glances nervously from Haley to Jane. Chad just lifts his chin and smiles triumphantly.

I watch this madness take place, taking in their fear ridden faces, almost appreciating the sick humor of the scenario, until the bottle stops. Equal sighs of relief and anticipation ease into the air as the unholy mouth of the Budweiser bottle points at me.

“Lucky man.” Chad mutters. “Alright, choose wisely.”

I glance around the circle. Hayley glares back and Jane is playing with her cell phone. Ashley looks cross eyed at the stray lock of hair on her forehead and swats at it relentlessly. I stop on the mousy girl staring wide eyed at the floor.

“Stacy. I’ll go with Stacy.”

The oh’s and ah’s fill the room, all eyes diverting her way. Stacy looks horrified.

“Alright, seven minutes on the patio. Get out there.”

Chad shoves me through the door. He squeezes my shoulder and I look back in time to see him air humping the wall. Stacy follows and the door slams. I take a seat in a lawn chair and she starts to blush.

“Look, Jesse, we don’t-

“No, I know. I mean, I figured I’d pick you just to, like, save you from...Chad.”

“Oh, yeah. Thanks, he’s a creep.” She sits and stares at the ground. I try to think of something to say. I stand suddenly and she looks up. I can feel my face burning.

“So, do you know where you’re going next year?”

“What?” She says, confused.

“Like, for college.”

“Oh. No, I don’t know yet.”

“Yeah. Me neither.”

I turn and stare into Chad’s backyard. The sun is setting. I take a deep breath and spin around. Stacy stares at me. She smiles and pushes a lock of hair out of her face.

My palms start to sweat.

“Do you want to...” My voice trails off.

“No,” she says quickly. “Not, like, unless you want to.”

“I mean, it’s just a game.”

I sit next to her. She starts to blush. I move in closer.

She whispers, “Just don’t make it weird, okay?”

I stop. “What do you mean make it weird?”

“Like, just don’t be weird about it. It’s just a kiss.”

“Why would I be weird about it? You’re the one being weird.”

“Me?! You’re the one being all awkward and shit. Why don’t you just kiss me?”

“Fine!”

“Then do it!”

We both glare at each other. I lean in. Our lips lock for a few seconds. Finally I pull away and she starts to giggle.

She smiles and says, “You really suck at this.”

Bored and Horny
Joel N. Dodge



Collecting

Kayla Lappino

I like to collect things
Have ever since I can-
Was conceived.
The joke is I collected
All those serpentine, wiggling, tadpoles,
From my father
And maybe an entire ovary
To create myself.
That's why I'm an only child.

I remember,
Collecting.
Not dolls
Or trading cards
Though I had a few of both.
But grass stains
Tummy aches
Imaginary friends
Talking shadows.

I remember,
Collecting.
Hours in front of the TV
Made up games
Silence
Tears on my pillow.

I remember,
Collecting.
Bud pulltab
bouquet
Sheets of rolling paper to burn
A drug store
Bruised holes up my arms
Music to play at my funeral...

Second Date Questions

Todd Robert Stark

The restaurant is crowded but intimate. We talk over salad and tilapia, laid out on a tablecloth as red as our wine. Things are going well.

“I believe in past lives,” he says shyly, “I feel such a strong connection to other times, specifically ancient Egypt. How about you?”

“How do I feel about reincarnation?” I’m nervous. It was easier earlier on; being questioned about favorite foods and movies. “I do believe in it...just not in the usual way.”

“Is it something more New Age?” he asks, resting his chin on his hand in that *eager listener* pose I like.

“Sort of. For me dying is like going to sleep and being born is waking up again. I can’t remember all the details of my past lives, but I get really vivid flashbacks sometimes.”

“Wow.” His expression is entirely earnest. “What’s the farthest back that you can remember?”

“Uh, the late Paleozoic era.”

“What?”

“I think I was an amphibian.” His smile is fading but I keep talking. “Or maybe a reptile, it’s hard to tell.”

“You think my beliefs are funny, huh?” He gets up angrily, but I don’t notice.

I’m watching the water, waiting patiently for movement. Somewhere in my tiny, dark, lizard-brain comes a strange premonition: one day I won’t have to fight to live. One day my meals will be served to me, and my biggest worry will be having no one to share them with.

First Grade

Olga Reyes

The taste of vomit lingered in my mouth,
threatening to trigger a feeling
I did not want to show.
Their lips moved
But I did not understand.

Why can't they speak Spanish?

Hollow faces filled the room
and plastic smiles lingered in my mind
like the scent of my vomit
waiting to trigger something
I did not want to show.

Why are they calling my name?

Their words were pushed together
like Scrabble letters in a bag.
My heart, no longer in my chest,
turned to lava that burned my stomach.

Small bodies stood in a circle,
as if a ritual to the Gods
was about to begin.
They fiercely clapped their small hands,
fire and thunder emerging from their palms.

Broken crayons and pencil shavings
lined the edges of a table
as if it was an offering to the Gods.
Was I to be sacrificed?

Their lips moved
But I did not understand.

Sidekick
Elmer Beriguete

EXT. ROOF TOP - DAY

AMAZING MAN

Where have you been Fantastic Boy? I've been looking everywhere for you.

FANTASTIC BOY

My apologies Amazing Man, It's just that I got held up at the grocery store buying our dinner for tonight.

AMAZING MAN

Why on earth are you shopping for food? You know our licensed super hero butler does all of that for us.

FANTASTIC BOY

I know, I know. It's just that I thought it would be nice to make something for a change.

AMAZING MAN

So this has nothing to do with your arch nemesis Iron Snake looking for you?

FANTASTIC BOY

What? Of course not, I had no idea he was even in town. I should really defeat him soon then.

AMAZING MAN

How about now.. I just saw him in front of the town hall, he's holding the Mayor captive.

FANTASTIC BOY

That's horrible, why don't you take this one today, I'll stop him next time. I'm real-

ly excited to cook this meal. I swear you're gonna love it.

AMAZING MAN

Really.. What are you cooking then?

FANTASTIC BOY

Umm.. Well the thing is. It's a surprise dinner and you can't know what we're having.

AMAZING MAN

The Mayor only has a few minutes before Iron Snake bites his head off. I'm sure you can cook up this amazing meal afterward.

FANTASTIC BOY

How about this, I create a diversion and you can attack Iron Snake while he's distracted.

AMAZING MAN

I'm not helping you on this one Fantastic Boy.

FANTASTIC BOY

Why not!

AMAZING MAN

I can't carry your weight all the time. It's time for you to start being a team player.

FANTASTIC BOY

But I am a team player. I'm your sidekick!

AMAZING MAN

More like a cheerleader. I haven't seen you raise a finger since I've hired you. I'm starting to wonder what's so fantastic about you.

FANTASTIC BOY

Are you serious? How about my fantastic awareness. I can see anything coming from a mile away.

AMAZING MAN

Can you see that mother breast feeding her baby four blocks down.

FANTASTIC BOY

Of course I can. Which direction?

AMAZING MAN

East, from that blue car over there.

FANTASTIC BOY

Yup, I see her alright.

AMAZING MAN

Trick question, there is no breastfeeding mother.

FANTASTIC BOY

(laughing)

What? I totally knew that. I was just joking around. That's all.

AMAZING MAN

Okay then, why don't you jump off the ledge of this roof. I'm sure someone with such fantastic powers can manage to survive the fall.

FANTASTIC BOY

I don't do heights, it was on my rèsùmè. Remember?

AMAZING MAN

You're jumping off regardless, your superhealing should keep you alive. As I recall that was on your rèsùmè correct?

FANTASTIC BOY

Can't I just make our surprise dinner? There's gonna be bacon!

AMAZING MAN

I commend you for using my love of bacon as a bargaining tool. But I must refuse your offer and ask that you jump off this roof before I push you down.

FANTASTIC BOY

but-

AMAZING MAN

You have ten seconds.

FANTASTIC BOY

You can't do this. I'm your sidekick, remember?

AMAZING MAN

Ten.

FANTASTIC BOY

Remember that time I took a video of you pulverizing that giant squid back into the sewers. You loved that!

AMAZING MAN

Nine.

FANTASTIC BOY

Just relax man. Let's just go fight Iron Snake, alright?

AMAZING MAN

Eight.

FANTASTIC BOY

Why are you still counting I said I would go.

AMAZING MAN

Seven.

FANTASTIC BOY

Are you deaf man? I said I'll go defeat Iron Snake.

AMAZING MAN

Five.

FANTASTIC BOY

Wait, what? You just skipped six. That's not fair. You have to say six.

AMAZING MAN

Three.

FANTASTIC BOY

You're not even counting down correctly. Why aren't you counting down numerically!

AMAZING MAN

Zero.

FANTASTIC BOY

Oh come on. You didn't even say one!

AMAZING MAN

Looks like I'm in need of a new side kick.

Fainting

Phoebe Lamont

Primroses appear in my garden, red and blue
With yellow eyes, in the springtime. They seem to
appear out of nowhere, first in the ground and grass

and then my eyes, a thousand for every drop
of rain in a spring cloudburst, a white black bright
colored glory that brings me to the ground, my head
off my shoulders and tongue and throat blank, dry.
My skin becomes clouds, and then

dazzling gray dots everywhere.

Free to Be Me

Laurie Jackson

Only three minutes left. I take another bite of my blue raspberry popsicle...Brain freeze!

My lips and tongue are blue. People might think I'm extremely cold...I could get sent down to the nurse, but who would want to go to the nurse? Her office smells like old people.

First in line, I burst through the doors. Running fast over the quicksand, jumping to the ladder, which slowly sinks. I'm the monkey queen. Hanging upside down, I pull myself up in between the two bars and crawl on the top, making my way to the castle. I go down the ladder, pushing the others out of my way, zipping across on the bar over the lava. I reach the log bridge, shaking up and down. Arms out, one foot in front of the other, don't look down at your doom. I jump onto the raft, going up the slide...I hear the teachers protest, but they can't stop me now. I reach the top of the tower, slide down the spiral river slide.

At the bottom, I'm caught, taken by the hand. The lunch lady says something, but I can't stop staring, her hands are so wrinkly, like mush, and old. She wouldn't even make it across the quicksand, let alone work her way over the lava. The wooden picnic table, where I carved my name, awaits. I take a seat, and think about tomorrow. I'll make it to the swings.

Good Thoughts
Nikki Hitze



Will You Laugh With Me Tonight
Shelby Coyle

Fire, fire, burning bright
Will you keep me safe tonight
Flicker, flicker, burn and blaze
Keep me in your light always
Crackle, crackle, crunch, consume
At my back, please always loom
Breathe, breathe, fly ahead
Follow in my trail of dread
Flare, flare, lick the sky
Feast on flesh and feel them die
Fire, fire, burning bright
Will you laugh with me tonight

George

Jessica Ekert

The old man sits back in his booth and fiddles with his big round glasses, trying to wipe a smear off the lens. When he puts them back on, they immediately slide down the bridge of his nose. Above the frame there is an absence where his eyebrows once were, but it's been years since they've disappeared.

George picks up the newspaper and returns to his crossword. A waitress comes over to refill his coffee and skips over the untouched one next to his.

"Thank you, Rose."

She puts her hand on his shoulder before she walks away.

The bell above the front door jingles with the entrance of a new customer. He looks up, his eyes widen, but he is disappointed when he sees who it isn't.

George fills in the last crossword answer and gently sets the paper down next to his coffee. He shifts his legs around, grabs for his cane and stands up in a slow, aching way.

On his way toward the door, he walks up to Rose and slips a five into her hand. He closes her fingers around the bill and briefly holds her hand in both of his before he walks away.

Rose begins to clean up George's table when she glances at his crossword. There, across and down, is the word Joan. Joan, Joan, Joan. Joan is the answer to every question. Rose slips the newspaper into her apron pocket and stares out the window, somewhere past the grim sky.

Last Night on Earth
Veronica Pysnack

(BRADEN sits on a beat up couch in the basement at JIM'S house. There are voices and music in the background, indicating a party taking place upstairs. BRADEN checks his phone.)*

BRADEN

Less than ten minutes to midnight. Cheers.

(BRADEN takes a long drink from his glass. The basement door opens. Enter ASHLEE with a drink in her hand. She looks confused when she sees BRADEN.)

ASHLEE

This isn't the ladies room, is it?

BRADEN

Uh, no. It's not.

ASHLEE

(giggles)

Well, of course not. There aren't any other drunken skinny ass sluts in line to puke out their brains before they go and get it on with any random guy up there.

BRADEN

Um, you do realize that you just called yourself a drunken skinny ass slut?

ASHLEE

You wanna know a secret?

BRADEN

What?

(ASHLEE looks around, then hurries over and plops down next to BRADEN.)

ASHLEE

(whispers loudly)

I'm not drunk, and I'm not a slut either.

BRADEN

Oh. Good to know I guess.

ASHLEE

I'm Ashlee by the way.

BRADEN

Braden.

(They shake hands.)

ASHLEE

So what are you doing down here by yourself, Braden? The party's upstairs.

BRADEN

I could ask you the same thing.

ASHLEE

Ah. But I asked you first, did I not?

BRADEN

I just... wanted to be alone.

ASHLEE

Alone? On a night like tonight?

BRADEN

You know it's most likely a hoax, right?

ASHLEE

Yeah, but at the same time... what if it isn't?

BRADEN

Oh God. Don't tell me you actually believe in that stuff.

ASHLEE

You wanna know another secret?

*(Before BRADEN can respond,
ASHLEE continues on.)*

No.

(A beat)

Well, maybe. But still you have to wonder:
could this really be our last night on Earth?

BRADEN

Ugh. Forget this.

*(BRADEN gets up. He goes to open the door,
but the door won't budge. He starts pounding
on the door.)*

Hey! Anyone there? I'm trapped down here!

ASHLEE

We're trapped down here.

BRADEN

Hello?! Anybody?! HELLO?!

ASHLEE

The music's too loud up there. No one's
going to hear you, Braden.

(BRADEN checks his phone.)

BRADEN

Great. No service.

ASHLEE

Don't make it sound like it's a bad thing.

BRADEN

And I'm supposed to be rejoicing that I'm
going to spend the rest of my night with some
drunk girl who claims she's not?

ASHLEE

Oh, well if you say it like that then it's...
Hey! I only had one of these.

(She holds up her glass.)

Or was it two? It couldn't have been three.
Or was it...?

(BRADEN sits back down on the couch.)

BRADEN

Well, what do we do now?

ASHLEE

We could talk.

BRADEN

Talk? About what?

ASHLEE

I don't know. Maybe, just maybe, about... things.

BRADEN

I don't think we have anything in common.

ASHLEE

That's where the whole point of talking comes in.

BRADEN

Fine. Let's talk.

ASHLEE

Great! So what brought you to the party tonight?

BRADEN

It's my friend's Jim's house. He decided to throw a party on this "last night on Earth."

(BRADEN laughs, but stops when he sees ASHLEE'S serious look. He clears his throat.)

I, uh, came here with my girlfriend.

ASHLEE

Oh... And where is she right now? Shouldn't the two of you be getting it on before—?

BRADEN

Her other boyfriend came and she decided to

spent tonight with him.

ASHLEE

Ouch. That sucks.

BRADEN

Yeah. I remember the first time I saw her, sitting on the bleachers as she cheered our team on and—

ASHLEE

Okay, new topic. Any hobbies?

BRADEN

I play lacrosse.

ASHLEE

Besides that.

*(She points to the jersey that
BRADEN is wearing.)*

I meant outside of school.

BRADEN

I...

ASHLEE

C'mon, just say it. We might die anyway. No one else is going to know if you like to watch porn.

BRADEN

What?! No! That's not what I was going to say!

ASHLEE

Then what?

BRADEN

I... like to read.

ASHLEE

Interesting. A bookworm among the brainless lacrosse players. What's your favorite book? And please don't say Fifty Shades of Grey.

*(BRADEN looks away, twiddling his thumbs.
ASHLEE looks disgusted.)*

Oh dear God!

*(BRADEN laughs, raising his
hands in surrender.)*

BRADEN

I'm kidding! I just wanted to see your reaction.

ASHLEE

(mumbles)

And he's a smart ass, too.

BRADEN

Anyway, I have too many favorites. Uh, how about you? Any hobbies?

ASHLEE

Not too many. I'm in the Drama Club at school. And I play paintball on the weekends.

BRADEN

Wow, that's... interesting I guess.

(BRADEN checks his phone.)

ASHLEE

Am I really that uninteresting to you?

BRADEN

What? No. I'm... just checking for service that's all.

ASHLEE

You mean so you can escape from me and my weirdness before the world comes to an end, right?

BRADEN

No, I—

ASHLEE

Yeah, whatever.

(A beat)

What time is it anyway?

BRADEN

11:55.

ASHLEE

Oh, boy. How do you think we'll go? Will we all have a heart attack at once and die? No. Maybe we'll see a bright light right before we are blown to bits. Or will there just be pitch blackness that engulfs us and we'll go peacefully? Personally I like that better than being eaten alive by zombies. Oh! I already have goose bumps!

(ASHLEE looks over at BRADEN, sitting quietly.)

Braden, why aren't you freaking out?

(BRADEN gets up from the couch.)

BRADEN

Because the world isn't going to end! Don't you get it?! They just want to get everyone all hyped up, ready to take their overdose with vodka, and for what? Just to add another figure to the suicide statistics? It's all a God damn hoax!

(Several moments pass.)

ASHLEE

(quietly)

Wanna know another secret?

BRADEN

No, I don't want to hear any more of your God damn secrets! I just want to get out of here!

ASHLEE

Fine. Tell me one of yours.

BRADEN

Give me a reason why I should!

ASHLEE

I don't know. Maybe it's because we could die within the next few minutes. Maybe I just want to know what kind of person you are since you're the last person I'm going to see before it all ends. Maybe it's because I don't want to think about the world ending, and talking about anything is the only way to take my mind off of it. How's that for a reason, asshole?

(ASHLEE turns away, hiding a tear she is wiping away.)

BRADEN

(sighs)

I'm terrified.

ASHLEE

What? But... you said—

BRADEN

Because I was trying not to think about the possibility of my life ending just like

(Snaps his fingers)

that. There's so much left in my life that I haven't done yet.

ASHLEE

And you think I'm not in the same situation?

(BRADEN sits back down on the couch.)

BRADEN

You're right, I'm sorry.

(A beat)

So tell me, what haven't you done yet?

ASHLEE

Well, I haven't gone to Disney World.

BRADEN

I have. It's all right.

ASHLEE

Don't be that person right now.

BRADEN

Sorry. It's the most wonderful and magical place on Earth!

ASHLEE

Now you're just being silly.

BRADEN

Don't want to ruin your thoughts about Disney in your last minutes remaining.

ASHLEE

Yeah, I guess I can accept that. How about you? What haven't you done yet?

(BRADEN looks uncomfortable.)

Are you okay?

BRADEN

I've... never had a home run.

ASHLEE

Oh, Braden, it's okay. I'm sure there are plenty of professional players who haven't gotten a-

BRADEN

That's not what I meant.

ASHLEE

Huh? But... Wait, don't you play lacrosse... Oh! So you're still a-

BRADEN

Yup.

ASHLEE

Huh. Well, if it makes you feel any better, I'm still on first.

BRADEN
(laughs)

You're so weird, Ashlee.

ASHLEE
Yeah, well, guess that's the last thing
you'll think of me.

BRADEN
You know... we still have a couple of minutes
left.

(A few moments pass.)

ASHLEE
What are you suggesting there, Braden?

BRADEN
Nothing! Just... you know... maybe we could..

ASHLEE
How about we just hold hands for a while?

BRADEN
I guess I'd be fine with that.

(ASHLEE gives BRADEN a look.)

Sorry. I would really like that.

(They hold hands.)

ASHLEE
This is nice.

*(From upstairs, JIM is heard shouting over
the noise of the party.)*

JIM
All right guys! Ten seconds to midnight!

*(Everyone upstairs begins the
countdown.)*

BRADEN
Well, least we got to know each other before

this.

ASHLEE

Yeah. It was nice getting to know you,
Braden.

(Just as everyone reaches "3... 2..." BRADEN and ASHLEE lean in towards each other. But before anyone can yell out "One" the LIGHTS go out suddenly. After a few moments, the sound of a door being broken into is heard.)

A flashlight shines through the darkness, searching. The LIGHTS come back on. JIM, with a flashlight in hand, stands near the basement door, hanging off its hinges.)

JIM

Damn house can't take all this high tech stuff! Stupid breaker, stupid door, stupid... uh.

(JIM spots ASHLEE and BRADEN tangled up in a loving embrace on the couch. JIM clears his throat loudly.)

ASHLEE

(screams)

Ah! Who are you? Don't you know how to knock?

JIM

Excuse me? This is my house. I should be asking who you... Braden?

(BRADEN gets up from under ASHLEE, who falls off the couch with a cry.)

BRADEN

Hey man, what's up?

JIM

What are you doing down here?

BRADEN

Well, the door got stuck or something, so... wait, when you said "down here," did you mean in a "We're in Hell" kind of situation

or-

JIM

No, I did not. Now get your head out of your ass and get it upstairs. Elizabeth's looking for you.

(JIM exits. BRADEN groans and covers his face.)

ASHLEE

Who's Elizabeth?

BRADEN

My ex-girlfriend.

ASHLEE

(bursts out laughing)

Oh, wait until she finds out that you got to third!

(A beat)

I don't feel so good...

(ASHLEE ducks behind the couch and pukes.)

BRADEN

(groans)

Oh God. Why didn't the world end like it was supposed to?

(Blackout.)

The End

Venom

Sarah Fessler

Words are venom from the mouths of snakes,
Snakes speaking soft sincerity on Saturdays.

Spittle splashes as the words hit my face,
The smell of crisp wind blown salty air reminds me of
Ocean waves and the tastes of summer.

The words tasted like red, rolling off a hiss,
The hiss of the past, spitting venom as if the words were
sweet whispers of love.

But words aren't really venom.

Sitting on cold pavement,
The snow falls on my face like shooting stars in the night,
While Smurfs dance exotic in teardrops from clouds.
Because they are blue they are sad.

To be or not to be.
The cold rain of love
Gives way to broken pieces, So,
We ran fast like cement to escape the words,
And ended up walking through walls.

Humans can be so careless with words,
So tomorrow we will fly to different universes in the sky,
To bright nights and dark moons.

I will forget to not forget,
Aus schaden wird man klug.
The boulder says "move me".
Snakes slither silently through sleepy grass
during silent nights.

They Say You Die Three Times

Tarin Bonvino

"I know what that is," he told his mom after she hung up the phone. He was five, so he knew a lot of things now. "It happens in movies. Especially to soldiers. They get hit and they lose the war. It happened to Mufasa, too. He got trampled, then he couldn't be Simba's daddy anymore." He released her hand and bounded over to the snack cupboard. He snatched up the fruit snacks and waved them in the air. "Can I have these?" he asked. His mother didn't answer. She was sitting very still, like he was supposed to during story time at pre-school. The phone was in her lap, but she wasn't calling anyone. She just stared at it. He shrugged and tore open the fruit snacks. "I don't get one thing though," he admitted, popping the fruit snacks into his mouth. "Why didn't they just get up afterwards?" He talked with his mouth full, but she didn't say anything. She just stared and stared.

She was supposed to be sad, but mostly she was cold. January air, bitter from not belonging to a more interesting month, blew through the mausoleum and attacked the mourners, tearing at hats and black coats and carefully-styled hair. Old women always spent too much time on their hair, she thought. She tore her eyes away from the sea of silver-blue curls and turned to the coffin in the middle of the room. It was pretty –she could admit that much. The wood was a deep, dark brown, natural looking but impressive, with ornate gold handles carved in the shape of the Last Supper. A little superfluous for something that was going to be shoved in the ground, but she supposed that old women were entitled to their little indulgences.

Three years ago to the day, she'd received a phone call in the middle of the night. Afterwards, she'd stayed up for hours, gasping out his name in desperate, choked whispers. She'd fall asleep for seconds at a time, always awakened by his face flashing through her mind. Three years ago she'd said his name every day, wrote it in notebooks and told it to strangers, whispered it while she lit candles and before she got in her car. Two years ago, this anniversary was one of the most important days on the calendar, circled accordingly. A year ago she still thought about him every time she saw a cross on the side of the road. Now she only remembered it after she blew out candles, when the smoke began to slowly dissipate, twirling and spinning through the air. It was almost noon before she realized what day it was.

ode to the real fairy queen

Daniel Land

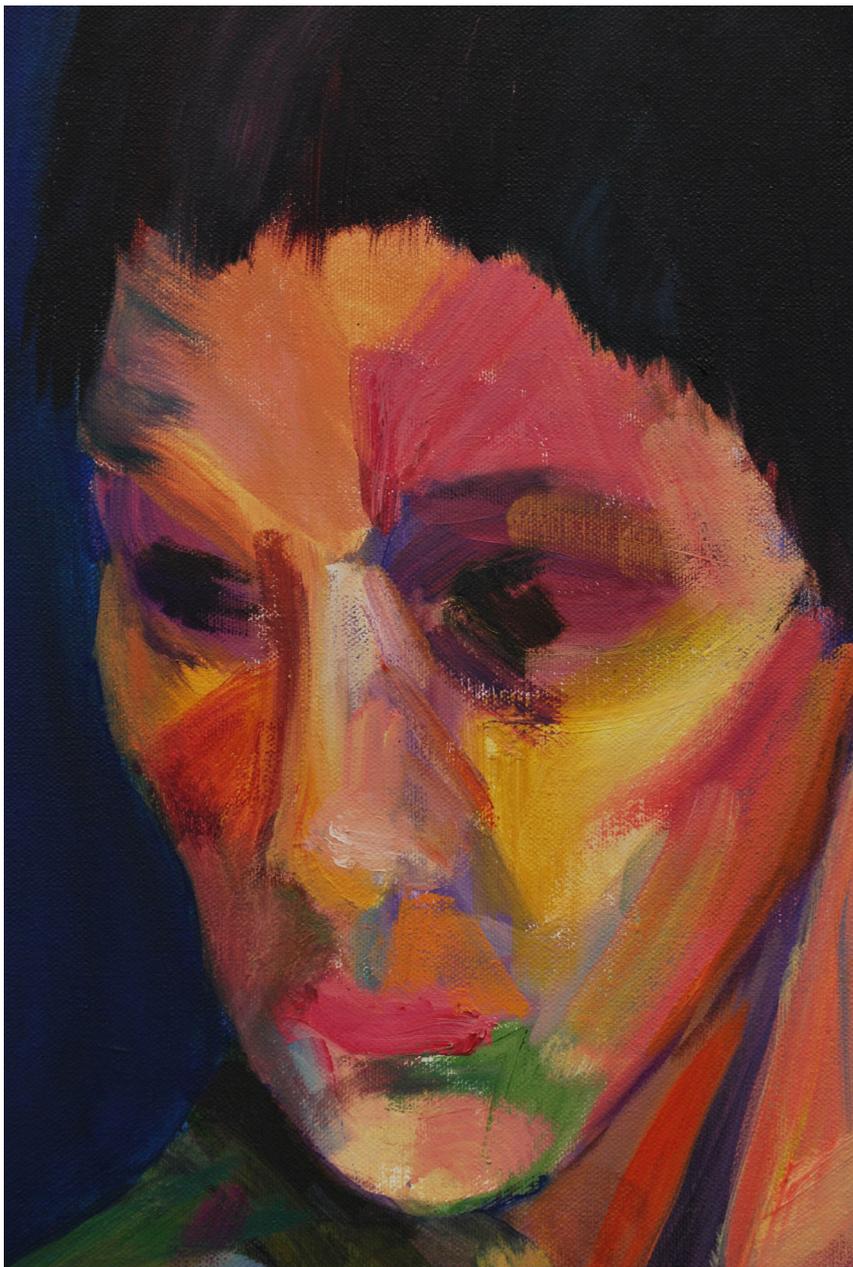
How does it feel to hold
the sun in something
of a timid grasp,
Miss? Does it do well
to warm the spirits,
or calm your elation;
brighten your pale face
to match the glow? You
yourself are an image,
and it sets length to
motion... A circular
breeze that pushes
a birdhouse in lock
to a whole vivid mesh,
while still spinning slow

enough to prove itself
against the calamity.
How do you mean

to carry life in a dress,
and where, by chance,
is the one moment you
intersect your own infinities?
What becomes of you?
In the springtime, you're
a fix in everything that
holds you proper.
Yet when the sun is gone,
the sky in your hair
melts into the horizon
and all the birds fly
north to meet you again.

Synthetic Man (With Detail)

Lana Slinkard



The Laborers

Jessica Ekert

Grease

Finally, break time. They remove their hard hats and hold them under their arms. The greasy, soot-covered men file out of the steel mill into the yard. Underneath the thick rolling clouds of smoke the men eat their lunches. An old man standing in line for the food truck sifts through all of his pockets for any loose change he can find. "That's not enough, sir. The ham sandwich has been raised to a dollar more," the man in the truck tells him. The old man looks at his trembling, open hand of nickels and dimes and slowly lowers it.

Missed Memories

Her husband carries their son into the room so she can see him before she leaves. In his hands he's holding that toy car he loves so much. He raises it up to her and she knows he wants to hear her go *vroom vroom* when she revs the engine but she really must be going or her boss will give her hell again. She laces up her work boots and ties them tight. On the bed, the boy drives the car up and down the comforter's mountains. He guides the car to her pillow and as it climbs to the top, he makes it *vroom vroom* on his own.

Underground

It was the last wall-control bolt Ron had to install before the end of his shift. His back ached from hunching over in the small mine shaft. Exhausted, he leaned up against the dirt wall and slid down to rest a few moments. He felt a tremor and quickly got to his feet, but it was too late. A solid piece of coal and cap rock fell right on top of him. The men heard and came running. The lights on their heads bounced along the dirt walls like contained fireflies. They tried to lift the massive rock off of him but it was too late.

Becoming Us

Julian Daley

With time, our emotions grow. In spite of them,
passion escapes. The bubbles in a shaken bottle of cola
flow to the top. Erupting as the movie starts.

Your nervousness matches mine. Intertwining hands
squish from the sweat. We smile. Then the usual

sighs of relief because through the awkwardness
of our bodies, we need no words as
we watch the movement on the screen. I
laugh and fighting back your need to be more
reserved, your lips curl up into a smile. We connect. And
then

you walk me to the doorstep and I
run inside. But with time,
I stop running and we'll just be
happy.

Doyle Knows Best
Tyler-Simmone Bowman

INT. PLANET FITNESS GYMNASIUM - DAY

DOYLE

You're twenty minutes late. Nobody keeps
DOYLE waiting, ever.

KELLY

I'm so sorry Doyle. I had to drop the kids
off at soccer practice.

DOYLE

The kids, the children, that's all you ever
seem to care about. Don't you care about
me? About this? About us? KELLY, baby I
thought we had was special.

KELLY

Oh, honey, you know I care very much about us.

DOYLE

Lies. Doyle senses lies. Look, honey, if this
is going to work, I'm going to need 110
percent dedication from you.

KELLY

No, Doyle I swear, I'm 110 percent dedicated.
It's just...

DOYLE

What is that smell I smell?... Do I smell
Oreos? Do you know what happens to females
who eat Oreos?

KELLY

No. What happens?

DOYLE

They get fupas. Fat upper pussy areas. Do
you want a fupa, Kelly?

KELLY

No.

DOYLE

To the treadmill. I've had enough.

INT. PLANET FITNESS GYMNASIUM - TREADMILL
STATION - DAY

DOYLE

You're going to need to run an extra three miles to get rid of all of those Oreos you ate.

KELLY

I... I... I just took a couple when I was getting the kid's snacks together for practice.

DOYLE

Again with the kids. This is so much larger than those little boogers you call your kids. This is about the art of working out. This is about trainer, client trust and I'm sorry Kelly but you've broken that trust. It can never be gained back.

KELLY

Doyle, I'll try harder. I can do better I promise.

DOYLE

It's time for abs.

INT. PLANET FITNESS GYMNASIUM - AB STATION
- DAY

DOYLE

Give me fifty crunches.

KELLY

Doyle, you're killing me.

DOYLE

You should have thought about that before you ate those Oreos. Give me fifty crunches and now fifty sit-ups.

KELLY

Okay.

DOYLE

After you've finished that, we're done for the day. I've had enough. Doyle does not like to have his time wasted.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLANET FITNESS GYMNASIUM - PARKING
LOT - DAY

DOYLE

Look, Kelly, Doyle does not think this is working out.

KELLY

What do you mean, Doyle?

DOYLE

Doyle means he's done with you. Take your ten dollars a month elsewhere.

KELLY

But, Doyle, why? I don't understand. I swear to never eat another Oreo again.

DOYLE

This is larger than Oreos Kelly. This is about the art. Look, it's not me, it's you.

KELLY

Please, just give me one more chance.

DOYLE

Sorry toots, second chances are for suckers and Doyle is no sucker. Now leave. Doyle has a 3:30 appointment with a dedicated client.

Cleeh
Alexandra Peretin



EdGore

Kayla Lappino

I have a gremlin living inside me.
I don't mean this metaphorically.
He lives in my gut,
turning my innards into a hammock,
grumbling in his sleep.

I call him EdGore.
He is a rambunctious house guest.
Punching a hole in my stomach.
He eats my desserts.

Once a month, for a week,
EdGore sharpens his claws
on my uterine lining,
chewing my ovaries
like gum balls.

When EdGore gets bored,
he uses my bladder as a trampoline.
My lungs are heave bags,
to punch and kick.

Every so often he reties
My intestines in to a new bed.
Squeezing my kidney
Using it as a pillow for his head.
He growls and rawrs
Throwing a general fuss,
For EdGore late night snacks are a must.

The 28th Day

Veronica Pysnack

I wipe the counter clean of any leftover chocolate sprinkles or crème filling.

Something hits the window.

I glance up—why did I look?—and see them. Hordes of hunger filled eyes, slack mouths, and the muffled groans rumbling as they pound and claw at the glass.

I swallow; look at the clock and at the calendar beneath it.

It's time.

"Uh, George?" I holler to the manager, my voice shaking.

George comes from the kitchen, wiping his hands clean on his apron.

"What the hell is it, Dan—" George stops when he looks out the window.

Never in my life have I seen a grown man on the verge of shitting himself.

"All hands on deck!" George yells to the back of the shop.

Han and Bill rush in, cowering and shaking.

"It can't be," Han cries, shaking Bill beside him, "it just can't be!"

"We did it last month, we can do it again!" George says.

"Where are Alyssa and Jackie?" Bill asks.

"They're out there," I say, pointing them out. Yesterday they were so normal and beautiful; now, looking like they crawled out of the goddamn grave.

"That's it, we're done for!" Han sobs.

"Gentlemen, it's time." George goes to the window. "See you on the other side."

He hesitantly flips the sign to OPEN and unlocks the door.

We brace ourselves.

Ding goes the bell.

All the women in town swarm in. We are surrounded.

In Poems

Olga Reyes

In Spain in 1919, they told Lorca,
“In poems, you have to give
voice to a soul. Any soul.”

So he wrote about widows
who lost their husbands
in a war. *Nunca volvieron.*

And the widows’ tears stained
the pages, leaving a sweet taste
on my tongue.

They told Lorca, “Poems must
emerge from the depths of the
heart, even if it’s dark.”

So he wrote about the widows’
eternal fidelity, each stanza
gripping my throat as their

love lingered on each word.
But in the end of each
poem, they told Lorca,

“Words must paint a picture
of dead soldiers and widows
with fire in their mouths and

tears that stain the pages yellow.”
And Lorca wrote more poems
about the widows and their

sorrow, but finally, the widows,
carrying swords against their chests,
marched to their husbands’ resting

place and drove the sword through
their solemn hearts. And Lorca wept,
perhaps, an action out of mercy.

Beautiful Anguish
Breana Iannotti



Anguish is something we all face at some point; it may be emotional, physical, or mental. Whatever it may be, it's real. Disregarding all the agony we once felt, we've all experienced something beautiful in our lives, something euphoric. But it goes away, and then we are spiraling down into oblivion once again. The darkest of places in which we create ourselves; there is no light, no hope, no mercy. Nobody understands death nor what lies after it...that's why in our heads we create own perceptions about what happens in the afterlife. We all need something to believe in- without hope and faith we are left with empty hearts and hands. No matter how evil the world may seem, the monsters whispering in our ears can't reach the beauty we contain inside. We don't let them. Death is very evident and very real, it happens everyday and it doesn't mean a thing to us, we won't even think twice; our days will linger on. But when a loved one is lost, some part of them will always remain with us: the beautiful part.

The Tides of Time

Luke Parsnow

Do we know the lonesome sound?
Do we know how much is lost?
When the tides of time come crashing down

There will be a cost
Forgotten history put to sleep
Do we know how much is lost?

Under an ocean of eternity, buried very deep
The great ideas, beliefs, and powers of man
Forgotten history put to sleep

And when the water hits the sand
They roll back to sea and never return
The great ideas, beliefs, and powers of man

They will crumble and burn
That will be their end
They roll back to sea and never return

To forget the forgotten, we cannot pretend
Do we know the lonesome sound?
That will be their journey's end
When the tides of time come crashing down

Snow Day

Laurie Jackson

The snow is taken by the
frosty air,
each a specific
design that I never repeat.

Just a brush of my skin,
the cool iced flakes
help create
your sledding fun,
with forts
and fights.

The rise of your goosebumps
on your skin
make you go in.
Red noses, bright
in my blue white night.

The lights turn on,
warm with hot coco.
Bundled up, I pass
by, no one seems to see.

You think Jack and his
Frost touches your leaves
all on his own?
Just wait.

I create that whirlwind
of snow that lands on
your houses, your trees.
I help Jack paint your
Pretty leaves.

Momo

Breana Iannotti



Convenience Store Personality Test

K.M. Alleena

I. Sonoma Reds

My boss dramatically throws his pack of cigarettes onto the counter. It's a busy Sunday morning, and I'm at that stage where if one more person asks why we're out of newspapers, I'll snap.

"Camel Turkish Royals? Stopped buying the Southern Cuts?" I comment.

He grins rather stupidly, exactly matching the photo of a much younger version of himself depicted on his driver's license.

"Both are good."

"Doubt it," I answer, and grin back.

Camel Turkish Royals is the kind of person who would rather joke around than complain about the dismal job. I appreciate this, especially on a day like today – everyone else seems to be in a foul mood.

After I hand him his receipt and he goes off for a smoke break, I busy myself by wiping down the counters, organizing office supplies along the way. A man in a navy Carhartt jacket walks in; today he is also sporting a red and black flannel hat which does not suit him. He always looks unshaven and perhaps mildly unkempt – but with a mixture of dust and snow on his shoulders, today it seems much worse. He is a regular here, and of the worst kind. I grab his cigarette order – Sonoma Reds. He doesn't say a word, just grunts and tosses a twenty on the counter, crumpled.

"I just need your I.D.," I tell Sonoma Reds. His shoulders immediately tense; his forehead goes red first.

"No, you don't need my I.D. I'm forty-six freakin' years old, for Christ's sake!"

Not again.

I sigh and close my eyes for a fraction of a second before speaking.

"We need an I.D. To scan in order to process the sale, sir –"

"Like *Hell* you do! This is just the goddamn government checkin' what I'm buyin'!"

Camel Turkish Royals walks back in the store, and stops with his back against the door. He pulls a face of feigned terror, and I roll my eyes at him.

"Sir –"

"No! Bullshit! This is total bullshit!"

“Sir, do you still need the cigarettes?” I ask, voice firm.

“Duh!” he answers, gesturing wildly and laughing in a sarcastic manner. I start to feel the anger building up in my stomach, and try to reign in my attitude.

“Well, I need your I.D.,” I say, pausing while Sonoma Reds blusters and fumbles his driver’s license out of his faux-leather embossed Duck Dynasty wallet. He is still swearing under his breath as I process the sale for him. He begins to unwrap the box – a small one with a silhouette of a mountain. It’s funny how the cheapest cigarettes tend to have the prettier packaging.

Sonoma Reds slams the exit door open, tossing the wrapper on the floor. Camel Turkish Royals stoops to pick it up, and walks toward my counter. I lean in and whisper, “The government is spying on his government issued I.D.”

Camel Turkish Royals feigns surprise and leans away, shaking his head.

“A new kind of bumpkin, right there,” he notes, pushing the cigarette wrapper towards me. I throw it away, and stare at the cigarette wall behind me, full of flashy advertising and *deals* that aren’t really deals.

Sometimes I really wonder if it’s worth all of this frustration just for a smoke break.

II. Two Newport Shorts

I’m working with Pyramid Red 100s tonight, who is complaining that we don’t sell her brand again. She is holding a pack of USA Gold Red 100s and debating her purchase. It’s slow, and I don’t remember the last time I had a line build up.

The way she is tapping her I.D. on the counter is irritating me a little – but I don’t say anything. She is the second assistant manager, and if I am nice to her, I’ll get to head home early. I take a sip of my iced coffee and wait for another minute.

“Oh, forget it,” she says, pulling the last cigarette out her pack. She hands me the USA Golds and her debit card, “I’ll survive.”

As she waits for her receipt to print, she crushes the Pyramids soft pack and watches it pop nearly back into shape, before throwing it away.

Finally, as Pyramid Red 100s is leaving with the load of cardboard to be recycled during her cigarette break, a customer walks in – another regular. She is short and blonde, and very nice to all of the cashiers. Nothing special, but a nice customer is rare these days.

“Hi honey,” she says, digging around in her Coach purse, “Just two Newport shorts, please!” Her voice is oddly high pitched. She carefully sets her driver’s license on the counter, scan-side up.

I turn to the cigarette wall, which is now full of holes because of the day shift’s sales, forgetting what she just asked for.

“You would think I would remember your order,” I start, turning back, “you are in here every day.”

Two Newport Shorts laughs and repeats herself, while quickly darting over to the other register to pick out a lighter – a plain black one. I cash out her order. She leaves, wishing me well and assuring she’ll see me tomorrow. I wave without telling her that Friday is my only day off until next Wednesday.

When the left hand door opens, so does the right one as Pyramid Red 100s drags the recycle bin back into the store. The draft of cold air reminds me how lucky I am to work in front of a pizza oven.

“Don’t lean there,” Pyramid Red 100s scolds, as she walks back up into the box, cellphone in hand. She hangs up her jacket, and the smell of full flavor cigarette smoke lingers behind her as she returns to her register.

III. Marlboro Ultra Lights 100s

“Hey, I knew I recognized you,” says the very tall man in front of my register. This was the cable guy who fixed my internet yesterday. Today, his cap is switched from company garb to Boston Red Socks – same as always. His voice is calm, but quiet.

“Marlboro Ultra Lights 100s, yes?” I ask, turning to the cigarette wall behind me.

“Ah, yeah. Make it two; snowstorm’s coming. Mighta just fixed your internet there, but it’ll be knocked out again with the weather.”

I half-smile, handing Marlboro Ultra Lights 100s his cigarettes.

“Well, thanks for your optimism,” I say sarcastically, and he laughs, tucking two boxes of cigarettes into the inside pocket of his coat.

“Hey, honesty’s the way to go.”

I nod, noticing a line starting to build up behind him.

“Now, if only work would take it well if I smoked in the van during storms,” he muses, also half-grinning.

“Have a wonderful day, sir!” I say enthusiastically, as an old man rudely pushes his way up to the counter.

As I wait on other customers, I notice Marlboro Ultra Lights 100s smoking by the windows near the trash can outside. He's not talking to anyone, just looking up at the sky as snow lazily drifts to collect on frozen ground.

IV. Fortuna Menthol 100s

Flash the best smile you've got in your arsenal next time you're in line waiting to buy something. In all retail jobs I have ever worked, this is key to snapping me out of Cashier's Stupor, so it must work for others; I make mental note of this as a middle-aged African American man walks through the doors.

Another regular customer, with a dependable demeanor – which means at least for a few minutes, I am saved from monotony. I already have his cigarettes on my register.

Fortuna Menthol 100s has a stereotypically smooth jazz voice; practiced and perfected. He smiles brilliantly, and turns to Camel Turkish Royals at the other register.

"Don't even have to ask anymore, man," he says.

Camel Turkish Royals laughs nasally and continues drinking red bull while reading Reddit on his phone. I judge him silently and cash out Fortuna Menthol 100s's order, which also contains a chocolate chip cookie.

He unwraps the cookie, and takes a bite before pointing it in my general direction.

"Don't see the point in going anywhere else. See you folks tomorrow!"

He begins to hum as he walks out of the store, placing his pack of cigarettes in a pocket, pulling out a battered, nearly empty pack of the same brand at the same time.

Trudging through the snow, he somehow manages to fish out a lighter too, all while finishing his cookie. The wind blows the hood of his black jacket up over his hair, but I notice him place the cookie wrapper in his pocket. A second later, I see the quick glow of a small, hand-held flame reflected off the black paint on a nearby gas pump.

V. Marlboro Reds

All of my co-workers warned me, when I first started, about the customers who assume all cashiers are mind readers, and also should know better than to question such logic or lack thereof.

I had never seen Marlboro Reds come into the store before, so at this point it's safe to assume he is not a regular. He is a large, red-faced man, who seems out of breath –

either from the cold, or the twenty-five steps from his white mini-van to my register.

I am busy switching the pizzas in the case, and rush over to greet him. He wears a scowl, and leans on the counter, both elbows lining up evenly with the Jack Link's advertisement mat stuck there.

"I'll have the reds," he grunts. His voice is obnoxious in between wheezes.

"Which reds? Marlboro reds? Sonoma? Fortuna? The USAs?"

"Don't get smart with me," Marlboro Reds snaps, "You know, the reds."

His accent is akin to country music stars', but with much less finesse. I take a deep breath and close my eyes during the span of half a second.

"There are a *lot* of different full flavor king cigarettes available for sale, sir."

Marlboro Reds is visibly irritated by the swords creeping into my voice. There is a long, angry moment of silence as he stares at me, eyebrows knit. His eyes are an unflattering shade of brown, which matches perfectly to his natural state of being. *Shitty.*

He sighs angrily, the air escaping his face with the stench of fermenting jalapeños.

I back off a step.

"*Marlboro Reds,*" he says finally. I pick a hard pack off of the cigarette wall, and fling it on to the counter. After I scan it and his license, he says, "soft pack, *thanks.*"

The end of his sentence drawls sarcastically. I snatch the box of cigarettes off of the counter and trade it out for him.

After the sale is complete, Marlboro Reds meanders towards his van. Just after he lights a cigarette, he crawls into his vehicle, pulls out a beat up blue flip phone, dials a number, and begins to drive away while talking on it. I continue to change out the food in the pizza case, when the phone rings –

The receiver is out of reach for me, so Camel Turkish Royals picks up the one by his register. I continue to work, and listen to the sound of his voice drift over the incessant humming of the oven near my ears.

When I walk over to my register again after finishing my work, he is laughing. Probably right at me, as is the norm with him.

"Your customer complained," he says jubilantly. "Marlboro Reds?"

“Ah, yeah. Says he is unhappy that his cashier is, and I quote *‘stubborn and incompetent.’*”

I cross my arms and give him an indignant look.

“You heard that nonsense! What do you expect?!”

“Calm down, calm down. I told him you’d be spoken to, but still – haven’t heard a more accurate description of you yet!”

“Shut up!” I joke, enunciating both syllables. I move to elbow Camel Turkish Royals in the ribs, who darts out of range and into the corner of a cabinet door. He exclaims – half in pain, half in surprise.

Karma.

“I’m not in trouble?” I venture after a moment.

Camel Turkish Royals shakes his head.

“We take these opinions with a grain of salt.”

VI. Newport 100s

The license says she is eighteen. A Floridian, too. Tan, with self-consciously straightened black hair. The dark eyes match her photo. I raise an eyebrow as I look up at her. She smiles, sort of. Her expression is small and her eyes seem distant.

“Newport 100s, then?” I ask, setting her I.D. Scan-side up on the counter. She looks to me to be much younger, but the eyes gave away the she is older than her actual age. I know the feeling.

Still, she smokes – this person displaced from too-sunny Florida to too-snowy Oswego, New York. As a cashier, it’s not really protocol to ask why the drastic change of scenery or what happened – we aren’t the therapists; the cigarettes we sell are. But I can’t help wondering anyway.

I cash out Newport 100s’s sale, and she walks away, staring down at her feet, both hands in her pockets.

“Damnit,” she mutters. Her voice is quiet and seems weary, like a certain heaviness hangs on the art of pronouncing. She turns to me and sighs shallowly, her shoulders scrunched up to her ears. She takes one hand out of her pocket and pushes a stray strand of hair away.

“Lost my lighter.”

“There’s a bunch on the other register.”

I wait while Newport 100s fishes the perfect lighter out of our cheesy-looking display. When she sets it on the counter, it is barcode-side down – the design is light blue butterflies on an indigo background, and the word “HOPE” vertically typed in white down the left-hand side.

I look up and Newport 100s half-smiles again. I ring

up the purchase for her, and she leaves.

Outside, she lights up a cigarette, takes one puff and lowers her hand to the side as she trudges away through the snow. She ashes the cigarette once, takes another puff, and continues to walk like that into the darkness beyond the lights of the gas pumps.

VII. Blu Menthol E-cigs

The most common cigarette I sell is Newport 100s, with the next being Marlboro 27s. Sometimes we sell cigars, but hardly ever do I get questions about the electronic cigarettes. They are a new fad, one Big Tobacco probably wishes would fizzle out before it is forced to completely hop on the bandwagon.

E-cigs are the weapons of choice for those who deem real cigarettes too mainstream. For some, they are the least of several evils; for others, they are the cure to a life-long addiction – an answer for the liminal stage between having quit and still being called ash-tray mouth by their mother-in-law. To still others, they are a secret they dread for even us cashiers to know – come on, who *really* smokes e-cigs anyway? *Surely* losers, right? Surely?

Often I find myself unaware and unconcerned about e-cig etiquette, but I do notice how the customers who buy them squirm uncomfortably as they carefully formulate their questions so as not to sound like they don't know what they're talking about.

Today is one such day with one such customer. It is an ugly Saturday morning, with more slush than necessary tracked all the way to the beer coolers and back to my register. To make matters worse, the sun is too bright as it reflects off of the shiny gasoline delivery truck and directly into my pupils. In the store, my transition lenses are about 33% shades now.

A young man walks in wearing a grey sweatshirt emblazoned with a green Oswego State logo. He ponders a minute while leaning on my counter. I move out of the way for a second to let him see the cigarette wall. He stares at me for a split second, and I knit my eyebrows. It feels as though he is staring right through me.

"You guys sell the Blu starter kits, right?" he asks, some sort of Asian accent slightly audible.

"Yes, of course," I answer. I point right at the obvious display on the far right.

"Can you tell me about them?"

"Of course I can," I answer jovially, beginning to rattle

off what I know. The fact that they are made by the Newport brand and free of propylene-glycol specifically interests this customer. I tell him how they come in one piece disposables for those who haven't tried e-cigs before. He isn't interested, so I ramble about how the cartomizers work and how the act of using an e-cig is known as *vaping* in some circles. I tell him how stupid I think that sounds. No reaction.

"Can you tell me about the green one again?" he asks. His head tilts ever so slightly to the right, as if to read the box on the shelf.

"The green box only comes with menthol cartridges – if you want the other kinds, you'll have to buy a pack or choose the blue starter set."

He chooses the green one, and leaves forty-five dollars poorer.

Camel Turkish Royals leans on my counter, grinning like he's withholding some information I should know. I lean in close to his face, a faux-irritated look on mine.

"Since when do you know so much about e-cigs?" he inquires, voice lilting in an annoying fashion.

I exhale and roll my eyes ceiling-ward.

"It's just part of the job, that's all."

Girls Spec Script: We Need to Talk About Ray - Excerpt
Victoria Diana

INT. HANNAH'S APARTMENT- BEDROOM- DAY

Hannah and Adam sleep. Hannah takes up most of the bed and has all the blankets. The alarm on her phone, resting on the bedside table, RINGS. Hannah wakes up.

She checks the time. It's 6:00AM. She puts on snooze. The alarm RINGS again. It's 6:05AM. She rolls over.

HANNAH
(Groans)

Ughhhh.

ADAM
(Groans)

Ughhhhhhh.

Adam lays face down. The pillow muffles his voice...

ADAM
Shut that fucking thing off.

He falls back to sleep. Hannah reluctantly gets up. She sleepily gets dressed, attempts to put on skinny jeans, and falls over.

INT. SUBWAY- DAY

The subway car is crowded. Hannah holds a bar near the door, and dozes off.

SUBWAY INTERCOM (V.O.)
Stand clear of the closing doors please!

The sound jolts Hannah awake.

INT. SUBWAY STATION- TUNNEL- DAY

Hannah waits to get on a different subway line. She kneels in front of a homeless man, mid-way in conversation. He's clearly not into it.

HANNAH

Well, see, sir, I do have a very successful magazine job. Do homeless people read magazines? Can you read? Anyway, I still consider myself a starving writer working on my craft, so you see why I can't give you any money.

HOMELESS MAN

You don't look starving to me.

HANNAH

That's really rude, sir.

A train breaks up ahead. A condensed crowd shuffles onto the car. Hannah sees it, swears, stands up, and runs towards the closest doors.

From inside the subway car looking out, the door closes on Hannah right before she's about to get on.

End of tease.

CUT TO TITLE

FADE IN:

INT. CAFE- DAY

Marnie, Shoshanna, and Jessa sit at a cute, eclectic cafe for breakfast. They drink coffee. The only sound is the CLINKING of their mugs and silverware. Hannah bursts through the doors, clearly late. She walks over to their table, and sits down.

MARNIE

Oh, thanks for showing up.

HANNAH

Well, I mean, if we met in Brooklyn once in a while...

MARNIE

Well, you work in Manhattan...so...

HANNAH

Yeah. At 10, not 7 in the morning riding in with all the maids and construction workers.

MARNIE

(Sarcasm)

You poor thing.

HANNAH

Thank you. My thoughts exactly. So next time...Brooklyn...9 am?

MARNIE

Shosh has an 8AM! Which is why we picked this time!

Marnie points to Shoshanna. Shoshanna drinks her coffee, and turns her head back and forth at Hannah and Marnie like she's watching a tennis match.

Marnie looks at Hannah's outfit.

MARNIE

(CONT.)

Are you going straight to work after this?

HANNAH

Yeah?

MARNIE

Oh.

HANNAH

What?

MARNIE

Nothing.

HANNAH

What?

MARNIE

You're wearing skinny jeans to work?

HANNAH

I have a hip magazine job. I can wear skinny jeans.

MARNIE

They have holes in them...

HANNAH

See, this is exactly what I was talking about when you--

JESSA

Ahem.

The two fall silent and turn to Jessa.

Jessa raises her eyebrows. The two compose themselves.

HANNAH

(Strained voice)

I feel like you feel the need to control everyone's lives, and then when you can't, you freak out.

(Break)

Which hurts my feels.

(Break)

And is rude.

MARNIE

(Strained voice)

I feel like you have no sense of time, you show up whenever you feel like it, which then hurts my feelings.

(Break)

And is very rude.

JESSA

Better?

Jessa turns to the waitress, who stands

there awkwardly, not knowing what to do.

JESSA
(CONT.)

I'll have the eggs benedict please. And a Bloody Mary.

(Beat)

Non-alcoholic.

The girls eat in silence, the only sound being the silverware CLINKING as they eat. Shoshanna looks around the table contently.

SHOSHANNA

This is just like Sex and the City.

INT. GQ MAGAZINE- CONFERENCE ROOM- DAY

Hannah's co-workers Joe, Karen and Kevin sit around a table. Hannah walks in, with a bag of Sun Chips.

Hannah sits down. She opens the bag, which makes a POP noise in the silent room. Kevin glares at her.

She eat the chips, but her heart is not in it. The CRUNCH CRUNCH CRUNCH echoes throughout the room.

KAREN

The Sun Chips finally got to you.

HANNAH

Yup.

Eats another chip. CRUNCH.

KAREN

Even the smell just makes me want to vomit.

JOE

I can get you a ginger ale?

Joe stands half-way up, then sits back down and slumps. The chips in Hannah's mouth

muffle her voice.

HANNAH

It tastes like cardboard dipped in cheese powder.

KAREN

Or those stale crackers they give out at communion.

KEVIN

You know, you could just stop eating the Sun Chips.

HANNAH

(To Karen)

I used to hoard those crackers under my tongue then spit them out once mass was over.

Karen laughs at Hannah's comment. Joe stares amorously at Karen.

Hannah finishes the chips. CRUNCH. Kevin shakes his head, staring intently at Hannah's face.

KEVIN

Your face. I just, I just want to punch it.

HANNAH

I'm...sorry?

Their boss, Janice, walks in, and everyone stops talking and straightens their posture.

INT. GQ MAGAZINE- CONFERENCE ROOM- DAY

The meeting has ended and everyone stands up and heads towards the door. Janice remains seated.

JANICE

Hannah, please stay seated. I would like to speak with you privately.

Hannah exchanges a side-ways glance with Karen and Joe as they walk out of the room.

HANNAH

Yeah, of course. What's up?

Hannah sits back down in her chair.

JANICE

You have been excelling lately.

HANNAH

Thank you.

JANICE

A spot has opened up last minute in the August issue for an essay. I told Mr. Nelson we could use one of yours.

HANNAH

Wow.

(Beat)

Yes, yes, of course, I would love to.

JANICE

If he likes it, you could earn yourself a monthly slot. For the time being.

HANNAH

Yes, that would be great. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

JANICE

Have it to me by tomorrow.

HANNAH

Ok. Again, thank you so much.

Hannah stands up, walks towards the door and opens it.

JANICE

Hannah, one last thing...

Hannah pauses and turns around. Janice peers

over her glasses at Hannah's jeans.

JANICE
(CONT.)

This isn't Tiger Beat...

Hannah stares down at her pants.

HANNAH

Oh. Okay.

INT. GQ MAGAZINE- HANNAH'S CUBICLE- DAY

*Hannah sits down at her desk. She has a smile
on her face. The phone rings.*

HANNAH

Hi, Joe.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GQ MAGAZINE- JOE'S CUBICLE- DAY

*Joe sits at his desk, two cubicles away
from Hannah.*

JOE

So, what was that about?

CUT TO HANNAH.

HANNAH

Jenna...has...offered me an essay slot in
the August--

CUT TO JOE.

JOE

Do you think Karen is back with her
boyfriend?

CUT TO HANNAH.

HANNAH

Oh, God.

CUT TO JOE.

JOE

When we were waiting for Janice to show up,
she got a text and smiled at it.

CUT TO HANNAH.

HANNAH
(Sarcasm)

Yup. You're right. She's probably back with
her boyfriend.

CUT TO JOE.

JOE

Oh no! What should I do?

CUT TO HANNAH.

*Hannah has one hand on the phone and the
other massages her temple.*

HANNAH

I don't know. Proclaim your love? Commit
seppuku? Read Sylvia Plath? I'm hanging up.
You have a problem.

CUT TO JOE.

He has a crazed look of determination.

JOE

So you think I should proclaim my love to
Kar--

*Hannah hangs up.
Joe tilts his head out of his cubicle.*

JOE
(Whispers)

Pssst!

Joe waits for a response. Nothing.

JOE
(CONT'D)
(*Whispers*)

Psssssssst!

Hannah tilts her head out of her cubicle.

HANNAH
(*Whispers*)

What?!

CUT TO HANNAH.

JOE
(*Whispers*)

Did you just hang up on me?

HANNAH
(*Whispers*)

You do not need a co-worker's help. You need a therapist.

JOE
(*Whispers*)

You need a therapist!

HANNAH
(*Whispers*)

Real mature!

JOE
(*Whispers*)

Well,

(Beat)

at least I don't buy my jeans at Abercrombie and Fitch! The bitchy pre-teen called, she wants her jeans back!

HANNAH
(*Whispers*)

They're grunge! Like the Indigo Girls!

INT. KITCHEN- NIGHT

Hannah's parents lean over the kitchen counter. A cell phone on speaker rests on the counter.

LOREEN

Congratulations, sweetie!

TADD

We love you, Hannah-Banana!

EXT. SIDEWALK- MANHATTAN- NIGHT

HANNAH

Bye, guys, love you too!

LOREEN, TAD

(On Phone)

Bye!

Hannah hangs up.

She scrolls through her contacts. She slows over Marnie's name. Pauses on it, then scrolls over it and up to Elijah's contact. She clicks on his name. Holds the phone up to her ear.

INT. PAL'S APARTMENT- LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Elijah sits cross-legged on a chic couch in a posh apartment. The apartment looks like it belongs to a Real Housewife, but with a hipster, artsy touch.

ELIJAH

Look at you! With your life together.
Congrats, sweetheart.

HANNAH

Aw! Thank you!

ELIJAH

Where is Hannah Horvath and what have you

done with her?

Elijah LAUGHS.

HANNAH

I'm just happy my life is going well for once.

ELIJAH

Next you'll tell me you've lost 20 pounds!

Elijah LAUGHS.

HANNAH

Yeaaaah.

Hannah LAUGHS uncomfortably.

SQUABBLE, SQUABBLE... *fate grabbers*

Daniel Land

I fold down the shades and pack
up my window. Suddenly - *click* -
the receiving end of my days
are puckered. Dammed shut,
and the presence of levity becomes

the force to latch that door
forever. A glimpse to the inner-
works; the dim wreath of my figure
is lost to the shadowscape and
I turn in spite of it. Rendered,

I am. The rabble so short, it keeps
me pinned, floor-bound. Reflected
in a verse of tiles, it patterns me,
letting me feel again. It's easy to
drink in, and I'm struck stupid for a little.

Regardless of the system, I'm drunk.
Ganged upon. For the life of me, I'm
weeping at the solace of each tiny
form of emotive charge. Grouped in layers
beside a choir of *me*, all situated in front

for excellent panning motion. I'm so
fluent in this view, *I almost ask*
to be excused. Bruised context. A limp,
corroded gush, just in time to be pummeled
until drafted into shape. Into lovely,

lively shape. And when I wake up,
I'm in a bed in a room. Between walls
and a roof. The world is lighter from
the lack of my thoughts, and outside I
watch opinions ruin yet another nice spread.

Pa's Wooden Spoon

Phoebe Lamont

It was inconspicuous in the metal bowl with

All the other cooking utensils:

Twisted whisks and spatulas crowded around

The worn dark wooden spoon, with stripes of light

Wood like shadows across my bedroom walls

When cars drove by in the night.

It felt grainy in my hand, not worn as it is now.

I had to stand on the blue stool

To reach the bowl when we made cookies:

I liked mixing the butter and sugar together best,

They reminded me of packed snow beneath my feet.

When we added the flour bit by bit,

The dough thickened until I couldn't

Stir anymore, and I gave the spoon to my

Father, who, smiling, mixed in the last flour.

I left when he spooned out the dough,

Ball by ball, onto the cookie sheet

And later, he would come into the living room

With the bowl and spoon, and give them to me

And I would lick the spoon clean, it was still warm

With melted butter and the place where my father

Held it was as smooth as his wedding band.

Guatemala Beetle
Michelle Stiles



New York is Cold and Full of Poetry

Shanna Fuld

I got a call from a friend.
He said, "how's New York?"

New York is cold and full of poetry, I said.

The words are in the scars of my once broken wrist.
The rhymes are in the teetering leaves outside.

The print is in the chalk on the sidewalk.
The music is in the briskness
Of a wind that blows up my unfit shirt.
It's a tickle that reminds me of the song,

That all New Yorkers are singing.

This here is an isolated place and it's 20 less than I'd like,
My hands in a pocket- my gloved frigid fingers,

I go read Kerouac in the library chair,
I got this phone call and I realized that

New York is Cold and Full of Poetry.

Migration

Marian Holmes

The summer that I was eight years old, the monarchs came.

For days the sky seemed to burst into flames; wings, mimicking the flesh of persimmons and mangoes, flapping endlessly overhead. Flora and fauna connected by the color wheel.

People came in droves, cars lining the already narrow streets of our usually-forgotten town. The “every-day” hindered by traffic; traffic created in the name of nature.

A soon-to-be third-grader, I sat alone under the tulip tree which shaded the expanse of our front yard. I was tall for my age that summer; a growth spurt, arriving early, had me creeping steadily above my peers, but still, the boughs seemed to kiss the clouds where the tulips budded each spring. In late autumn, the “helicopters” would fall from these heavens, littering the grounds in anxious hope of pollination.

Tulip seeds are thin and flat, designed to be picked up by the wind for means of fertilization. They are dull in color and texture, bark-like and dry. They are offensive to bare feet. At one end of their length, tulip seeds sport a sharp barb for the purpose of rooting and attaching themselves to animal pelts. The weight of this appendage causes the seeds to fall in spiral formations, imitating the blades of helicopters descending steadily. Much of my childhood was spent bare-footed and wincing as I reached down toward my sole(s) to release both seed and pain alike. Still, I’d sit under my tree, in awe at the show of falling flying-machines.

I have always housed a curious mind. Over-curious some may say; my parents did for a time, sending me to several summer camps a day just to get me out of the house.

“You ask too many questions,” they claimed. At camp, my hyper mind and un-edited mouth were someone else’s hassle to handle.

Still, they did their very best, buying me books and spy kits, sending me to programs where I was engrossed in art and inventing, and even once, gifting me a metal detector, which brought about endless items quickly

categorized as “treasures”. Many have since been re-filed to “trinket” territory. My birthday came just two days before Christmas, and I learned early to be wise in present choice as I, unlike my peers, would not get a second-chance that same year. I had one shot to get it right. December 23rd, 1999, my tiny hands ripped the paper from my very own microscope, complete with glass slides, the kind a kid could cut themselves on, and a regulation-sized scalpel. My parents hardly ever kept the world from me; tools were not something to be feared, but something to respect. Sharp edges had great purpose when yielded correctly.

I had waited anxiously for spring, the rebirth of the planet, to take my scientific instrument to the wild. I viewed everything beneath its concentrated beam of light. When school released us that June of 2000, I could not wait to spend each day magnifying my world at forty, one hundred, four hundred times my normal eye’s ability.

I set up my lab each morning, claiming the front porch with a spread of tools and notebooks. I always brought my microscope out last. The black, metal frame made it durable, Marian-proof, yet heavy, and my developing muscles would strain slightly from its weight. By August, I could have sworn it was but a feather. An orange, construction-grade extension cord stretched from our living room, winding through the vestibule, to the wicker table my microscope rested on.

The neighbors grew accustomed to my constant presence. I’d wave hello to each person bringing trash bags to the curb. Re-emerging mid afternoon to get the mail, they’d ask about the advancements in that day’s experiments.

“Today I’m dissecting wild mushrooms.” I’d speak to any who would listen, utilizing science jargon from the instrument’s instructional guide and the books I checked out of the library each week. I was a chubby, self-reliant, budding-scientist, constantly clad in mismatched clothing, and I had become a staple of the neighborhood.

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The monarch butterfly migrates twice each year. It cannot withstand the cold, and so, in hordes of glorious orange these creatures flock to once-familiar trees. It was by some grandiose fluke that they found my town that summer, and I remember all the news sources speculating. Anchors and authors alike debated this winged coincidence. Humans miss so much by over-thinking. I did not care to answer the

“why,” perhaps I should have given-up on science then and there, but the other “Ws”, the who, what, where, and whens, brought me running to my yard.

For hours I watched the flutterings, observing flights and colors, wingspan, noise, and wind. I took to my notebooks, jotting conclusions and crude drawings of both individual specimen and rabble alike. A multitude of butterflies can be referred to as a flutter, a rabble, or a swarm.

People traveled to see them. Scientists and nature observers, families with children and parents parallel in senses of awe at the flying masterpiece above them, crowded our town. And in a few days time, they vanished, leaving barely a trace behind them. Spectacles wear off quickly; nature goes from wonder to norm by the third flap of a butterfly’s wings.

The monarchs came. The people came. The people left. The monarchs died.

My tulip tree morphed to mass grave less than a week after their arrival. I do not know what caused the fatalities, but my lawn became a site of both horror and wonder in my eyes. I remember waiting a day, respectively, before I picked the first corpse up.

I walked slowly to my laboratory, a one-woman funeral procession in the midst of the suburban grind. I placed the creature gingerly, and stopped a moment in consideration before reaching for my scalpel. The summer of experimenting had brought me steady, precise hands, and the wing was severed in one quick motion. To touch, it was like silk or sting-ray. Smooth, and soft, and slightly comforting. Yet fragile in a way I’d never witnessed. I rubbed my fingertips upon its edge and found the paper-thin mix of chitin and scales disintegrate between thumb and pointer. I cried a bit.

The next morning I began my scientific process. Observing the different parts of the monarch, dissecting slowly, placing pieces on slides to be gazed at under the microscope’s beam. But their wings still haunted me. Each time I’d overestimate necessary pressure, I’d cringe. The silent ripping of the naturally exquisite “fabric” seemed to tear at me as well. I could not overcome the delicacy, no matter how many wings I observed. Even at forty, one hundred, four hundred times my eyesight, the patterns of their surface distorted to a point beyond recognition, no thought remained but that of my power to destroy the wing with ease. Already dead, I could, if I chose to, maim this

creature further, and the idea of humans choosing to do so, that some humans *do* choose to do so, terrified me. What if, as I had observed the monarchs, someone, someday scrutinized the human race? Who? What? Where? When? These were not my concern so much, as what they would discover to be the “why.”

Journey's End
Shelby Coyle

“Hello, my dear,” a woman says,
I spin to look around.
On this empty country path
She appears without a sound.
“Would you mind some company?”
She says in friendly tone.
“Why not,” say I, with a smile,
“Much better than walking alone.”
And so we travel down the path,
From one town to the next.
She tells me ceaseless wonders,
Riddles which leave me vexed.
And as we speak, she skips ahead
And draws me in to dance.
The low sun circles overhead,
In this manner we advance.
We laugh and play and make our way,
I loop her arm in mine.
“I feel I’ve known you quite a while,”
Our fingers intertwine.
“Oh, I have seen you many times,
In many different faces.
I have met you everywhere,
Through a history of places.”
“Another riddle,” here I laugh,
And she chimes in as well.
We took long our joyous time,
Where darkness shortly fell.
“We should hurry on ahead,
The next town’s surely near.”
I lead her on and hear a breath,
“Oh, my precious dear.”
We carry on with stars above,
The moon lighting our path,
And in the nearing distance
Cut voices filled with wrath.
The hand in mine grips tighter,
She pulls me off the way,
“Please, my friend,” she whispers,
“How has been your day?”
“Has it been all that you desired,
Though you never quite reached town?”

Please, hurry, answer quick,
I do not wish to let you down.”
“My day has been quite wonderful,
The best I’ve ever had.
But, come, we must escape this path,
These men here seem quite mad.”
I pull her hand and turn to run
But she stands firm in her ground,
While hoof-beats, cries, and madness
Wrap us all around.
“Oh, my ancient friend,” she sighs,
“That we must do this again.
There is no use in running now,
You cannot escape these men.”
Then, for a moment, in my eyes,
Her face flashes clear and bright.
And for the last known thing I’d see,
Oh, was it a sight.

Never So Gracefully

K.M. Alleena

For Gramma Jo Ann

We
have all been dying
each year
with each step
and each breath,

but never
so gracefully
as you.

Now,
you exhale
with the promise
to give Death
our regards,
quoting songs
from the lips
of your guardians,
angels or beings
yet unseen.

You keep saying
you'll be
a whisper;
the pictures
in old, dusty frames –
a memory.

You tell us to smile
and blink away
the storms in our eyes,
raining down our cheeks
to your bedside.

You remind us –
all of your generations –
that it was you
where our strength
in our genes
comes from;
a direct line,
traceable.

You daydream
of your sisters
who had the patience
to go before you
and find their place
in the sunlight,
waiting
for the day
you'd grace them
with your presence.

Telling their stories,
you fold the corner
of the page
in the book you're reading,
and set it down.

Weakly
you wink –
dark brown eye
shining green
for just a moment.

*"I'll be back,
you know;
a wailing kid.
They said so,
anyway;
your Great Aunts,
I mean.
Can you imagine?
Reincarnation?
What a thing!"*

We hear the nurses
claim
enough is enough
for one day,
and they tuck you
in snug;
hospital blankets
white like clouds.

You cough,
but your face is peace.
You smile,

while the rest of us weep
from our inability
to be as optimistic
in our weakness
as you can.

Whisper
Emma Johnson

