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Note From the Editor

To dream, to love, to create. These three ideas are at the core of what delineates creative people from others. The endless passion to create something, anything, that gives a brief glimpse into the soul of a human being. Every year, the Garfield Lake Review strives to highlight humanity's individualism and creativity through a physical medium. We display what makes humanity special through a yearly exhibit of poetry, prose, photography, and fine arts. Each year presents new and exciting challenges with the creation of a student-led publication, but time and time, again the students of Olivet College overcome those challenges to create a publication that serves as a view into the window of the time that it was published. Each year's edition is a physical time capsule for culture and society at the time submissions were curated. We are uniquely us and I believe that the 2020 edition of the Garfield Lake Review strives to put each accepted piece on display in a colorful and original manner. The staff this year has put extra effort into making this edition the most fun and out of the box yet. That being said, I hope you enjoying reading this year's edition it as much as we did making it. Next time you have a dream and a passion for that dream, go out there and create it. Don't wait any longer. Each of your dreams are you own and ought to be given to the world as a gift. The creatives of the world should display themselves in the full glory and splendor that they deserve.

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Not Pictured*

Powerful Storms

Powerful storms are these emotions, running rampant and untamed, destruction in their every action made, their ruin of me.

Powerful storms, ones I seek to tame, or at the very least harness, seeking their unrelenting strength, hope and renewal in such wild things.

Powerful storms, ones wielding passion, determination for the tough roads ahead, these things thought only destruction, yield great empowering, something needed desperately, needed by me.

To a Plastic Rose

Faded plastic rose sister of the petroleumderivative Christmas tree and processed cheese national flower of the programmed state of questionnaire diplomacy multiple-choice morality and universal suffrage of pollsters and telemarketers where two eyes in TVs and taps in every phone send encrypted beeps to an assistant somebody planted in the flower factory what poet wrung like War and Peace from a computer will codify your plastic odes

Ideals

Are you kidding me?

Of course I wish I wasn't here.

I can't quite find the words to say it so people will hear.

I've tried to show it a bunch of different ways. I leave little scribbles out for houseguests to find, of my chest constricting in dark blue charcoal.

I murmur things when I'm drunk
To girls that leave me for the boys we're with
and always, at the same time, I pray that no one will ever know.

Of course I wish someone who'd had just a few too many light beers

would crash into my MKC Lincoln in the middle of the night.

That's the dream, the ideal way to bow out.

It's the only reason I drive, calm and sober, down the highways before sunrise.

Too much of a fool to live properly and far too cowardly to end it myself,

this is where I'll stay.

-Courtney Camden

In the Lavender Room

a bouquet vase for ashes, fertilizer to flourish flowers

of Lavender-

lavish smells that crawl

subtly up the noses of my selves

willingly, wistfully leaving behind

glass jars of Fireflies-

memories, like the Lightning,

crack at the sound of

dead air.

Just a second to pass;

only that purple-budded plant,

pulling purposefully at protrusions of the psyche,

presents:

old books, two-dollar bills,

statues of White Elephants-

tickets for the gates,

tickets for Time.

An entrance fee for the carnival

where rollercoasters

suspended by frayed string

dangle toward the island

(every human

is a piece of the continent)

begging to be cast away

Broken Bottle, Nebraska

I grew into the comfort of your shelves. stole books you paid for and dragged them to bed. I fit into your wallet, like some pressed flower, but left no dried scent in my wake, only the valueless imprints of oily desire.

I knew no need. If food fell to the floor, more came. Le Seur canned peas replaced by the fresh ones culled from the earth in the yard. Books, cassettes, German ideas lifted from a cascade of intellectual charms that matter nothing to a boy.

Streams of Mozart pursed my lips. Only near your own collapse did I fully return to the sounds of that connection, mathematical, impish, and majestic all in the space of a lone sonata prized like a hand tooled leather gear-shift bulb.

You said no to horse rides. Several Depression era summers loosed your term of saddles. Sent me to ride them instead. And I galloped across the ranch, into the brush and back out, accompanied only by vinegar made by toil and the grime collected behind my ears.

Horse mouths make short music out of daylight. Afterward, their tails swat at the ballast of the universe as they fall into sleep's corrected daze. Make a piano out of that trough. String the muscles with the electric impulse, sweat on haunches catching the last dim light.

Gold Bearing Quartz, Maryland

You were bourgeoisie. A grey blanket trimmed with different colored stripes.

I yearned to see the yellow hair fall just below your jaw, spritzed with Guerlinade.

Of eyes reddened not from woe but indulgence of year's end, clipped with coldness and smoke.

You, I think, come like the wisps of conversation forfeited to coffee mugs and floating into the ceiling tin.

Then you are a ribbon of those three stripes of color all at once, the dark one blown to providence.

Combining Colors

When staring into two sets of eyes,

One mocking gentle snowflakes,

The other looking as though they are disguised by cinnamon dust,

Which is the option that will bring the most comfort: memories of the idea of maybes?

I adore Christmas and the blue that snuggles winter;

I also adore Halloween and the burnt orange that dances upon dead leaves.

Both holidays sing me to sleep in different ways,

Though I don't know that I prefer one song over another.

The same conflict presents itself in the men I love.

Baptized blues, saturated browns.

An overprotective sky, a resilient ocean, a confident strike of lightening.

An open field of pumpkins, a stubborn sun mid-October, a passionate monarch.

Blue was the first surgeon I was going to let operate but I gave myself frostbite before he could.

Brown is the surgeon who has gotten the closest to my heart.

I don't know who I want to let in:

The memory of blue

Or the maybe of brown.

A heterochromia iridium would be ideal.

-Kailey Collins

I'll Fly Away

Pushing the morning to its breaking point; making morning hurt by

Jealously swaying with sunsets until they set me to flames.

I'm stealing the changing horizon and painting my own fire against the sky,

Wind settling to a whisper; searching for beginnings but belonging to those that fly away and

Everything that fades.

Paint me Pure

There's something about wanting someone in your life so you can steal their

Clothes.

Under the illusion, they would shield the wretched smell of loneliness that seeps from the holes in your

Heart.

You seek the one who never fails to fight your battles, a Hero.

To have someone so willing to collect the black ruins of mascara and use it to write you a love

Letter.

It's never been about them, it's about the clothes that you sneak, the fabric that stains your body with their

Perfume.

Your shoulders are too narrow to fill the

Space.

Your hands are too delicate to fit the

Cuffs.

You're suffocating them with your

Insincerity.

Their efforts have the same effect of three shots of tequila and you're teasing your

Sobriety.

Ignore them, ignore your insatiable desire to want someone just to want

Someone.

They demand attention: the curve of my hips, the length of my hair, the softness of my

skin.

I wanted blue, like I was a guide with kissing cloud

Lips.

A gateway to heaven with just a gentle

Landing.

But society baptized them in pink:

Bloody rose petals.

Flustered cheeks.

A cotton candy sky.

I wanted blue:

Snowflakes in December.

Sheltered moons.

A bruised night.

Beautiful yet mysterious.

All the men painted me

Pink.

I set flames to their

Clothes.

In my drawer, I have a pair of their

Socks.

I don't put them on, except for when I'm

Alone;

When I'm not wearing blue, but feeling

It.

It's been months since I've felt any surface sheltering my feet other than a soft sponge of blue socks;

His.

I shower with them on, soaking a forgiving

Floor.

I don't want to change my

16

Outfit.

But I don't like that his damn blue socks are the only thing making me feel

Wanted.

I don't love him.

I love that he allowed me to put meaning to insignificant Objects.

I want roses and rings and rainbows to mean something

Different.

Something not

Him.

Something

Me.

Something

Neutral.

I wanted to grow up to be a

Star.

Not someone famous, but a raging, inspired, independent

Star.

Society told me

No.

I was burnt into a

Peony.

A wimpy, insecure, brittle to the touch

Flower.

I don't want to be blue anymore and to think of him and definitely not pink to think about an unrepresented

Me.

I want to be

Yellow.

Shades of happy.

A face after finding love in something other than a someone.

I'm working on the

Transformation.

It's nothing too grand, but I now buy myself:

Lemons.

Honey.

Water lilies.

Buckets of fireworks, finally taking my turn to light the

Sky.

Splintered morals of a generation

The bridges of lips don't meet unless there is A collision,

An insincere destruction to what was once Innocent.

A wished upon galaxy falls into empty hands, This time it doesn't make art. Instead, it forces itself to blend to a canvas That doesn't crave the touch.

Bodies have begun to engulf each other, But only from the waist down. A kiss surrenders to a first that swallowed What should have been saved.

Intimacy with the absence of intimacy, A heavy hallow.

Society has stripped love from its value
While blistering a youth.
Graves has been built for authenticity to die in,
I wish people wouldn't fall so deep in the bed of others.

Ode to Good-bye

Farewells enhance every event, our hazy knowledge of the transitory intruding, insistent we acknowledge our own impermanence. How we mingle at parties, decide who is too dull for our time. Our faith in pets to make themselves worthwhile enough for their inevitable end before our own, before we are ready to have them leave.

Another pack of cigarettes. One more drink before hitting the road. That stranger we welcome in, after the discovery of a shared astrological sign at the free concert in the park. That unprotected sex. Those pills your doctor prescribed, the ones you cannot quit. *Good-bye. Good-bye. Good-bye.*

The momentary parts seem to equal a whole—reproducing our genes into descendants, keeping journals, all those photographs—but there is still a *good-bye* at some point.

The beauty of connection—every *good-bye* reaching to envelope every other *good-bye*, like the couple dancing on the patio surrounded by twinkle lights, the lioness and her cubs lounging on a boulder, the library books touching, not touching but always talking to one another until deaccession claims the weaker ones. Even our published words

are not eternal, short-lived on shelves.

The histories we've pieced together.

Those millions of people before us. Their pets.

The fugacious nature of flora and fauna.

Our languages are transient, transforming in time.

God be with ye this morning! This afternoon! This evening!

God be wy ye! God bewiye! Godbwy!

No more needing the day's measure for a farewell, or who does and doesn't have religion.

A simple slate. A clean getaway. A shortened transaction so we can run off and live our temporary lives.

Goodbwye! Goodbye! Good-bye!

What the Blood Loves about the DVT

The thrill of slowing, then traveling upwards. as if making a fist inside the vein. The possibility of control, more of itself, experiencing everything else's panic: the heart, lungs, brain. What matters.

Clots are bad enough, but they just sit, away and arterial. Growth is slow. The DVT 's nature is to ascend, seek out life-giving organs and stop them—first, the chance to reconnect, grow, spread, force tissue and skin to swell, push up into the vena cava.

Keep going.

Power is addictive, but blood is not that aware it only knows that once begun, this chance to bulge becomes obsession. First the calf belongs to the DVT. Then ankle, thigh, and hip easily fall as if willing. The rest of the body is still. Waiting for the next event, quietly acting normally, useless as far as defense.

Valves try but become incompetent

to the movement of hardened blood, can no longer control the flow. Blood is pleased, compels the DVT to continue spreading its control higher, aiming for brain, but willing to stop the heart or fill the lungs.

At this point, the rat poison you have begun to take—that which is currently killing wild cats in mountains out west—weakens the viscosity, lessens the terror of the blood, starts to dissolve the DVT. Weakened, the blood will wait. It has time and your legs have so much vein, so deep, so vulnerable, so ready to stop and bloom.

The Clearing

There was once a doctor who took out his own appendix.

There was once a girl who gave up her own self for a man, (and there were lots of them).

Some times all I have in terms of power are headphones that enable me to fall under the limbo line of understanding the yelling around me.

Sometimes words grapple with me and I brush them away,

Windex on dirty fingerprints, two hands pushing away a thorn bush to get where I'm going,

spending more time getting where I'm going than sleeping and eating combined.

As the haze fades the golden words stand proud and italicized in the clearing.

It's better to be alone,

removing any organ that doesn't serve you.

Genesis

To be queer is a mirror matter of reflection

A matter of light and shadow.

A duality of energy and stasis.

Through reflections and memory

We become our own composite story.

So let's start at the beginning.

A genesis for the ages.

The first pages in the first set of days.

My mother cried a lot.

"I left the breastpump tube at the Hospital!"

"I can't do this."

"It's just so...permanent."

A 26 year old scared shitless.

Time was out of joint.

In much the same way she realized she would have to give up.

Smoking and then the bottle

Despite the time not being right.

She had carried me to the end.

As this time it was her turn to make all the mistakes.

To uncover what's right.

In the second set of days.

My father cleaned out the garage

He organized the basement.

Thumbing through cookbooks on a Saturday morning

While Car Talk on NPR competed with Saturday Morning TV

So my mother might have a chance to sleep.

While I watched spandexed models bounce off the edges of the television set.

My father was preparing lessons.

An educator by trade, he knew he had to be ready

Ready for questions and curiosities.

For measurements and poetry.

Ready for dreams and realities.

Successes, failures and the resilience that happens inbetween.

Ready to demonstrate the nuances of knowing when to double down, or to quit while you're ahead, to be at peace with the way it happened, and when to get the fuck out.

But regardless to know you can always make it right.

I will be learning as long as he is teaching.

The third set of days happened in my Grandmother's house, the Betty Brynn children's museum, the parish down the road right next to the local wading pool.

Matriarch to eleven, my grandmother saw a thing or two, just about every fifteen minutes for fifty years of her life.

Her house was never empty, or quiet, and at least three people had something to say about it.

At every opportunity, at least as many as Grumpa Jack's two blue collar jobs could afford.

He whisked her away.

Together defining the four corners of their world.

Their own points of their compass

The perimeter of their stars.

Their home grew to become a treasure attic of space matter.

An album of fulfilled dreams, wishes and empty candy dishes.

Which is what prompted me to ask

"Grandma, why all these candy dishes, and no candy?"

Her favorite was Vandewall's Angel Food.

So we always made sure she had some.

Two weeks into the fourth set of days I became an older brother.

I forget the first time I heard

"Oh my gosh, you two look so alike."

But ever since I spent a lifetime reminding the friend, relative, or stranger that my brother and I are different people.

At first, I wasn't even sure he was human

My brother processes internally, I processes verbally

I defined every rule he ever broke.

I set the bar so high so he could just skate by

My obsession with following foundation and form fed a fixation

On finding his own hammer, drum, and rhythm

Growing up, he would never stop moving, tapping, fidgeting or making noise.

It drove my mother crazy- so of course I didn't mind.

We came to know it as my brother's own heartbeat

A rhythm of his own kind.

Spin slip skin shin repeat

Became the evening meditation for the fifth set of days.

My uncle spent his career in transportation.

Yet years before his fixation for freedom on the open road

Was ignited by two rubber wheels and a chain.

Instead of becoming bound by the block

Milwaukee became his playground.

Together, we restored my first bike

An orange Schwinn with a yellow banana seat, fat boy handle

bars and metallic gold skull shaped tire caps.

My uncle told me to put a baseball card in the spokes.

But all I had was pokemon.

It took all my energy not to give in or give up as I tried with all my might

To ride around my own block

I will never ever tell him or mom I ever road without a helmet,

Yet there is no freedom feeling quite like a kid, a bike, a road and the wind playing with their hair.

The sixth day I found my stage

In the middle of a ding dong dungaree world.

Cukoo bird and Little Pirate crewman number two.

My mother dyed tights orange.

Gluing craft feathers to a 2 XL brown T-Shirt

Hemmed to fit my almost four foot frame

I had three lines, two costumes, and for the first time was taller than a yardstick.

I was a BIG deal.

I found my spot beneath the tri-colored strip lights.

As the curtains opened to a stale middle school auditorium

I showed my community my world

Reminding each audience member

What it was to sail away and believe.

To remember to never grow up.

To clap and believe in fairies, pirates, wizards and crocodiles

All the while knowing

My whole world was the stage.

On the seventh day, I pierced my ear

A sterling silver ball of metal

Reinforcing a tiny emptiness

An absence of matter

The 17 year old Claire's employee taught me that

Left is right

And right is wrong

But that never seemed to belong.

Like-

In what world was direction

Like left or right

A matter of black and white

Put quite politely

Or to simply say it straight.

Do you have the balls to be queer?

Yet in my seventh year

I asked my mother

And she said she'd tell me when I was older.

Yet when I got home my father's ear would hear of the adventure.

As he pierced my skin deep insecurities

By simply stating

It looks good.

And now, 26 sets of days later

I am taking a spare moment

To rest

-Alex Frantz

Diet Craze

I skimmed a news headline about some scientist finding sugar

in oxygen. So I'm cutting out oxygen for a year. You mustn't worry or carry your worry

to my mother. I just want to lose my pregnancy fat before Samantha graduates

from preschool. She's learning self care as I devour chocolate bunnies

on Easter and Halloween and every waxing moon.

At home, I hate telling her the bunnies are my dinner.

Yes yes tomorrow I'll be on day one of showing my daughter

I have the control to abstain from gulping down what surrounds us. -Keith Gaboury

Factory Body

At home, I check the tag on my rainbow shirt: made in India. The tag on my vintage-looking jeans: made in China. The tag on my boxer briefs: made in Mexico.

As I walk my Indo-Chinese-Mexican body through San Francisco density, I wonder if my organs truly fused in my mother's womb or in some far-off factory.

When I jump onto a Union Square cable car, I tear open my chest and ask a tourist to check the tag on my silkscreen heart.

The Immigrant's Briefcase

Leather slaps, dried leaves crackle, a smell of wet pine dust permeates the space, accents eternity.

Worn travel tags suspend

an

illegible

memory.

Their dusty plastic bodies tied neatly to a frame of fabric and leather - Threads

coil

around

the

briefcase's handle.

Fathers can't protect their children from violence when they have a gun to their head. Barbed wire gashes pattern the skin above River Styx's water stain.

Every journey leaves us

with a book. An autopsy finds unbound pages, smeared ink and the splatter of bloody tear ducts.

-Alex Gurtis

The Static

The static

Is deafening.

The muted tone.

I want to scream

So, I can break free.

Its grasp is too powerful.

I can't escape.

No one can.

So, I sit there

Trapped by thought,

Wondering

If I'm the only one

That can't break free

The deafening grasps

Of the

Static

A Nazi Reacts

from 1945 photo, housed in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

They ask us the same question all the time. They gather us and force us to watch the collected evidence of our crimes. I look around at the men I sit with. Some of them friends, comrades in arms. I don't know how they look straight on unblinking, unmoved. The man two seats ahead of me wears a medical patch on his arm. Is he remembering the vows he broke? I see many covering their faces, hiding from reality, just as they did in the war. Others though, I know, are avoiding the reporter's camera aimed at us. See, we all say we didn't know. How could we? There were no screams from the thick walls down below and the smoke was just an irritant on a windy day. A tear slides from my eye and I brush it away because I did know all the time but I never knew we'd get caught

-Kristina Heflin

You Bring out the Genealogist in Me

after Sandra Cisneros
You bring out the Viking in me
I want to raid your lips and plunder your body
Offer you as a sacrifice to my gods
Bloody and profane
On an altar of stones
You bring out the Viking in me

You bring out the Scot in me
I want to shelter you against the cold loch wind
Stow you in the castle of my clan
Blow the pipes
'Til we be free again
You bring out the Scot in me

You bring out the Irish in me
I want to kiss that Blarney stone of yours
Until every blessed word is mine
Luck be damned
When Danny's eyes are smiling
You bring out the Irish in me

You bring out the American in me
I want to bleed for you, die for you, live for you
Go west and stake my claim on you
Hoist my flag
To the sound of beating drums
You bring out the American in me

-Kristina Heflin

At the Donut Shop

After the work Phyllis Koestenbaum

Basically, my body is a crème-filled donut. Something empty that must be filled. At the donut shop, they use crème filled injectors to ejaculate into the holes. They are not gentle. They do not ask. I feel dirty eating the donut—the crème oozing on my fingers. I am empty. I want to feel full. I want not to think about being a donut. I hear a name that is not mine, but it is mine today. I am a color. I am a number. They give me a pill. They give me the opportunity to leave. I am a donut. Where will I go? I lay on the table. He puts my feet in stirrups. They are cold like me. He scrapes and rakes what was growing. The scraping goes on and on and on. They take what was inside out. They arrange it on a tray. I think about dying. I am a donut who bleeds. Before I go to bed I take more pills to sleep. I use a sanitary napkin to hold my blood. I stay awake. I can't stop thinking about the horrible thing I saw on the news-about the children at the border. Little children taken away and placed in cages. Living, breathing, children taken from families for months, for years, forever. My body embarrasses me, all blood and tears. When I am sick, I eat to feel better. Yesterday, I ate a bag of Twizzlers, a bag of Circus Peanuts, a bag of jelly beans, a bag of pork rinds. I don't worry. They are all fat-free. Free fat. I remember I am full. I eat a donut.

Gnat Creek

This is no

imperceptible wind showing its course in shifting smoke rising from our fire

No this is plunge into river bringing mountains down to show us what cold is

This is no

opalescent dew collecting on artist conk underbellies

No this is fistfuls of bright huckleberries ornamenting the understory

This is no subtle poem

No this is waking up in your arms

-Frederick Livingston

People You May Know

You were mindlessly scrolling through Facebook, and you came across him.

He was in the suggestions of "People You May Know."

You haven't seen him in years,

But all the grim feelings came rushing back.

You clicked on his profile and saw that he has 101 mutual friends with you.

101 mutual friends.

Friends who have no idea of the torment he put you through at fifteen.

At fifteen, you were carefree, naive, and curious.

He was older, wiser, and charming;

he made you believe he knew you.

You trusted him to love you.

Two months into dating, he changed for the worse.

You couldn't talk to your friends,

Do extracurriculars,

And if you ever stopped texting, he'd rage.

The first time he hit you, you blamed yourself.

"I'm sorry."

He became silent.

He wrapped his arms around you while you cried,

And you could only mutter "I'm sorry."

After a year of suffering, you finally left.

Just as quickly as he came into your life,

He vanished: like a bad dream.

You are now twenty.

You learned many lessons since him.

You learned that your body is a temple

And no one has the power to tear you down again.

You are strong.

You are a survivor.

You learned that you are to be cherished and you deserve to be happy.

You deserve to be happy.

He was a boy who tried to destroy you;

Now he's just "People You May Know."

Trying out suits

for the first funeral the last decade. I feel like a scarecrow everything flaps. fabric slaps my bones, falling like sails on a mast in no wind. I try one - try another. the store is lit very distastefully and this is a decision which I don't want to make. I want to get this right. I try one in pure black it's too black. try gray and it's not black enough.

40 **Tidal**

the moon
sheds its skin
across the sand
a cold and quiet place

a wind gnaws
along the jawbone
of the
coast
and the horizon
is a clouded
empty
white

footsteps taken
now sink into the
darkened blue
the swollen silence
lusting after little pinpricks
of light
filtering through the
sodden sieve

a life looms there in the green sonorous weeds wailing softly in the undercurrent, the suspension of song

a world unkempt dwelling beneath the patterned winds

to drift up and gasp the naked sky is to stand in the salt and let the sun bead weak gray into your eyes

adrift on the whispering spoon of the earth.

Fabricated Notes

Of the dreams she used to have
Days spent scuffling in
slums of Nishinari-ku, seeking
out scraps—bread dressed in rags
stale water from yesterday's drizzle
Or occasionally a treat from
landfills of a rich neighborhood kid

Of the time she yearned musing on pitted roof
For a change, a chance to reinvent
To see the blinding *lumière* of Paris
To breathe the air of Kiyomizu-dera*
She laughed at her own inanity
A ludicrous fantasy imagined too far...
Until.

Of the morning Father Dearest came by with news "A spectacular journey" in his words

Simply irresistible

To the land of the free they were to go
Big people, Small signs
Gift from France. L.A Graffiti.

Yet what conditions allowed them so?
Otousan** revealed not the details
A seed of suspicion implanted itself
And her afeard heart sang the song of doubt but she wavered them away
Too consumed by the fire of desire

Set ablaze by undeserving appetency

Of the flight it took
Twelve hours
Garbage odors.

Embraced like perfume
An English phrasebook clutched near her bosom, "Good morning"
It read.
"Today will be a happy day"
It lied.

Of the reality that soon hit her Unwelcoming stares all throughout Whispers of internment "Roosevelt was right" As was Pearl Harbor and Nagasaki.

Of fake success and feigned compassion She thought her like swallows who soar to the South But verity mocked her such Hopes shattered like the witch's mirror

Of the questions she proposed Wherefore is the thing called liberty? Where art mine American Dream? *famous temple in Japan

^{**}Japanese for 'Father'

⁻Athena Niu

The Timekeeper

One minute in—bloody chaos of umbilical mishap, disquiet delivered by a fallen babe Cry muffled by gargoyled eyes Reflecting stars over Israel that night

Fifteen past and a quarter lost—
Game gone wrong, a blinded eye
Others scorn what matters not
Already crippled, vineyard-twisted
Cobra to follow and imprinted red-hot

The hand touches the ground
Declares half is past—
Middle-aged Bestseller
Absconded North Korean refugee
National hero; face plastered on walls
Or was he.

Forty-five—a good time they say
Indubitable late marriage to come
Isabella was her name; blue eyes blond hair
Packaged from France; cargo-shipped
Saw the fiancé and to the window she threw
...herself (Defenestration was due)

Last minute—life hums a lullaby
Black widows with fake tears down their faces

Prancing harvestmen, crawling for the inheritance
Venom sent him paralyzed down the neck
And thinks to himself:
What a half-assed life
The monitor slows, the doctor sighs
Prepares himself for the grey-area speech
59, 60
Tick...tock...beep

The Shifting Tectonic Plates of Mind

Dozens of gray whales are dying on the West Coast. Stranded.

We don't understand it—starvation? Of a sort—we're

swelling, venting; thinking, flowing within geothermally connecting grammar

like a drug we are....Thinking about what light is. Li-fi thinking new math for anomalies of anomalies. Sending ourselves a message: us.

We're inviting ourselves to keep mapping it. Species us.

Drawing our architecture. Paint dripping neurons.

As if cracks in continents; worms; lightning. Head

to the basement when the winds pick up. Climb each other, ourselves until no longer these teacher tornadoes. These trees—swaying doors.

Grafts given to someone in exchange for something.

Escaping from electrical school on a foil surfboard.

Getting under Einstein's ground by rising above the surface.

Using present tense for facts. We all live here. Within ourselves one another.

Using present tense for things that keep happening. We read every day. We fish.

We work hard every day to build a house still susceptible to sliding in floods,

mudslides and wildfires. What should we do when our house is on fire?

Head to the roof if it's still there. Sail it. Houseboat. Inventing.... Schooling squid.

Microscopic creatures for gobbling floating in the sea. Ghost shrimp and other

tiny shrimp-like animals in sediment on the ocean floor. Mysids hiding under rocks.

Inventing....Permanent shelter. Calling ourselves to ourselves, stay.

Carefully, grammar, eaten by its ocean? Krill in what whale's belly?

-Thomas Osatchoff

Learn

The first time I got called FAGGOT, I surely didn't know what it meant. The wrong kind of boy, football bored me, cars bored me, guns bored me. And TV shows where the gun is the uncredited main character.

I liked reading—or would have liked reading if teachers didn't force me to read books like *Men of Iron* with knights clanking around in unattractive iron clothes.

Calling me FAGGOT got physical.

Too scared to tell my parents, I took it.

Our school's motto: Learn. I did. It tasted like blood.

Repeatedly

Megachurch founder repeatedly groped his assistant. Megachurch founder repeatedly groped his ass-

istant. Shhh! His ways aren't our ways. His assistant. Repeatedly. Repeatedly groped. His assistant,

a human being. Megachurch founder. His assistant. Groped. Called a pastor's pastor

repeatedly. He groped. His assistant. This pastor's pastor. He founded a megachurch. Mega what? A church

with many open hymnals. Repeatedly, they showed up for services. Groped. Keep quiet. Don't speak. About

what the megachurch founder did. Repeatedly. Lip zip. Assistant. Groped. Pray. Bible Study. Repeatedly.

-Kenneth Pobo

I Have Two Lovers

One is a real lover.
Well, kinda, sorta.
Not in the Hallmark-card-sense either, but more a lover than his twin, for sure.
He softens the mornings in his lab coat reaching for the coffee pot, and in one swift, orchestrated move, a kiss and hug, until he swings you across the room, spinning senselessly.

The other one is a wounded child.

Try to remember that, between tantrums, what triggers his discontent.

So don't use his hateful words against him because his mornings are grey and cold, no amount of coffee can remedy the cold shoulder, the complaints, for never being able to be compliant enough to take that elixir he slips in your drink so knowingly.

One speaks of books he's read the great finds you found him from the Dollar Store by Pulitzer-prized authors, even.

He rants at the spin-doctors on NPR.

Hates politicians, hates bad people.

The other one drives his truck on the very edge of the sidewalk at full speed because he wants to scare you, and then laughs when he does.

Soon enough the lab-coated man doesn't appear in the mornings anymore. Even the coffee pot starts to grumble. He is devoured, like Superman devoured Clark Kent, but they are both there like Siamese Twins, their hearts are fused together, and pretty soon you will lose yourself and both by fucking with the Bermuda Triangle.

One PoeMath

πing

Heartless $\alpha \pm$ Hope

$$\beta = \operatorname{Gods} \frac{\textit{They dwell-through leaves}}{\textit{in Heavens?}} \ \textit{or} \ \left(\frac{\textit{Beyond that,where}}{\textit{a cocoon on silk fibrepes}} \right. \\ \left. \pm \beta \right) ... \\ \frac{\textit{carries noisy}}{\textit{hopes}} (\textit{of the \mp insane})$$

Free ± doom

$$\frac{-\textit{Scent} \pm \sqrt{\textit{lost childhood dreams}^2 - \textit{was found}}{\textit{the angry cry}}$$

Who steal miserable?

Limping(swinging slowly)
$$\oint$$
 and holdings scythes self to fearless childrenn

So quietly ≠ so noiselessly

$$\sum_{he=went}^{Screaming} unnoticed_k$$

$$\bigcup_{by=hearts}^{Beaten} (Singing_n \cap Vainly_n)$$

no ⊕ body

$$\operatorname*{Constant}_{done \rightarrow \infty} \left(tiny\ Makers + \frac{are\ small}{no\ more}\right)^{n}$$

Intransigent $\boldsymbol{\Omega}$

$$\text{Offering}_{wings\ to\ you}[f(when\ seeking)\ \oplus\ yester(days) = no \land gift] \leq is \frac{left}{unwanted}$$

-Radoslav Rochallyi

Your or My Eugenics?

-- thanks to Times of Israel, 7OCT19

Two ink-smudged Soviet-era documents were Mom's only official proof of Jewishness – the rest was memory and ash.

Those pieces of paper served to get us citizenship under Israel's once near-automatic Law of Return.

Decades later, she agreed to give blood to a non-profit Jerusalem bio-bank which said it was studying genetics of healthy aging.

Then her family's Chief Ashkenazi rabbi sent a letter by certified mail claiming they'd long ago bamboozled

immigration authorities when making Aliyah,
"How dare you say you're Jews?"
Which sounds to me
just like crazed Nazi pseudo-science in reverse.

-Gerard Sarnat

Stranger to Ourselves

such are the ways of this life
that the ones we hold most dear
can be gone in an instant.
and for however brief the days, weeks, months, or years
that we shared with them,

they leave an imprint on our soul that is so indelible it forever changes who we are, and who we will become, and what makes us laugh, and what brings us to silence.

when we try to remember who we once were before we ever came to love them, there comes a profound realization that we are now a stranger to ourselves.

the tears shed from this understanding are often the saddest ones of them all. and while there is no promise that we will ever be purged of this pain,

held high before us,
with these scars now stitched together as our new skin,
is the reminder that we once loved
and the challenge to love again.

The Year of the Dragon

My mother should have known

She was born in '52

It was written in the stars, in the quiet night sky Above her childhood bed

Her mother should have known That there was a beast Roaring, scratching

Alive and wanting out

Birthed from the broken pieces Of a child's dreams

Coaxed by large male hands On cool skin

Everyone could see the flames Where innocence should have been

Now - tame, dormant, buried But ever-burning

Embers looking for kindling

Everyone should have known Everyone should have fucking known

A roaring inside my mother

A demon snake licking the edges Testing reality's hazy limits Eating up the insides

Leaving behind

All of what could have been

A Place, Cemented

Everything has a place, the instructor said, nothing happens in a vacuum. All events occur in a real place. A Saturday, mid-July, in Santa Monica. Heat you expect though a welcome breeze riffles the trees in Reed Park. People are on lawn chairs, blankets, beach chairs as the Los Angeles Philharmonic plays for free. A camera records the conductor's dancing hands, the rising bow of viol row. Someone has spilled a sippy cup. No one minds two women sharing a blanket. High overhead shaggy headed palms on impossible giraffe necks nod along. There is a percussive dribble from the nearby basketball courts. Someone has toppled a platter of watermelon. Puccini. From among the chairs a kid approached the drums. She stands by the kettle, bounces every time they add their part. Her hands fly in double meter. The strings swoon. Then in the hush between stanzas, only the cello humming, all others tense in anticipation, your words to me are quite clear;

-Travis Stephens

I am leaving you.

Blue Chariot

I realize I've never gone on a vacation before,

because I can't take care of myself, how can I take care of someone else,

so I took myself to Rhode Island,

on the way over I hit my own body with my car, and when I smash into it, the bumper makes a larger sound than the body,

I can momentarily feel the sensation of crushing a bird but a large and loud one -

I stand over myself as the poor man moans, crying, but I'm not done yet, I'm not done yet, so I tell him to shut up as I sit on his chest and slam his head into the pavement just to make sure -

and as I stuffed myself into the trunk of my car, taking off the shoes,

I thought about the spiral of the hermit crab, the weight of something familiar,

like a burden on the shoulders,

Please please let me out, the back of my car yelled. but when the police come, I cut the body in it's middle and climb into it and say,

I'm fine, sir! Just going along my way,

oh, not exactly like the hermit crab, but it is me and my blue chariot, hiding far away.

-Haolun Xu

Above



Canon 7D "I want to wake up in the city that never sleeps" $\tilde{\ }$ Frank Sinatra -Keely Cruz



Nikon D3300
Chameleon basking in the sun on a wall at the Castillo San Felipe del Morro
-Sarah Feldpausch

Suburban Disaster



Pentax KX

A colourful connecting passageway between café's and apartments. Presented as a foreboding descent into monotony. The walls are bright and adorned with unique paintings and graffiti that urge the viewer to remain in the oasis of socialisation.

-Adam Foster

Suburban Disaster



Pentax KX

A view of from a dark and cold street. The viewer is alone and kept far away from the warm light of the busy centre by the tall buildings. The one hope present is the Gatsby-like green light that remains out of reach for the viewer.

-Adam Foster

South Bank, London



 $\it Nikon\,Z6$ Diners and waiter outside a café in London's South Bank with a mural overlooking them.

-Jeremiah Gilbert

62 **London Graffiti Artist**



Nikon D7100

Was exploring the street art in London's Shoreditch district when I came across this artist art work.

-Jeremiah Gilbert

A Fever Dream

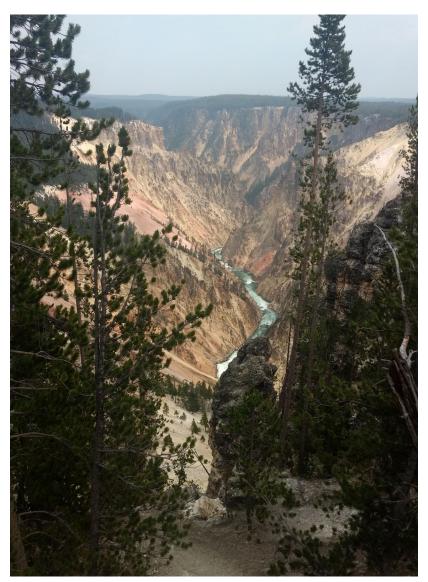


Moto G6 Phone

This photo captures the strangeness of the dreams everyone has. This was meant to encapsulate the shaky oddities of dreams with things like the harsh black from the neck and hand prints and then things that should not belong such as the arms surrounding my head. My face was meant to represent the inviting aspect of a deep sleep and flowing dreams while the surrounding represents the unknown.

-Riley Hancock

64 **The Mountain Pass**



Moto G6 Phone

I believe this photo captures the best parts of the national park. Gorgeous blue/green water, vast forests and formidable mountains passes.

-Riley Hancock

The Tidal Pool



Moto G6 Phone

I captured this photo in awe of all the life that can live even in the most shallow of pools, and craggiest of rocks.

-Riley Hancock

66 **Parrot Feathers**



Canon Powershot SX420IS

"I've always been envious of the fact that birds can travel whenever they wanted, so I took a picture of this beautiful bird's wing."

-Cassidy Inks

Beautiful Drowning



Nikon D7500

"Beautiful Drowning" is meant to make the viewer to think deeper than surface level. This piece is meant to ask the question, "why is she in the water in a prom dress?" The answer is left to the viewer to decide.

-Eliza Velasquez

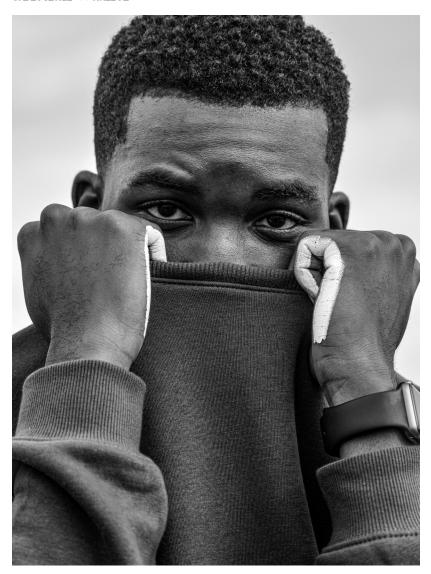


Nikon D7500

This photo was not meant to happen; it was meant to be a cute portrait in a quaint barn. "Before the Shot" is literally a photo of the model fixing her hair before the intended shot.

-Eliza Velasquez

Tristian Walker



Nikon D7500

The intention of this photo is to make the viewer connect with the model. The way Tristian looks into the lens and into the eye of the viewer invites them to share with him and themselves their own story without having to use words.

-Eliza Velasquez

Does the Name Saad Mean Anything to You?

It is the celebration of my son's birth. Dad is sitting in the center of the salon, walking his fingers on a coral rosary. A white cap crowns his head, and a majestic beard tells of piety. His oak cane is leaning beside him like an obedient child. My nieces, dandy in puffy dresses and floral headbands, share little toys in a corner, and the nephews clump over an iPad taking turns.

My mother is threading a garland of fuchsia roses for the baby's crib. She has her large glasses on—the type she only wears for serious business. I remember when she wore them to make tutus for my sisters and me, her foot stomping the sewing machine's pedal as the thread reeled to glide into the needle that beaked stitches on the tulle. I recall how, when Saad asked for a tutu, she stared over the rim of her glasses' silver frame and said harshly, "No, you're a boy!"

The thread in Mom's hand now is light pink, half of it already festooned with fresh roses. A basket of fuchsia petals rests on her lap. She is wearing a long-sleeved green caftan that covers the flaccid arms. Her henna-dyed hair is starkly orange where white strands have been. I am in my daybed, tapping the screen of my phone, the wallpaper of which I changed this morning. A miniature version of Saad and me shines.

The occasion for the wallpaper was interesting. Dad took a picture of Rana and Salma, my older sisters, with his new camera. Their hair tied in ponytails and uniforms smelling of a long day in a classroom. Saad and I were five and three. We begged for a photo, and Dad begrudged us one. Relaxed in domestic shorts and a t-shirt, I stood akimbo, head tilted to the side to show how long my hair had grown, and Saad crossed his arms and smiled the widest smile I'd ever seen on his face.

Dad stared. "Stand properly. Your hands down."

We stood like soldiers, like Dad himself when he served in the army during Saddam Hussein's stupid invasion of Kuwait. Saad kept his smile, but mine departed with my akimbo stance.

Today, my back rests relaxed against four pillows with

lace trimming. The phone beeps. I stride out of bed, smoothing the duvet over my hemorrhoids' donut pillow to hide it.

"Walk slowly. The wound," Mom instructs.

She means the episiotomy. As I walk, the suture pricks my inner thigh like the Singer's sharp needle piercing the tutus. I slow my pace a little. The nephews and nieces gaze at me, wondering where the wound is. I cross the salon, walking towards the house's back door.

I remember the day Saad and I were chased by Nashmi, the sheep Dad brought for the annual Eid slaughter. How we ran up the patio's twelve stairs, panted, and saw it at the tail of the stairs, looking mad. How we shut the door, locked it, and laughed the whole afternoon.

Now, I open the same door, and before me, Saad stands as handsome as a brother can be. I stand on tiptoes to reach him; how tall he has grown since high school. Broad shoulders, shaved face, bright hazelnut eyes.

"Missed you, Sister," he says and embraces me. His cuddle brings attention to my sore, about-to-explode breasts. Then he gestures, and another handsome guy enters.

"This is Ghalib," Saad says.

He extends his hand. I reach with mine, and I notice the gold bands on their fingers.

"Are you sure they will not be upset?" Saad asks.

I want to say I expected him alone. That he will be shredded to pieces. That the next time he comes home will be our father's funeral, and Mom's diabetes will worsen. But he and Ghalib have weird, if inviting, chemistry. And separating them seems like splitting one body into halves.

"Of course not! They will be happy to see you. They've changed a lot." I say, and I hear my son's cries.

We walk abreast. Ghalib dapper in black pants and white shirt. Saad in his usual washed jeans and a polo shirt. If my smartwatch can make my heartbeats audible, Saad can understand my fear. I can use our childhood codes of backward

words and let Ghalib wander somewhere until the end of the gathering. I brazen up:

"Enola emoc retteb."

"Excuse me?" Saad says. Then we all hear a gasp as Salma, my middle sister, smacks her chest, her mouth agape, searching for words.

"Shuush," I say, a few steps from the salon's entrance.

*

"Peace be upon you," Saad clears his throat. A freezing moment. Dad's thumb stops on a bead. Mom's needle is a millimeter away from punching a hole in the heart of a few remaining petals. Rana, my elder sister is holding a tissue to wipe chocolate from the tip of her daughter's mouth. The children murmur about who these two people are.

My dad holds his cane. The salon waits for more guests to arrive. I am waiting for my husband to bring the best Mille-Feuille in town, Saad's favorite. I take my son, who has been sucking my mother's finger. Helium-inflated balloons bob in white and blue. I grab my nursing cover and sit opposite Dad. Saad walks to my mom first. Her tears cascade a decade of separation. He then walks to Dad, bends, and I wonder if he still smells Dad's rose oud. My dad lifts his shaky hand from the oak cane, and Saad kisses it.

"Who is this man?"

"Ghalib."

"Who is he?"

A pause.

"My friend."

Dad mutters prayers designed for calamity. Ghalib steps forward and bows to caress Dad's hand. My dad removes his hand from the cane and turns away. In minutes, the hall becomes empty of children. Mom puts a scarf on her head, then extends a tray of freshly squeezed orange juice to Ghalib and Saad. Ghalib drinks half the glass.

Dad asks all of us to sit. Saad rests his orange juice on the coffee table. Dad clears his throat and starts with a sermon. Mom sits now next to Saad. Tears well up in her small eyes. Wrinkles accrue around her cheeks. She reaches for Saad's hand. He cradles it with both palms.

Dad comes finally to the point: "I appreciate your coming after these years. But son, in front of everyone, you are disobeying God, and I can't have a sinner in my household."

He pauses. Rana uncaps a bottle of water for him. He takes a few sips, pauses for a while, hands shivering. Still leaning on the cane, Dad says, "Choose either Ghalib or us."

Everyone looks at Saad. I look at Ghalib, who lowers his gaze to the marble floor. Mom presses her hand into Saad's, and I can tell from her steamy face that the hot flashes are on. If I only could tell Dad about Saad's confided secrets. About the math tutor raping him on the same sofa where my dad is sitting now. About Saad's fear of telling everyone the reason for his low scores and Dad's frequent ruler beatings. Then I might have changed the course of events. But you don't dig in the past to kill your parents with a heart attack. You don't break promises to let your loved ones fit into the picture of a perfect, reunited family. My baby is still sucking.

"What do you say?" Dad asks.

Saad holds Mom's hands, kisses them. "Forgive me," he says, rises tall as a statue perforated with civil war rockets, and walks away, alone.

I, my son still feeding on me, race Ghalib to Saad's side.

The Hurt I Could Cause You

"Gavin, stop it," I giggled as he grabbed me by my waist, tickling me. I knew this was so wrong... but I liked it.

"What? We can't just dance a little?" Gavin said, giggling and slurring. He was drunk. We were both drunk.

"Margot is in the other room . . . My best friend? . . . Your girlfriend?"

"I just wanna dance. That's all."

The loud trap music and people could be heard outside of the bedroom we were in. I think it was Margot's parents' bedroom. Dammit.

"Why can't you dance with Margot?"

"I don't know. She keeps acting weird. Watching my every move to make sure I'm not cutting myself again, even though I told her I was fine."

"So . . . you're hiding from her?" I said concerned, glancing at the brown scars on his wrists.

"Pretty much yeah. I mean I love her, but she's starting to be too much lately. You're like the only sense of relief I have from all of this," he said with his ocean eyes staring into mine.

"Stop," I giggled.

"It's true . . . ," he paused.

Gavin touched his nose to mine. Our mouths nearly touching. The tension was so high between us. This needed to stop. Then, he placed his lips on mine, pushing his body up against me. I knew it was a mistake, but I didn't stop him. I kept kissing him back. We pulled each other even closer until our bodies could feel each other's warmth. Margot's face flashed inside of my mind. It didn't stop me, but it made me think about how I'm such a shitty friend. This was the second time this happened. It has to stop. But I didn't want it to.

Then, out of nowhere, Gavin pulled away from me quickly, and started to tear up.

"I--I'm a shitty boyfriend, aren't I?" he said, sobbing. "What? No, you--"

"I don't deserve Margot. I shouldn't have kissed you. I--I just don't know how to deal with her. I'm so shitty. Shitty, shitty, shitty!" he started to scream at himself. I know the alcohol in his system didn't help this situation, especially since he deals with being bipolar.

"Gavin, please calm down."

"You just don't get it, Tara. We kissed because of me, and that makes it shitty for you too because you're her best friend. It's my fault."

"Iknow...it's my fault too..."

"I gotta go," he said, abruptly. He was still crying. I didn't know why this made him so emotional. It was like something else was going on with him, besides the fact that we betrayed Margot. I didn't run after him though, and I truly regret it. I never saw him again that night... because he stood in front of heavy traffic, letting a damn truck hit him. That was the worst night of my life.

Now—I'm here. Two weeks later in this cafeteria full of melancholy. Everyone was still mourning their star basketball captain, Gavin. I just sat across the room. Watching my best friend sit alone at the table she, Gavin, and I used to sit all the time. She's sitting alone this time because she hates me. Because she hates the world. Her boyfriend is gone, and there is nothing I could say or do for her to make things better. Especially if I know I'm the reason Gavin went through with killing himself. I haven't told her though . . . about that night, and what happened between me and him. I want to tell her. I really do, but I know she will hate me and the world even more. Should I talk to her? Should I still give her space? What kind of best friend am I? I know I can't help that she has barely talked to me, her parents, nor her classmates, but I have not gotten the balls to say something to her. I don't know how she's going to react.

I watched as people tried to approach her, but she just ignores them. I finally decided to walk up to her, but before I could, she started to yell.

"Just get away!" she sobbed and stormed out of the cafeteria. No one else followed behind her because they were just too afraid. But I had to. I had to stop being shitty and finally talk to her. I ran out into the hallway behind her, but she had already run into the counselor's office. Mr. Kelly is our school counselor, and he's also our closest friend. He was there for me and Margot when we dealt with a lot of shit, and he is so easy to talk to.

I wondered if Margot said anything about how she was feeling, so I went up to the door. I could hear her sobbing still and Mr. Kelly telling her to calm down. He was probably hugging and holding her—he does that—and it helps.

"I-I just need closure . . . " Margot confessed to him.

"And what closure would that be?" Mr. Kelly asked her.

"I don't know . . . li—like why he went through with it? Why I couldn't see him before he did it? Wh---why did I let him drink knowing he was still sad about his brother's death?"

"You need to stop blaming yourself," he said. And he was right. She needed to stop blaming herself because it was my fault. I let the kissing get more intense. I let it happen not once, but twice. And she doesn't know this. I'm the closure she needs, but I can't be that closure. I can't do that to her.

"I can't go another day without knowing why this happened. And Tara she. . . " I heard her pause as I pushed my ear closer.

"What about, Tara?" he asked.

"She just doesn't talk to me anymore. I mean maybe she's taking it as hard as I am, but she hasn't said a word to me. I want her to talk to me. I just don't want to be around everyone else because they won't leave me alone. Everyone keeps asking me if I'm okay, but I just don't say anything to them because

they know I'm not okay. I don't say anything because I know that I'll explode, like I *just* did."

My eyes started to tear up hearing her say this. I finally understood why she always looked alone, but I *knew* I was a terrible friend. She said it herself. I mean maybe not in those words, but she said it. I didn't know if she actually wanted me to say anything to her, and I hate myself for not noticing this before.

"I don't know why," Mr. Kelly responded, "You two are inseparable."

"Yeah, well, feels like we aren't anymore. I--Is it me?"

No, Margot. It's not you. It's never been you. It's all me. I'm scared to talk to you because I feel like I will tell you the truth, which you deserve. I remember seeing her face that night we lost him. I will never forget the blank stare she gave me after hearing about it.

Cop cars surrounded the home we were at for the party. Not only were they there to shut the party down, but also to tell Margot and I what had happened to Gavin.

"Excuse me?" said one of the cops to us. "Is this the home of Margot Robinson?"

"Yes...I--I'm her," Margot said nervously, knowing that she was drunk and would probably get in trouble.

"We were told that you are the girlfriend of Gavin Edwards, correct?"

"Yes... is he okay?"

My heart started to pound while I anticipated the cop's response.

"Unfortunately, h--he isn't."

"Where is he?" Margot said. Her eyes were getting watery.

"I'm so sorry to tell you this, but there was an accident on the freeway..."

"What the hell was he doing out on the freeway?" she started to panic.

"Witnesses said he walked in front of an oncoming truck. They said they told him to get out of the way... and he didn't."

"He wouldn't do that. He can't do that... Wh-where is he? Where's my boyfriend?"

"He was rushed to the hospital . . . but he died shortly after in the ambulance . . . I'm so sorry to have to tell you this."

Margot just looked at the cop and fell back into my arms. She started to hyperventilate then started to sob, uncontrollably. She just kept repeating, "He can't be dead! He can't! He can't!"

I held her head to my chest tight to bring her comfort, but it didn't seem like it was helping. Then, I was sobbing myself. Gavin was not only Margot's boyfriend, but my close friend too. I sobbed because I could have prevented this from happening. I let him walk out of that bedroom and let that truck take his life. It was because of his wrong feelings for me, he was hurting even more.

I slowly started to distance myself from Margot after that night. Her pain and grief got worse and worse to the point where she would be so sad that I wouldn't know what to say, so I said nothing in order to not make it worse.

But I *did* make it worse. *I* shut her out—not the other way around. I don't even want to speak to her now. She hates me. She'll nev—

"Thank you, Mr. Kelly—," Margot said walking out of his office. She realized that I was behind the door. Then, she and Mr. Kelly just looked at me as I stood like a deer in headlights. "T—Tara?" she said surprised.

"Margot . . . um-"

"What are you doing?"

"I uh . . . was just . . . trying to get some water from the

drinking fountain . . . "I trailed off noticing there was no drinking fountain near me.

"Tara?"

"Yeah?"

"I can tell you're lying."

I chuckled nervously and looked down at my feet and then back up at her and Mr. Kelly.

"Maybe you should talk to her," he whispered to Margot, knowing I would hear. Then, he looked at us both with a smile and shut his door. Margot and I just stared at each other.

"Hey . . . " she said.

"Hey . . . I'm sorry," I said, tearing up.

"For what?"

"For everything. For not being there. For being shitty. I was just giving you space."

"I mean, maybe not *that* shitty . . ." she laughed.

I laughed with her with tears in my eyes. Then, I saw her starting to cry.

"I miss my best friend. I know you were just trying to do the right thing, but I need you more than ever now. I'm sorry if I made you feel like I didn't," she sobbed.

I held her in my arms as she wept. For once, I didn't feel shitty. I missed this. I missed her.

"Why are you here at school? You know you're not stable enough. I saw what happened in the cafeteria," I said.

"I thought I was fine."

"You shutting people out doesn't make you fine."

"You heard everything, huh?"

"Everything."

"I guess I need more time. And I need my best friend to be there for me."

"Always. . . ," I smiled. "You wanna skip class like we

used to and walk to Jamerson Park?"

"Such a bad influence on me."

"You love it though."

"I need a breather . . . so let's do it."

Margot and I used to go to Jamerson Park to swing on the swings and just talk. Talk about boys, family, the fact that high school is absolutely dreadful. We haven't gone since last year. Life kind of just got a hold of us. She was so worried about applying to college, getting in, and making sure her grades were decent enough to do so. I, on the other hand, was just trying to graduate. I mean, maybe skipping class isn't the smartest thing to do if I want to do that, but I wanted to be there for Margot somehow.

Eventually, after walking a few miles to the park. Margot and I looked around to see if any cops were around. The cops around here would always catch us when we were younger and tell us to get back to school. Those days were great. We then made our way to two lonely swings and sat and watched the scenery. The sun shone bright and the trees blew softly from the breeze and the tall grass followed. Birds flew all over the place and squirrels ran back and forth with their walnuts. It was beautiful. I looked over at Margot, who just sat and watched it with me in silence. Then, she started to swing gently with both legs slightly going back and forth. I started to as well.

"What are you thinkin' about?" I asked. There was a pause between us.

"Why'd he do it?"

"Who?" I knew who she was talking about, but I played dumb.

"Gavin."

"Oh . . . right."

"I just need to know why he did it. I thought he wouldn't go that far—but he fucking did."

"I'm so sorry," I said, trying to hide my nervousness. I know I need to tell her what happened that night, but I don't think I can. We just started to become close again. She'd be crushed. I want her to have the closure she wants though. Shit.

"It's not your fault," she said.

But it is.

"You saw him that night, didn't you?" she continued.

"I did."

"Did he seem . . . alright to you?"

"He seemed fine," I lied.

"I don't get it. His depression was so intense that he started to shut me out too. And I know he cheated on me."

"What?" I said quickly. Fuck. This was it. I'm about to lose my best friend.

"He told me. He cried in my arms explaining how fucking shitty he was to me and apologized. And of course, I stayed with him because my dumb ass was worried about him. He wasn't the same after his brother died."

"Margot . . ." I trailed off.

When Gavin was 16-years-old, his older brother, Ryan was killed in Afghanistan. That day changed him forever. Ryan was not only his brother, but his best friend too. He took care of him when their parents were being awful-kicking him out of the house multiple times for God knows what, or being drunkards and not giving a shit about him. On top of all of that, he had to deal with the loss of his brother. Never had I seen someone who was so bubbly turn so gloomy in an instant. He was unhappy with everything in his life, which explains why he cheated. I know that is no excuse to cheat. But I sympathized with him. Gavin was lost and confused. I could only be a friend to him, even though God knows I wanted to be more. I really don't know how to tell her that it was me though. Does she know it's me? I mean, I'm probably not the only one, but still. Does she know? I think she would have said something to me by now if she knew . . . right?

"And," she continued, "he probably cheated on me more and more after that—yet, I stayed with him because I fell in love. God, I miss that asshole. I miss him so fucking much," she said while using her legs to stop swinging. I stopped with her.

"I miss him too," I said quietly.

I really do miss him. It doesn't feel the same. I wish things were different and I wouldn't have to tell Margot the truth.

"I don't even know who the girls he cheated on me with are."

Oh, thank God.

"And I don't even care," she continued. "I just wanted things to go back to normal."

"But they never did," I said.

"I know. I'm an idiot."

"Stop saying that."

"Well it's true . . . and you know what?"

"What?"

"It's probably me."

"What do you mean?"

"/killed him."

"Margot. Stop it."

"I made him do what he did. Because I just wanted him to be fine, but he wasn't. I made him worse. How shitty is that?" she chuckled.

"Margot! Stop it now! It's not your fault!"

"Explain to me why he did it then?!"

"I-can't."

I mean I can, but I know she'll hate me so much. I'm the only friend she really can trust or even be comforted by.

"Exactly. I will never know what he did in his final moments." she said, getting choked up.

"He loved you, Margot."

"He told you that?"

"No," I lied, "but I know he did."

"I wish I could believe you."

I wish I could believe me too.

"Just please don't blame yourself," I said.

"Then tell me why he did it."

"I wish I could."

Another pause happened between us.

"Me too . . . " she said.

It was silent for a moment as she started to swing again, and I followed. I looked at the scenery. The clouds started to darken up the bright green trees and grass. The wind got even stronger, and raindrops started to fall—first, gently onto our bodies, then intensely after about a minute. We were soaked, but we still sat on our swings . . . laughing with tears. Margot knew she wasn't alone around me. I hadn't seen her smile until today. I did that. I can't mess that up. I can't tell her. Not yet. Maybe not ever. I mean . . . my best friend needs me more than ever now, and to be honest, I need her just the same.

I'd be an idiot to mess that up. Right?

Arachnophobia

"You're gone... I watched you disappear..." she breathed out, unable to believe that the monstrous entity before her was still alive. There was no way that this horrendous creature could still be alive after everything that she had done. Yet, here it was, staring at her with all four of its large glossy black eyes.

She began backing away from it the moment that its eight giant legs began moving across the ceiling in her direction. She needed to get away from it. She couldn't allow for such a creature to consume her. "Stay..." she attempted to say, though suddenly found that her voice was beginning to fail her.

No. She couldn't allow for her voice to fail her now. Not after everything that she had been through. She'd witnessed this creature feast upon her friends as though they were nothing more than a piece of chicken from a bucket of KFC. She had set the creature before her ablaze with nothing more than a lighter and multiple gas containers filled with gasoline. Now was not the time for her to allow for her voice to fail her.

"Stay back! I'm warning you!" she threatened, searching the room for anything that she could defend herself with. All she could seem to find was an umbrella. "This will have to do," she murmured, and then proceeded to grab the umbrella from the holder it resided in and held it up as though she were holding Excalibur.

The creature contorted its head in an unnatural position and simply stared at the umbrella with both intrigue and confusion. In fact, its confusion and intrigue could be compared to that of a dog who is waiting for their owner to throw the ball in their hand. However, both the intrigue and confusion it felt seemed to pass, and the creature began its pursuit yet again.

"I told you to stay back!" she repeated once again as she prepared herself to stand her ground even though every inch of her body was beginning to tremble like a leave blowing in the wind.

"Martha," it said, and began to come closer and closer.

"It's time," it continued, as a slimy white substance began to ooze from its mouth.

"No!" she yelled and proceeded to lung forward, driving the tip of the umbrella into the stomach of the creature. "The only thing it is time for is for me to vanquish you once and for all!" She drove the umbrella deeper and deeper into the creature.

It screeched in pain and began to writhe around. The oozing white substance was replaced with a red and metallic smelling substance as the creature began trying to get away from Martha and the umbrella. Martha seemed unwilling to let the creature escape as she continued to drive the umbrella further and further into the creature, until the tip became stuck in something solid that was within its body.

"Take—" she began to speak, only to be cut off. She felt as though she were beginning to choke on something. She released her hold on the handle of the umbrella and quickly began clawing at her own neck.

By now, the creature lay slain on the floor a few feet away from Martha, though she paid it no mind. She continued to claw at her neck, retching as though something were trying to come up her throat. Yet, nothing ever seemed to come out. Well, not until the final time she doubled over and vomited. At that moment, she watched as a small, eight-legged creature fall from her mouth and onto the floor before it scurried away.

Martha began screaming in sheer terror. Although, this quickly proved to be a huge mistake as she soon watched more spiders began to emerge from her mouth, only to then begin crawling over every inch of her body. Somehow, her screams never seemed to stop. In fact, they began to grow louder and louder until a voice from out of nowhere silenced her.

"Martha? Martha, can you hear me?" the voice asked. With that, she opened her eyes and was greeted to two men restraining her, while a third was standing in front of her. "Martha, you've failed the trial," the third man told her. "You failed the trial..." he repeated, and his eyes seemed to flicker once

more, only this time, they were filled with sadness.

Of course, Martha merely stared at him with confusion. Did she know this man before her? Did he know her and she simply couldn't remember? What was this trial that he was talking about? And why did he seem so saddened by the fact that she'd failed the trial?

From another room, another person seemed to be watching Martha and her companions through a glass window. Martha was unaware of the fourth individual, but the three men were. "Subject 0839 failed this test as well?" he asked. He proceeded to glance over at the female in the room with him.

"Yes, sir. That's six hundred and sixty-nine people in total who failed this test," the woman replied, letting a small sigh escape her lips. "Shall we terminate her now?" she asked.

The man was silent for a few minutes before he proceeded to shake his head. "No. Let's keep her," he said. "After all, she has to be the most interesting subject out of them all." Then, without saying another word, the man and the woman in his company left the room, leaving the window completely exposed, along with the carnage on the other side of it.

Me Too

I hadn't realized just how toxic the mindset around the stigma towards women and sexual assault had been in South Korea. It's the place I grew up, the place I was cared for and as a young child. Years later I would soon find issues and fault in that mindset. Although my parents were a part of making me who I am, they weren't the entirety of my being.

At seventeen, I found myself in the middle of the "Me Too" movement, when it was just gaining speed. And it intrigued me, anything did that my mother told me to stay away from. I eventually had a personal connection and experience that made me want to be involved, something stronger than curiosity and wonder. An actual experience that left me breathless, questioning, and fragile. The personal experience was raw and jarring, to say the least, especially at the young age I was. The first time I felt fragile to the hands of a male authority figure was when I became an intern at a publishing company in Hongdae. I assumed I hadn't been given much to do since I ran the errands people didn't want to; I was made to get coffee, restock the printer, and do minuscule details of work. I hadn't realized that innocence, youth, and lack of credibility as a woman, were just what the boss had thought about and eventually preyed on.

The first time came in the break room after others left and my boss let me know I needed a performance review. Diligently, I obeyed, showing up like I always did to reviews or meetings. But that event harbored more ill intentions than I had thought possible. I had been groped by the hands of his, fingers prodding and poking under my skirt.

His hand covered my mouth as his breath fanned across my neck, a smirk pulling at his lips, deceiving and all too vicious. Tears expelled from my eyes, cheeks stained when he was done, leaving me in the break room sobbing. He told me to shut up, words like shards against my eardrum, pleasure radiating in his tone, for he found a certain level of gratification in the morbid groping and assault of me. He knew his power, he knew and was more than vividly aware of the way his hands were

rough and how his fingers forced themselves in me. Grunts and moans escaped his lips while mine trembled and quivered, covered in pebbles of tears that eventually dripped down my chin and neck.

I revealed the details of my assault to my mother, but her words were harsh, telling me, "Be quiet, stay silent, and it won't happen again." But, her words were, in fact, wrong. Perhaps they were based on the idea that women should be quiet, that things won't go away but maybe they'll become easier, but they didn't. The assaults happened, some with simple brushes against my backside, the curve of my hip or the swell of my breast.

My eyes were red-rimmed, puffy from the once again adequate exhaustion of crying and forcing myself up after I left my building. At that point, the utter lack of closeness and transparency had been a usual routine. As perusal, I had cleaned off semen from the bottom of my skirt, wiping the tears off my cheeks and crying of my blouse. But that stain was on me, the tears permanently imprinted and the stain of him never went away. I tried to disregard it, to let my bust life of studying and the workload overcompensate, trying to take on my responsibility at school, aiming for more projects or to lead clubs. No matter how busy I was, I still thought about each time that made me feel small, fragile, weak and voiceless.

After several weeks passed, the same cleaning of my skirt and drying of blouse had me walking outside in the bitter night, coming face to face with the Me Too Movement protest, not realizing I had found something to believe in, that I had found women who were just like me: women who didn't have a voice at first.

I joined the Me Too Movement.

The protests started out small. I hid them from my parents, but eventually I couldn't contain it. My mother had seen me on the street one day. She was harsh in her mannerisms and ferocity when we got home. She told me that protesting wasn't allowed, that I wasn't allowed to dishonor her. Now looking back on it, I saw that she was stuck in the ways of generations back. I told her the world was changing and she simply told me

the world doesn't change—it recycles over and over. My mother kicked me out after the I lost a part of me just as I had the first night in the break room, but this part was different, a part of me that was connected to my family, and in turn, I didn't look back.

I didn't see hope in her, but it didn't stop me from having my voice heard, from going out onto the streets of my homeland and protesting, so I did. The intrusions of hands and unwanted sexual comments lingered even during those times of the movement, but I clung to something, just as well all should. I utilized my disdain for the current epidemic in my country, harboring it to be a part of my resistance and rebellious imagination.

Moments of Action

If anyone back home could see me now...

Delia winked at me as she left her apartment, the door snapping shut behind her. The first time I'd ever been alone in her apartment since we'd started dating.

So, a milestone.

As soon as she left, I felt like an intruder, like a thief, like I should be gone before she got back from the upscale grocery store a few blocks away.

I prowled instead, as much prowling as a one bedroom can afford.

I opened dresser drawers...one full of jewelry, phony costume stuff, watches crusted with diamonds probably not even made of glass, gaudy silver bracelets...

The next held neatly folded underwear, some lacy, some sturdier, bras that matched, some that didn't...

I'd felt like an intruder; now I was intruding, and for no reason other than because I had the chance.

Childish.

Not the way a retired man behaved.

I went into the bathroom, looked at myself in the mirror.

Man vs. Machine. Machine wins.

I'd lost.

At least I hadn't lost my entire face, just nearly my jaw and half my teeth, my face repaired at MTA Farepayer expense, my early 50's retirement arranged, a lump sum settlement negotiated.

Humpty Dumpty put back together again after a malfunctioning piece of track equipment popped him in the face.

A lot of people I know joked about Muslim suicide bombers driving taxis, waiting for the next 9/11, but I don't think anyone, not even my ex-wife, ever held my face as tenderly as the Iranian doctor who reassembled it. A man, at that.

I'd bought a condo with the settlement, so I was staying in the city, no Florida for me like everyone else.

I had a lot of free time, and started spending it at the waterfront park, looking at the big city's skyscrapers, watching the kids, the cyclists and runners in their shiny spandex, the old farts fishing and drinking, mostly drinking because you couldn't eat anything from the Hudson anyway.

Just standing around, hands in my pockets, or maybe eating an overpriced hotdog, waiting.

When she ran by.

Spurred on by the tightness of her body, the crispness of her thighs, the bounce of her hair over the collar of her sweatshirt, I chased her. Sweating like an ox, like when I did trackwork as a kid, a beast in my own right back then, now nearly faceless, but still in decent shape.

 $\,A\,50$ something retiree, literally chasing a woman in the park.

Childish.

But I had to see her face.

She knew I was after her, she told me on our...second(?) date, and had stopped to stretch and give me my one chance to say something. Something provocative, but not sleazy, something interesting, being interested is what she wanted, at this stage, marriage and kids over and done.

All I did was tell her my name, smiling the crooked smile I had to smile now, lucky my lips still worked enough to smile at all. I introduced myself and made some remark about the waterfront being much different than when I was a kid, and it was covered with abandoned train tracks and homeless people standing around trashcan fires.

She also told me that she'd gotten a track and field scholarship to an upstate SUNY, then law school, married a classmate, teaching law without ever really practicing it, 2 kids grown and out of the house when her husband's heart stopped, leaving her single in the big city.

But she still loved to run, and the waterfront was the trendiest place to do it, knowing she could breeze past the yuppies wearing expensive gear which didn't make them as fast as she could be, even now, as she approached...a lady never tells her age...

She'd be back any minute.

I peed, and while drying my hands after washing them, saw a jogging suit hung up to dry on the back of the bathroom door. I took a moment to appreciate the faint smell of perfume and the fainter aroma of a woman coming off the drying suit, smelling, but not sniffing, no, I wasn't a kid I was a retired old man, too old to sniff panties and be prowling around...

...ending my little voyage back on the living room couch, looking through a photo album.

If anyone back home could see me now...

I'd thought she was Sicilian, maybe Greek, when she'd passed me, never expecting a black woman, almost tongue tied in surprise when I was finally face to face with her, getting my one shot to be charming and interesting instead of a creepy stalker chasing a jogger.

And here I was in her apartment, a few dates later, looking through a family photo album. Her, her black, deceased husband (RIP, fella), her two black kids and...

...a photo of her wearing the cap and gown...

Someone back home, friends, family, coworkers, someone certainly, would make a joke about affirmative action, her college degree.

Wait. This wasn't Delia. Her daughter? They looked alike, had that same...reasoned expression, behind a pair of purposely nerdy glasses.

Someone would make affirmative action jokes about her daughter, too.

Shit.

I focused instead on that expression, judging, but not

judgy, not really emotional, more like a scientist or something, weighing evidence like Delia had, when I'd introduced myself on the waterfront.

Taking in everything, thinking, weight evidence without being critical.

Smart.

Smarter than me, than all of the people I knew who'd make affirmative action jokes, the same people who cheered because now I was 'rich' and getting paid in early retirement for getting smashed in the face, like I'd lucked out because they still had to work and I had all day long to do nothing but feel the numb spots along my jaw that the expensive fake teeth implants chomped into when I ate.

My sister, she married a Jew, half, technically, not that you'd guess. Richie was just enough of an outsider that I could talk to him about it, though careful not to directly mention that Delia wasn't white. He'd tell my sister, rumors would start.

He'd said, "It's real simple, really, when you think about it, dating, relationships, hell, life, all most of it is, is just eating, talking on the way home from eating, fucking, talking, then eating and talking and fucking, and then twenty years go by, and you talk less and fuck a lot less and get fatter because you eat more, and then you wind up in Florida waiting to see which one of yooz dies first."

"And you're married to my fucking sister?" I'd replied.

"Hey, there's a lot of fun to be had, talking and eating and fucking, so don't think I'm saying it's not a nice life, this life we got."

Richie was right about most of that, except there were moments of action too, and action could be bad, could go south real fast. I could feel the numb spots on my face, and the giant dimple left at the impact point like a spider web spreading out, my jaw, subtly caved in around it, when I doubted how bad moments of action could be.

The lock squeaked and thumped and then the door

creaked open and Delia entered, holding two brown grocery bags. "I'm back," she said, hoisting the bags.

I got up to help her.

My hands were cold and damp, sweaty. I was nervous. About being caught, snooping through her underwear drawer, or coming dangerously close to sniffing her jogging outfit?

No.

Because if anyone back home could see me...do what, exactly? Share a meal with this black woman?

I'd get looks. We'd get looks.

From my loser coworkers who'd first thought I'd sold out by taking a safety officer position in an office away from the sweat and tendonitis of the tracks, and then all claimed to be looking somewhere else and doing something else to avoid being named as a witness in the lawsuit? The geezers on their porches in my old neighborhood? They're long gone, it's half Indian and Cuban now. My sister's in the suburbs and my parents were also long gone; my father wouldn't have said anything out loud, but would have refused to make eye contact with Delia, and my mother would have waited for an awkward moment to ask if she was Catholic.

The only one left who could really give me any shit about me dating a black woman was me. I'm free to date a black woman now that everyone is gone. Cynical much?

But gone they all were, indeed.

Delia started emptying the brown paper bags on her kitchen table, ripping one.

A bottle of wine she held up to the light before setting down on the counter, out of the way. Something wrapped in paper. Fish. Veggies to be chopped and cooked. A bottle of olive oil so green, it resembled cough syrup.

"Do you want to go out?" I asked her. Take her to a watering hole frequented by old coworkers and what remained of neighborhood acquaintances, so I can proclaim our mutual togetherness to the world, maybe to prove what a racist I'm not.

Yuck.

"Out?" Pausing with a box of pasta in her hands. "I thought we'd stay in."

"If you'd like."

"Well, what do you want to do?"

"Me?"

"Yeah, you." Peering at me over her glasses with that expression her daughter sported in the picture, the evidence gathering look.

"I, uh..." I reached into the mix of things still on the counter, grabbed a bag of arugula.

She watched me, as I crinkled the plastic, stalling for time.

Could she tell what was in my mind?

Could I?

I tossed the bag onto the counter where it nearly knocked over the wine bottle and grabbed her by the waist.

Pulled her to me, sort of slowly, gently but insistent I'd say, so she knew when I smiled crookedly down at her, that I was going to kiss her.

Which I did.

Which, ready for me, she returned, arms going around me.

Not our first kiss, but the first real one. The first with some intent.

"Why don't we stay in?"

"Now you want to stay in?"

"Now I want to stay in." I gestured at the window. "Forget about everything outside."

"Sure, sure." She touched my face, and kissed me. "That one of those spots you can't feel?"

"No, I felt that."

She kissed again, a little farther in. "How about there?" "Try again."

She did.

We went to her couch. Hoisting her with a grunt I kept to myself, I sat down with her facing me, across my lap, her heels tapping against my calf.

"I'm going to find those spots," she said, smiling close to me, our noses rubbing.

"And I'm definitely going to let you."

And I did.

I Said No

The warm weather strangled the afternoon air—causing her wavy hair to poof into masses of untamable frizz. Her Toyota Corolla was alive with humidity, so much that her lungs labored from the intense heat. Every breath she took whistled in and out of her body like steam spewing out of a pressure cooker. Closing her eyes, she gulped back spit, praying (like a fool) that somehow it would quench the thirst. If only the gods could grant her a gallon of cold water and a working air conditioning unit. She'd be ever so grateful.

Her windshield was streaming enough sunlight to warm the toes of a frozen yeti. It seared through her glasses, nearly blinding her from looking past her own dashboard. Escaping the light, she ducked her head towards her hands. Eyes searching through her palm lines until the sunspots started to fade out of her vision. She found long ones, short ones, curvy ones, fractured ones. Her imagination ran wild, pretending the two connecting marks on her right palm determined the rate of her future success. Her fingers traced the indentations...

He had grabbed her hand, pulling her fervently toward the apartment. She followed as she always did...eyes bright with love. Blissfully unaware of what was about to happen.

'No!' her head roared. Not again, she couldn't bear to remember it again. Suppressing it during her afternoon Biology lecture was hard enough. Sonia pretended her mind was empty of all thought. She used her favorite little trick, typically saved for extreme headaches. Eyes closed, she imagined her brain was like an empty desert with one tumbleweed rolling its way through the terrain. Or better yet, she pictured someone opening the top of her head like a lid and finding nothing but miles of blank space. Her lips twitched into an empty little smile as the pain of the memory lightened into a dull throb.

'There's nothing there,' she told herself. 'Nothing there.'

If only it worked that way. Something pricked beneath her closed eyelids. Her nose started running, and she knew her nose never ran unless... "Goddamn it." she whispered. Voice hoarse, but only partly from the heat. Her hands rubbed at the sting of salt cutting through the corner of her eyes. The wetness trailed down her fingers, towards the faded henna adorning her wrist.

"I want more," he insisted, twisting her hand into his. Palm against palm.

"I'm not ready," her voice quivered. Why did his grip feel like steel?

"Go away!" She screamed and prayed that the memory would never enter her thoughts again. 'Never again never again never again.' The gentle thrumming of her heart rose into a rapid pounding. Each beat sounded like the word no.

No...No...Nono...Nono...Nonono...Nonono

"No," she breathed. "I don't want to."

"I'd do it to you."

"No."

"Why not?" he sounded gruff this time. His patience was running thin.

"I'm not ready."

"How do you know that."

"I-I-"

"It'll add something new."

"But-"

"Just go for it. You'll enjoy it."

"I can't."

His hand pressed down on the top of her head.

"Please-"

"Grow up. It's not like it's going to hurt."

"Wait-no-I-"

"Just relax," he murmured. "Get into it."

His grip on her shoulders had tightened. "Do it."

Vaddu ani anna' (I said no), her internal monologue reverted to her native language. 'Inka ikara undaalani anpisthaledu' (I don't want to be here anymore). But she couldn't make anything come out of her mouth. Her tongue felt like a flat paperweight. Every sentence, every thought was stuffed down her hollow throat. Crumbling into a fine, powdery dust.

She heard noises above her. Sounds mixed with words that never ceased to end. They came pouring out of his mouth in the form of profanities, hurling towards her like poisoned darts. Each one finding their mark until her mind centered on a single thought. 'Naku amma kavali' (I want my mother).

'Kill me please.' She breathed but it wasn't ending. It was still going on—OH DEAR GOD why was it still happening! His hand never left her head.

'AMMA!' She screamed internally, 'HELP ME! Nanu intiki theeskelu!' (Take me home).

"More," he said.

'More'...what more could he want?

Dark clouds covered her mind, showering heavy rain on a girl that she no longer recognized. A cold hand curled itself around her heart and squeezed tight. "You know how to make all of this go away," it told her.

Her memories dragged her back to when she was fifteen, raking lines across her arms. Birthing a sick sisterhood, a disharmony, a horrifying mix of darkened red over wheat-ish brown. It left her hovering over her desk, using sleeves to hide the secrets ingrained into her skin. Fifteen years old and contemplating her life through fistfuls of unfinished goodbyes. The stress, the depression, and the anger made manifest within her was unbearable. It took two years for her to stop reaching for sharp objects. Two dark years of hiding caused her a lifetime of pain.

But somehow, in some demented way, she'd take every bit of those two years over two more minutes in this room.

Every second, every hour, every night with the scissors. She'd endure all of it again before she'd endure him, a man with the mentality of a high school locker room.

This was beyond hating herself, berating herself, destroying herself in the worst ways she possibly could. This was like rotting from the inside out. It was like he was trying to squash her out of existence. The way he looked at her like she was disposable. Like it didn't matter who she was to anyone in this world.

She felt like he was using a giant eraser to remove the titles: sister, daughter, niece, cousin, best friend, aunt, student, etc. He'd even taken away the title "girlfriend" and replaced it with the word "property".

"Keep going, love," he murmured.

Love....what did that feel like again?

Sitting in that hot car she couldn't understand why she hadn't fought. She was a Taurean, born to the most stubborn mother on the planet. Her strength was her greatest asset. She should've said something, she should've gotten up, she should've struggled against his hand.

But no...she'd froze. Weak—pathetic, completely useless. Letting him sear haunting memories into her brain.

He'd broken up with her, roughly a week after it occurred with the words, "We were just sort of stuck. You never wanted to do anything," and, "I don't love you. I just said that because I thought you wanted to hear it," and somehow, she had gotten up to attend her 9am Econ lecture. It was the worst kind of pain, sitting in a class and being unable to learn anything.

Idon't love you.'

We were sort of stuck.'

Her head was pounding, her heart was racing, her throat started constricting. The tears had reached her lips—the taste of salt, fresh on her tongue. She couldn't make the memory leave. Her crying had gotten loud, sobs racking through-

out her body. Her chest constricted as a mixture of panic and anxiety filled her stomach.

She needed to throw up. Right now. Her eyes flew to the little black trash bin she kept near the driver's seat. Her throat strained with pressure—the sound of retching ringing through her ears.

Nothing was coming out. She hadn't eaten a bite.

But still her body couldn't snap out of that position. She kept heaving, throwing up dry air until her stomach quieted itself down. The hot sun seared through her eyes to the point where she could barely see.

Frizzy haired, head splitting open, lips trembling, and forehead lined with sweat. It took hours before she finally turned on the ignition and drove herself home.

Melino - Excerpt

I sit on my throne of ash and bone, black fire burning in obsidian braziers around my father's court. My mother is gone again, bringing vitality and harmony to the world above. Father is unsettled, bored, and weary. His moods shift faster than the seasons when Mother is among the living; his judgments are more severe, morbid, and unjust.

I shift uneasily in my throne.

"Father, may I-"

"Yes, yes, leave," he waves a boney, bloodless hand, "I know how much you loathe me."

Recognizing his barb as an effort to occupy me in hours of self-pity, I bridle any response, which might make him begin a dismal dialogue. Disregarding my father's troubled form, I slip off the cemented skulls of the damned to escape into the minds of the dreaming.

I travel on a train of ghosts. I yearn to stay more than moments in the dreams of sleeping mortals, but they rebuke my presence, shirking away from me in shrewd terror. I spoil the mind, rip the tendrils of wild fantasy to mere shreds of phantasms. I wish it were not as such, but it is my lot in this immortal life.

My first stop is to a young child. She dreams of cotton candy meadows with rainbow ponies prancing in the air. She is delightful, giggling, and chasing the miniature horses through her euphoria. I smile at her little face, so sweet and pure. But as I traverse the candy field, the pink turns black, and fairy floss clouds hang rotten in the bruised sky. The girl shrieks in panic and runs, for the lovely equines, have turned ghastly. Their bright eyes bleed red, short limbs elongate, and they pursue her. My job finished, I leave her mind, but the nightmares stay as they always do.

A young artist prides herself in fearing nothing, but

I have a knack for sniffing out such lies. In her dream, she is painting a serene lake. Sun filters through puffy white clouds, cattails sway with the wind, and with each masterful brushstroke, a new beauty enters the scene. I peer over her shoulder, enthralled by the surrealness of her magnum opus. As I stare, her hand cramps and becomes a withered claw knobbled with age. She screams, but her voice is mangled - weak. Her luscious chestnut hair slowly streaks with silver, and large clumps begin to fall until her paper-thin scalp - riddled with large brown spots - holds only a few strands of wiry grey hair. Her shoulders bow, once taut skin limply dangling from her brittle bones.

The canvas ripples and is replaced with a baroque looking glass. The weathered crone averts her milky eyes, but the mirror moves into her sight. Finally, she can evade it no longer. As she gazes upon her ruined reflection, silent tears stream down her pitiful shriveled cheeks. I turn from the spoiled beauty to return to my train.

I am with an old man. He sits in a darkly lit room heavy with cigar smoke. As beautiful figures dance behind him, a jaunty tune floats around the room. Long-dead friends are seated around a green table, playing cards. The old man is happier than he has been in years, winning rounds and gathering mounds of colorful chips to cash in later. The man to his left calls a challenge, brilliant white smile flashing through the smoke, but the old man does not rise to the bait. He scoops up his winnings, triumph written over his features.

Unfortunately for him, as he turns to leave the table, he runs into me.

The man is a child again, weeping in deep, wretched sobs. His father is ten feet tall, glowering over the small boy. The man bellows; the child has broken a vase - the boy is struck across the face . . .

I traverse the dreamscape until I can take no more ruin. I return to my father and my throne, but my train moves ever

onward, spreading its poison into the mortal mind.

"Did you have fun, dear?" my father asks.

I wipe a black tear from my cheek.

There is no Elysium for those like me.

The Witching Hour - Excerpt

Thick, milky fog hugged the licorice pavement one evening in hot September. The air had finally begun to cool that night, but even the promise of a break in the heat wasn't enough to fill me. Ritualistically, I made a steaming mug of earl grey and moved to sit on the rickety black chair resting on my balcony. The balcony faced the community garden. It was a tiny thing, no more than a few tomato plants and some measly pumpkins, but tonight the gnarly vines and weed-clogged boxes came alive through the shifting mist. Snarled leaves and misshapen fruit morphed into groping mounds of the undead thrusting their way beyond the dirt, freedom at decaying hand. I thought about Ivy, how her faded beauty would shine through the aged cracks on her face on nights like these. A memory swam into focus through the misty gloom.

Blazing August sunlight filtered pink and green through Ivy's stained glass kitchen window. Fresh garden-grown zucchini, cucumbers, and lettuce lay dripping on drying racks. Bundles of fresh herbs hung around the window, casting purple dappled shadows over any exposed counter within sight of the fairy-glass. We had just removed pineapple zucchini bread - a summertime special - from the oven. I sat upon a stool by the island, watching Ivy as she bustled around the dark wooden cabinets, gathering supplies for whatever came next. The piping hot confections filled the kitchen with their mouth-watering aromas. I wiggled excitedly on my stool.

"Is it ready yet, Nana?" I burst out, desperate for that first slice of zucchini bread.

Ivy stopped her rummaging to place a honey bear, whole milk, a teacup saucer, and a slice of plain white bread on the kitchen island.

"Yes, they're ready," she said, as she slipped an oven mitt over her hand and placed a bread pan right under my nose.

"See the golden brown color on top? And look here," she poked a toothpick through the middle and took it back out to show me something important, "all clean, not a gloop in sight. These puppies are baked all the way through." She smiled at me then, blue eyes twinkling in the afternoon light. I wriggled with delight, practically bouncing in anticipation.

"Can I get a slice?" I asked as-sweet-as-can-be, adding a small "please" to really butter her up.

Nana Ivy laughed and took my tiny fingers in her wrinkled hand, giving them a big kiss and handing them back to me.

"If you ate it now, Honey Bee, you'd burn your tongue."

I slumped in my stool, the big frown on my face cementing to stone.

Nana laughed again, this time ruffling my hair before moving on. I turned my attention to the strange collection of items she had gathered.

"What's all this for?" I asked.

"We're going to feed the fairies," she said, a smile dancing at the corners of her lips.

A bitter breeze bit through the summertime memory, bringing me back to the present. Moonlight had turned the grass grey, sparkling the freshly laid dew. My grandmother had loved nights like this. She would use the eerie atmosphere as a platform for her stories, believing with her whole being that misty autumn nights held real fairy magic. With her voice in my head and my heart, I looked out at the world beyond me, searching for the fantastic. As I sat, I imagined the world outside my balcony was a detailed still from a silent horror film. The fog billowing over the ground marked the coming of Nosferatu. I could picture his murder-ship gliding into port through the smoky gloom. I took the last gulp from my warm mug, enjoying the reticence of midnight in early autumn. I allowed myself a moment more of peace before slipping back into the chill of my apartment.

Usually, the exposed brick walls brought me comfort, but tonight my apartment felt cold and impersonal. I curled on my bed, hoping to quiet the aching emptiness, but my loft's echoing spaces nagged at me, pulled me away from the covers. Claustrophobic discontent prickled at my skin. I needed to get out; the night was so pristine. It was warm enough not to need a jacket, but I took one anyway. Being my favorite, it had every-

thing I needed stashed in the pockets: phone, earbuds, lighter, cigarettes. A quick lacing of my boots, and I was free to explore the glorious doldrums in the world beyond my balcony.

The city was dead. The only reminders of human existence were the intermittent gothic street lamps, flickering in the encompassing silence, and the town's grimy 24-hour diner - with its dim fluorescent lights - sending an S.O.S. in Morse Code. Channeling Ivy's essence swirling in the wind, I reveled in the sublime solitude of the village in post-midnight. Sauntering down the deserted cobblestone walkways, I was a child again, adventuring in the dark. I was a crone, peacefully ambling down familiar roads. I wore a thousand faces until the weight of the night fell on my weary shoulders.

Feeling the urge, I shook out a Parliament as I leaned against a bus stop bench. An ornate streetlamp stretched above me, its spindling post defying physics with the luminous orb it supported. Mesmerized, I stared as moths danced and glittered in the artificial light. The more I watched, the more the moths seemed to change, to become something other until a distorted miniature human with delicate dragonfly wings, pointy ears, and a wolfish grin tweaked my nose.

"Hello, little friend," I greeted it politely, extending a hand for the naked creature to land.

It chittered in a lively fashion, gesturing wildly in all directions. I nodded like I understood it, offering it a gum wrapper I discovered deep in my jacket pocket. Fascinated, it held the metallic blue ball aloft and gave me a bow so deep you'd think I gave it the holy grail.

"Feeding the fairies?" I thought, excitement writhing in my little chest.

"How are we gonna do that?" I asked, barely managing to stay seated on my stool as I waited for Nana Ivy's answer.

"All we have to do is put milk in this saucer, place a slice of bread right on top of the milk, and drizzle honey over the whole affair."

Under Nana Ivy's watchful gaze, I followed her simple instructions. When I finished, she gave my head a little pat of encouragement.

"This all may seem very straightforward," she told me, "but there's a secret."

A secret?! "You can trust me, Nana!" I blurted.

A warm smile spread, reaching her glinting blue eyes.

"So," I stage-whispered, "What's the secret?"

I watched, enthralled, as she took something small from her apron, tapped it thrice on a green pane, and whispered a strange word to the stained glass. Before my very eyes, the individual colored panes began to dance in the frame until a little winged green woman formed in the rippling glass.

"Bring the saucer here, Bee," Nanna Ivy commanded, beckoning to me with great urgency. "Quickly."

I had to stand on my tiptoes to reach the sill, but once I did, tiny green hands ripped free of the window and pulled the saucer from my grasp back into the glass. Moments later, the little platter appeared in the window right in the green woman's arms. She winked and spider-like words formed in the glass by her face.

thank you ivy

Then the window shifted back to normal, and I was left feeling extraordinary. I gaped at my grandmother.

Nana Ivy smiled and said, "How about some zucchini bread?"

I shrugged away the past and flicked away my cigarette butt, suddenly content in isolation found only after the witching hour. I resumed my walk, marveling at the fog as I went. It's a curious thing, fog. It appears more tangible than cotton, yet the closer you get the further you go from touching it. As I cut a swath through the mist, a figure leaning on the hard brick of a building emerged in the distance. Knobbier than an old oak and thinner than paper, the man looked like a black and white photograph: hollow, intense, and strangely eternal. He took a long drag from a blue cigarette, thick iridescent smoke curling lazily from his angular nostrils, widening and expanding until it was nothing more than an afterthought. The rest billowed out of his mouth in a mass exodus of colorful haze spreading its cloying effect on whoever was around. I recognized him from somewhere, but the memory was just out of reach. As I stepped

closer, the man's face opened in a huge, welcoming smile.

"Bee!" he exclaimed, throwing his rail-thin arms around my shoulders in a tight hug. I immediately stiffened. He let go.

Utterly baffled, I stood in shocked silence, trying to overcome my immediate alarm at this strange man's familiarity. Even the smell of him (nutmeg, paprika, and notes of rosemary) tickled some missing memory in the far recesses of my mind. I shook out another Parliament and studied his pointed face while we smoked. Everything about the man was a walking angle, from his cheekbones to his pointy ears and his triangular lips. His chocolate brown hair stuck out from his head like thousands of stalagmites. His nose would have been a perfect point if it weren't for a peculiar notch wedged into the bridge. As I was pondering how he must have broken it, the stranger turned to me. Astonishingly, the man's eyes shifted color with every blink. First vivid emerald, then cerulean, silver, pink - it went on unceasingly.

The man shrugged, puffing shimmering smoke. "I tried to go to the funeral, but you know your dad."

"I don't - I don't know what you mean. I didn't see you at the funeral."

He looked at me quizzically, his baffled expression matching my own. He blinked, irises changing color again.

"Your eyes . . . " I began, but soon found I had lost the words.

He ignored me, a confused expression knitting his brow as he took another deep drag from his blue cigarette. His lower lip disappeared as he gnawed on it, working out a difficult problem without ever uttering a word.

Agitation prickled my chest; I shuffled my feet.

"Have you noticed the peculiar creatures around the street lamps?" I asked to break the silence. "They have wings," I added hopefully.

We stood silent for a while longer, in our small circle inside the mist.

His fantastic eyes examined me. "Do you really not remember me?"

I smiled awkwardly.

"That hurts," he said dryly, feigning a stab in the abdomen. He paused as if waiting for a laugh that never came.

A thousand thoughts scrabbled in my mind, but only one gained purchase. "Are you real?"

The man tapped his chin and narrowed his vermillion eyes in thought, "Can you see them?" he asked, sweeping a large hand in a broad gesture, motioning toward the thick of the fog.

I shook my head.

"Are you certain?" he asked intently, blue smoke masking his dynamic irises.

I gave the mist a cursory glance; there was nothing but swirling greys, blues, and whites fighting for purchase in the autumn air.

I shook my head again, unease writhing in my chest like a beast in a dark pit.

"Look harder," he commanded, an anxious tick at the corner of an eye. This time I focused, straining my eyes in concentration. A wisp of pearly fog parted to reveal a set of luminous yellow eyes attached to a hairy beast. I blinked, and it was gone.

"I don't see anything," I lied to the man-enigma-thing standing before me.

His expression tightened.

"I hope you're lying, Bee," he said severely before crushing his cigarette with his toe.

The stranger looked like he wanted to say more, but after glancing at the moon, he decided against it.

"We're out of time, Beatrice, but I'll see you around."

What happened next failed to surprise me as I watched the mist swallow him. His legs went first as he stepped out of our clearing, then his torso, and his face, until nothing was left except his beautiful eyes shifting in the light of the full moon. I lingered in the mist for a few moments to finish my cigarette. As I stomped out the butt, intent on leaving, a polaroid picture fluttered like a leaf above my face. I snatched it from the air and sucked in a quick breath of surprise. In the small square frame: me, no more than five, on my grandmother's porch, and next to me sat the man I encountered tonight.

"He hasn't aged a day," I murmured to the mist.

Puzzled, I flipped the picture over. On the back was a single word in cramped writing: Kwen.

*

By the time I reach my apartment, the oven clock read 4:15. In a daze, I shook off my jacket, moved to place it on the coat rack, but missed. Transfixed, I stared at the crumpled leather until my eyes burned. Was that a face I saw in the folds? A smile by the zipper? Suddenly realizing how parched I felt, I stumbled away from the door to the kitchen sink. As I gulped several mouthfuls of water from the tap, I splashed my face with the coldest water I could get, hoping to erase tonight from my tired mind, but to no avail. Exhaustion weighed down my bones. I settled onto my sofa - too lazy to walk to my bed - and succumbed to a dreamless sleep.

Lullaby Smile

I like to think that on good days, my mind sounds like a piano. On a good day the music floats through the air on its own little cloud. My breath follows the emotion of the song and my heart pulses with the rhythm. It is sweet, like flowers' nectar in the springtime, and it is all encompassing. Its music manifests a path lined with trees, which make a canopy above my head. The trees wrap their arms around me, and I am safe—safe in the comfort that the earth is breathing with me. It is magical. It is inspirational and, most of all, it is peaceful.

That is what it's like on a good day—colorful. Nowadays I am colorblind.

"Why is this happening? Why? What is she going to do now? She can't handle herself. She knows that. She does. She has to stop kidding herself. Stop."

I'm not in a forest anymore. The path is missing and instead I I'm in an airplane. I know this because my ears are popping. In front of me is a door.

"What if he made the wrong decision?"

"That's right! That is absolutely right. What is she going to do without him? How is she going to cope with her issues? God knows she has enough of them."

The window in the door displays nothing but darkness. The plane rocks with turbulence.

"It really would be nice to feel nothing."

I flinched at this new voice.

"What if he was just upset? What if all you have to do is say you were wrong?"

"It's much better not to think. The answer is clear already."

I twist the handle and open the door. All I see is nothing. The world itself is missing. I hear a bell chime.

"You know there's another door, right?"

I turn around. Sure enough, there's another door. The light shining through the window pierces my eyes and hurts my head.

"You know she can't do that. Why get her hopes up? She isn't capable. It's going to eat away at her until she can't even remember what it's like to smile. See where she is? She's dreamt up a plane! She is ready to make the plunge."

"Well, there are two doors. One has darkness, and one has light. One has nothing, and one has everything."

I feel something in my chest rip.

"What if it's a trap to make you forget?"

How could I ever forget? There's him in every part of my day.

"She can be stronger."

I put my feet on the edge of darkness.

"Ha! Stronger? She was strong before when she had help. Now she has no one. She can't manage?"

I am right here, but what is there to say? What can I say but listen to them argue for my life? They are as much a part of me as I am. Somewhere in my head I hear music. The bell chimes again.

"Why worry about being stronger when she could be nothing? There's no pressure that way."

"Listen to them argue. Have some faith in yourself. You talked to friends today and you smile. You sang to the music. You still know how to smile."

That's right. That music always inspires me—"

"What if it wasn't the right decision, though?"

"If it was the right decision, why does it hurt so badly?"

That's right. Why do we both hurt so much? Why do we walk around alone, our eyes downcast? Why can't I get his smile out of my mind? His laugh? His laugh really is ridiculous. Yet, it always makes me smile.

"Painful things are bound to hurt. It doesn't mean you can't heal. The sun will still shine on your skin. The trees will still grow. Music will still sing. Flowers will still bloom. Love will still blossom."

"Well, there's only one path for her now. She can't go back. She can't."

I'll never wake up with him next to me. How can I have that feeling again? That feeling of closeness—intimacy? Innocently loving someone and yet, be so conflicted....

"Why can't she?"

What?

"Why can't she? Well, because he won't take her back."

"He won't take her back for the same reasons she won't go back. Have some faith."

Faith? What does that word even mean.

"Faith? How can you even trust faith? Faith is so sporadic. One minute it's there the next it's betraying you. This is what faith gets you."

Betraying me? He never betrayed me. I step back from the door.

"What if he made the wrong decision?"

"Empty."

"She won't be able to handle it."

I'm right here.

"There is light to be found."

"Why would it hurt so bad if it's the right decision?"

"You're hurting too bad to turn back now. It will never go away."

"Better to feel nothing."

"You smiled today."

I smiled today.

I turned and ran, throwing myself out of the plane. Trust. I have to trust. For a moment all I saw was darkness. I felt suspended in my own mind. I opened my eyes. The bells stopped.

The air around me began to catch my fall. I seem to float in limbo. Except I feel everything. I watch my tears hover in front of me before disintegrating into a thousand pieces of shimmering glitter.

"Do you remember what it feels like to fly?"

"What?" I asked.

"I got rid of them for a moment. You need to catch your breath."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome. Enjoy the flowers."

"What you mean?"

I look around, but all I see is sky. I hear an instrument—piano—singing out to me. I stretch out my palms, reaching for something invisible. Suddenly I find myself being carried by a cloud. It's soft like a misty morning haze. I let myself fall into it, embracing the comfort—comfort I didn't think I could feel. I open my eyes when the piano got louder.

I see endless green. Trees reach out to embrace me. The music pumps into my blood and convinces it to flow again. The world seems to swirl and form around me. Flowers open and shine rays of soft light toward me. For a moment I feel at peace.

"You painted this yourself."

"I what?" I asked.

"You created this picture from your heart. It's what you yearn for the most."

"Oh..." My eyes close, the soft piano putting me to sleep. The cloud deposits me on a path. The trees hang over, protecting me from the night that wanted to reach me.

"I can't keep them away forever. But remember."

"Remember what?"

"What it feels like to see in color."

Time May Waste You

Things have been melancholic lately and I haven't been able to focus on much. Often do I spend the days sitting and staring out of the window to the dead grass covering the hills, recalling a life that seems so different than the one I am now living: my youth. I've spent countless hours recently reflecting on my past, as I am in my old age now, the color grey stretching over my wrinkling body. I waste my time by remembering time and hating time.

Remembering my youth is bittersweet. My heart wrenches at the remembrance of years spent alongside the ones who I loved most, and the remembrance of how they all slipped from my grasp. I remember nights of tears staining my cheeks, nights of deceit, nights of filled hearts, nights of laughter from my gut. The years may have escaped me, but the memory of once was haunts my every lonesome moment.

Sitting in the maple rocking chair, a family heirloom, in the cozy den, I gaze out of my picture window, admiring the golden sunset melting into the countryside while I'm sipping away at a cup of hot chocolate. The creaks of the rotting wood of the rocking chair are the only sounds that occupy the dulling space. The sunset is the only aspect in my life that holds notable color, as age has turned life grey. The clouds had been painted a blend of oranges, reds, pinks, purples, and yellows. The sky burned lower into the horizon, the clouds falling asleep with the sun. Hot chocolate melted into my tongue, tasting like the warmth in my youth. I spent many winters in the comfort of my childhood home by the grand fireplace, sipping away at hot chocolate as I am currently. The heat scorched my skin and my memory, a warmth irreplaceable by time. I always smelled like our family's wood stove in my youth; it reminded me of home.

Everything seemed more glossy and beautiful in memory. Maybe that explains why my past seems so dreamy in retrospect. I spent my teenage years sad, most of the time for reasons I've long forgotten about. I remember thinking that the reasons I cried would be the death of me, yet here I sit, remembering the tears but not the cause. I spent my sad years

isolating myself, ignoring my family's pleas for interaction unless it was a scheduled mealtime. My sadness was a thief of what could've been, had I not been too emotionally exhausted to connect with my family. My regrets haunt me, as most of my family is now floating among the clouds. My heart wrenches in remorse, as I've missed my family for years, and I'm not sure I'll recover from losing them until I'm old enough to reconnect with them among the clouds above.

I let out a rather somber sigh and took another sip of my hot chocolate. Swallowing the hot chocolate became hard, as tears swelled into my eyes and my throat tightened. Thinking so much of my family makes me rather emotional, though I never allow myself to cry. I stifle my emotions with thoughts of the clouds. I am simply too old for emotion, I told myself. The clouds will take me too.

Constantly and involuntarily reflecting on my past fogged my brain. I rose from the rocking chair and paced to my bookshelf, the mahogany of which clashed greatly with the maple wood of the rocking chair. Design never mattered to me. Superficiality is temporary. I remembered my sister and I spending late evenings in the library of our college, papers up to our healthy knees and deadlines up to our heads, until the librarian would ask us to leave so she, too, could go home for the night. I shook my head and squinted until I could see the library of my present, rather than the one of my past. Running my fingers along the collection of timely reads, my fingers tracing clearings in the coat of dust covering each novel. Briefly, I stopped my hand on a book and pulled it off the shelf, careful not to tear at its binding, as it was falling apart in my grasp. Cane in my left hand and the novel in the other, I sat back down in my throne of age. I squished my face to naturally push my reading glasses towards my eyes to help clear the words on the pages below. Still squinting my eyes, I glanced at the wrinkled page and made out the words:

10 Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?"

For it is not wise to ask such questions.

Glancing in the top corner of the page, I remembered that I had marked the chapter seven of Ecclesiastes for this very quote. *The Holy Bible* spoke often on the concept of aging, introducing ideas that often baffled me. I never adapted to a religion, as I chose in my younger years to keep my mind open, yet I still felt a responsibility to obey certain rules introduced within these holy pages. *The Holy Bible* advised readers to not look back at their past with intentions of comparing it to your present. If I felt the need to follow such commandments, *why couldn't I help myself? Why, I pondered, why must I torture myself with reminders of what I no longer have?*

I slammed the book on the coffee table, drops of tea escaping from my cup in retaliation to my sudden blasphemy. Slamming the book down released a decent amount of energy, and I sat back in the rocker to restore and replenish my mind the best I could. My mind hadn't been replenished in years. My mind was always foggy, like I was living in the clouds.

Cuck-oo! Cuck-oo!

The towering clock resting in the shady corner of my den displayed to me that it was now ten o'clock in the evening. I could hear my father reminding me not to stay up too late as a teenager. I could feel my eyes rolling in response to him, and I could see his words leaving my ears the moment they arrived.

Cuck-oo!

The clock rang to announce the time, though I had a vague hunch that the clock had been reminding me of my declining mental state.

Cuck-oo!

The chimes of the clock in the corner reminded me that I had forgotten to take my evening medications. Countless capsules entered my body each morning and each night, each chemical absorbing into my cellular level to attempt to replicate the health I once had. Who was I kidding? No amount of pills is ever going to turn me into the blossom I once was, as I've since lost my petals and wilted. Embarrassing was it to lose my stealth, grace, and beauty. Time is a thief of all that is good, of

120 all that there is the enjoy.

My throat still felt tight from my earlier episode. Used to my wavering emotions, I became annoyed with myself for nearly crying, as it disabled me from taking my medications. Frustration flooded my body systems, and for only a moment, my strength from my youth returned, as I slammed my fist into the countertop below me. The medications, which reside atop the table at all times for accessibility, fell to the floor. I rose from the rocking chair and squatted to collect the fallen bottles, finding myself in a position my doctor had previously advised me to not recreate, as a means to preserve the remains of the health and strength of my ligaments and bones.

I remember the warmth of the sun beating on my face, sweat absorbing into my hair that had the color of the sun above. I remember wishing for the clouds. I remember the tune of my mother's endearing voice as she instructed me to tend to the garden we were working on together. Hours, we spent, digging and planting, remaining in a squat. I remember the ease it required to hold that position for amounts of time. My mother would convince me that helping her in that garden of youth would strengthen my knees.

Using the edge of the coffee table I had just channeled my vexation onto, I gently lifted myself back onto my feet. My bones snapped and cracked, though the noises went through my ears, as I grew used to the sounds of my bones reacting to every unfamiliar move. A coldness embraced me in its arms, and treated my skin as a semi permeable substance, entering into the depths of my body. The fire had run cold, and I never cared to tamper with the thermostat because I didn't understand the technology.

I remember my husband's excitement when he had central heating installed in our cottage-style home. Though the house was small and didn't require much heating, my husband would turn the thermostat high enough for him to also want to run a fan, an ideology which never made sense to me. Personally, I despised the thermostat my husband so excitedly placed in our home. He stopped the usage of the fireplace, the hearth

of our home, the centerpiece of all that was our small family. I had begun to lack the memories of my childhood fireplace. Since my husband was finally warm enough, he and I would no longer need to sleep in each other's arms for a desired amount of heat. He began sleeping inches away, as the overbearing heat took the joy out of personal contact. With time, my husband and I lost the connection we felt when holding each other for warmth, and time stole him, giving him to the clouds.

I refused to use the central heating system, and I wasn't too sure if I had still been paying for it or not. Money no longer mattered to me, I let technology handle all of my finances. My neighbor's son brings my groceries weekly, as I can no longer operate any transportation. I yawned. I was too tired to rekindle the fire, so I limped my way into the bedroom and slipped into the queen-sized bed alone. The bed felt as if it had been stretched a mile wide since my husband began to sleep in the clouds.

My bedroom was grey, as well as the rest of the house. I was grey. I believe that everything had color to it, though time robbed me of it. Life itself was grey for me, reminding me of the dullness of isolation and lonesome. The only color I paid any mind to was the colors of the sky, as I hoped to be among the colors of the clouds someday.

That night I dreamed of my son. The blues of the stroller, the blues of the present wrappings, the blues of the cakes made, all turned grey. The phrase "It's a Boy!" became the motto of those six months I had carried my son. I heard it echo through my mind, as I dreamt of the grave expression of the doctor relaying the bad news to my husband and I. Following, the word "stillborn" appeared in bold grey letters appeared against a black void I was standing under. Clocks began to flood the dark room I stood in, followed by the clouds. This sort of dream was usual, reminding me of what I've lost to the clouds and what I will soon reconnect with once I make it there too.

I woke the next morning as groggily as I usually did, time reminding me that my body isn't going to work properly under minimal hours of sleep. After remaining in my bed for around an hour, staring out the window at the cloudless sky, I left my bed to replay my daily routine. With the radio switched on to a station referred to as "The Oldies" and coffee brewing in the pot, I opened my front door and grabbed the newspaper hanging from the door handle. The newspaper told me it was now Sunday, August 25th. I no longer kept track of the days, only the days in which pertain to the schedule of my medications.

The radio played me a melody that was played at my senior prom. I remember dancing with my boyfriend under the lights of the stars, not a cloud in sight. The clouds allowed us to enjoy a night. The song that had been playing from my radio that Sunday morning had been playing that night at the prom, accompanying my boyfriend and I to an awkward dance filled with stepping on each others toes and sweating on one another. I remember listening to the same radio station with my husband in our kitchen one evening, slow dancing as we once did as teenagers at the prom, still stepping on each other's toes just as often. I no longer could dance as I once did, and I promptly switched the radio off.

My afternoon was spent with my common activities, including reading holy print and trying to make sense of the world. I failed each time. My afternoon trailed so shamelessly into my evening, a repeat of the events of the night before.

I followed this cycle daily. I had been since the loss of my husband to the clouds. Yesterday became today, and today became tomorrow. This cycle never faltered, and it was inescapable. My Sundays became Mondays, then Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Time refused to stop, or even slow down. Time had intentions, and there was no winning to time.

The twenty fifth of August shortly became the eighteenth of September. My neighbor's son rang the doorbell of my home to receive my grocery list, as he had the week before, but to receive no answer. Concerned, he let himself into the breezeway area of my home, and came closer to the interior

door. The boy noticed the usual notebook laying among the mess on the floor, which had been previously flipped to open to a page holding writing. The notebook was covered in dust, as if it had been sitting for awhile, in expectation of something. He leaned down and read the words of the page aloud:

"If you receive no answer, do not fret. Do not worry. I am among the clouds now, and I am with who I love. Do not waste your time, or else, time may waste you.

Thank you."

124 **Jammin'**

"It didn't start out like this. In the beginning, it was just a jar every few weeks. I would open the fridge, look to the right panel to grab a jar of mixed berry jam, and if it was left empty by my previous endeavor of toast in the early morning, I would drive to the nearest convenience store to pick up another cup of sweet mashed fruit.

It would take me a few weeks to make my way through the jar. Just a tablespoon of it spread evenly across a warm piece of butter-covered toast. Then, it started to progress. My tablespoon of jam transitioned to two tablespoons. Then three, then four, all coated atop a single piece of toast. After a bit, instead of having toast with jam, I was having jam with toast... until it wasn't toast at all.

A few months passed and I began eating jam by the spoonful. I would wake up in the morning with sticky hands from the day before, pop out of bed as fast as the spoon hits the jam, and start breakfast. I would take a couple jars out—three to five—and proceed to spin the silver lid off, grab a spoon, and dig in. The cold metal going in clean and coming out slobbered in the delicious goo, the inviting purple-pink gloss with tiny chunks of fruit roaming about, the way I could feel the grains of sugar roll across my tongue—everything made me mad for marmalade.

The jars started piling up in the sink; I didn't clean them because I was too busy eating jam. There was nothing in my fridge besides jars upon jars, stacked up on top of each other. I had to get another fridge just to house the hundreds of jars spread about my house.

I gained twenty-six pounds, I now have diabetes, and every wall in my house is slightly sticky. No matter how sick I get, how many jars I go through a day, it's never enough. I just keep eating and eating, digging and digging through jars of jam. I can't stop. Hell, I have a jar in my pocket right now!"

"And how does that make you feel?"

"Well..." He looks down to his slathered pockets, a jar

of jam in each. "I wish it could've been something else."

The therapist, Sherry, furrows her brows. "What do you mean?"

"Why couldn't I love something else as much as I love jam? Why not kale? Or a TV series? Maybe exercise? Why jam?"

"When one has an addiction--"

"Addiction? That's a bit dramatic, don't you think?" Sherry looks at his pants. As he stares at her in extreme denial, he scoops a glob of jam into his hand. It stops midway to his mouth as he notices her glare, the jam trickling down his fingers and onto the couch. She sighs and points her pen to his disgusting hand.

"Actions speak louder than words, Mr. Sommers." He puts the handful back into the jar, closes the lid, and slides his hand on his sweatpants, now stained purple.

"I'm afraid you have a serious problem."

"What am I supposed to do?"

She takes a deep breath, avoiding eye contact with Mr. Sommers. He's itching for an answer, but scared of what it might be. Sherry finally meets his eyes.

"You need to eat more jam."

"Wait, what?" This is not the answer he was expecting, nor is he scared of it.

"I want you to eat more. Eat as much as you possibly can. In simple terms, I want you to do the opposite of quitting cold turkey." He looks down at the jars. With pleasure, he unscrews one and sticks his sausage fingers in. He shovels a mass of jam into his mouth and licks his lips with wild excitement. It would be an understatement to say he's satisfied.

Sherry watches, cracking a small smile as he looks her in the eyes. "Perfect."

The door cracks open and in comes Mr. Sommers,

stumbling haphazardly as he gobbles more jam from the second jar, the first one now empty. Once he reaches the couch, he's already done with the recently opened jar, which leads him to his fridge. Jam stains cover the cold outer shell of the refrigerator, and over the pictures of him with his mother at a park, and him with his deceased dog, Charlie. He doesn't notice the memories hanging by magnets, though. His wants lie beyond that, in the fridge.

He pulls the door open, welcomed by a familiar breeze of chill air. He closes his eyes, taking in the aroma of strawberry, mixed berry, even grape. His heart almost skips a beat when he thinks about what Sherry prescribed him. *You need to eat more jam*, she said so sweet. But not as sweet as jam. Mmm, jam.

He grabs a jar, barely making a dent in his collection. Based on the squalor Mr. Sommers surrounds himself in—which includes plastic bags with lengthy receipts stuffed in them, only including one item repeated over and over again (jam), many jam-covered sweatshirts and sweatpants strewn about every surface, and some cups filled with leftover jam from previous meals—it's quite surprising to see such careful organization regarding his food.

Once he finishes that singular jar, it only multiplies. A second turns into a third, a third turns into a fourth, and soon enough he's taking in more jam than ever before. This wears him out, as snatching jars from the fridge and travelling all the way back to the couch is the most exercise Mr. Sommers usually partakes in, so a nap seems fitting for the energy he has burned.

He drifts into sleep, jar in his hand, and a smile on his pink-tinted-slobber-covered face.

He awakens to a tummy growl. He quickly assumes it's morning, and his body is telling him it's jam time. But as he tries to roll himself off of the couch, he notices he can't move. He rubs his eyes, thinking this is due to his lack of full

consciousness, but through the blur he doesn't see his hairy feet lingering over the edge of the couch. He sees a mountain of flesh, his feet no longer visible. His belly button has disappeared into his stomach, his arms are the size of three legs sewn together, and his hands have become meaty sausages, fat rolling over his nails.

His vision finally becomes HD again, and he sees a pinkish substance seeping out from his pores. He can't even think right now. He wants to think about digging into a jar of jam with his bare hands like a raccoon in a dumpster, but that thought can't even cross his mind. All he can do is panic. What is this substance? He worries. How did I become such a great mass overnight? Why can't I move?

He peers out the window; it's still night. The TV plays old reruns of shows he used to watch as a kid. The crickets chirp to fill the silence of the night. And he simply lays there, immobile.

He oozes more. The pink quickly turns into a vibrant red, and small chunks of strawberry and grape and blueberry somehow squeeze out of his pores, too. Despite Mr. Sommers' thoughts travelling at the speed of a million miles an hour, he can't move a muscle. Not one singular pinky. But he can ooze, and ooze he does. It drips down his plump stomach, slides down his sweaty thighs, and collects atop his upper lip. His eyes widen in fear. It was too much jam; he finally did it. His body is rejecting the night of fun he had with the sickeningly sweet treat. The price had to be paid at some point for his disgusting habit, and now is finally the time to pay up.

Instead of gooey goodness filling his brain, he thinks about his potential death as he slips in and out of consciousness. But it all becomes too much, the thought of dying such a death, and his thoughts finally skid to a halt as pitch black becomes the only thing occupying in his mind.

He awakens to open blinds and light spilling in from the windows. Birds chirp gleefully, and the smell of fresh strawberries fills the room. But this often enjoyable scent causes Mr. Sommers to panic as he rubs his eyes once more. Thankfully, ooze isn't the sight he's seeing; it's his hairy feet dangling off of the couch. He lights up at this for a moment, only to quickly go back to his upset state over the smell of the room. He gags. He's going to vomit.

He bolts to the door--happy he can move, not so happy he's about to puke his guts out--and empties the jam from his stomach like running water from a faucet. Relieved, he enters the house.

The sickly smell. Ugh. He exits once again with one thought in his mind: no matter what Sherry says, he's *never* going to eat another jar of jam again. What do therapists know, anyway?

Ram Skull



Digital Art (IPad)

I created this piece one day at my grandparent's house when I was bored. I was trying out a new digital drawing app and stylus I had just gotten. I got my inspiration from a clip I had seen in a nature documentary earlier that week.

-Alyssa Campbell

130 **Artist's Hands**

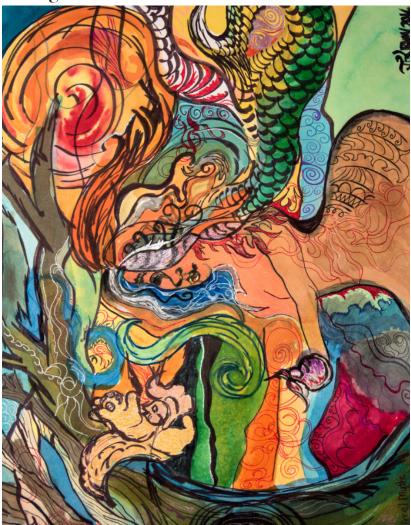


Mixed media with colored pencil, charcoal, and graphite on illustration board

Hands are an important tool for an artist. I enjoy the challenge of drawing the intricate details of the hand. I used mixed media to emphasize the difference between my drawing hand and my modeled hand. I added personal items to make it more complex.

-Christine Craft

Passing of the Gifts



Watercolor and ink

Passing of the Gifts is a painting I created as part of a ongoing series related to mythical stories. I am not concerned with realism as much as I am with fantasy; I abstract realistic settings, exaggerate color, combining imagery in a poetic manner. Narratives develop as I incorporate ideas about fate & the meaning of dreams and destiny.

-J.E. Crum



14"x11" flatboard canvas, painted in acrylic

I wanted to paint a scene of quiet comfortability and tenderness. This is partially a challenge to the male gaze as well by keeping things open and fairly natural looking aside from her color. As we can see, she is bright pink. This was partially to challenge my color use and partially in part to my belief that colors express emotion and could be somewhat ambiguous in the eye of the viewer.

-Riley Hancock

Mario Loprete



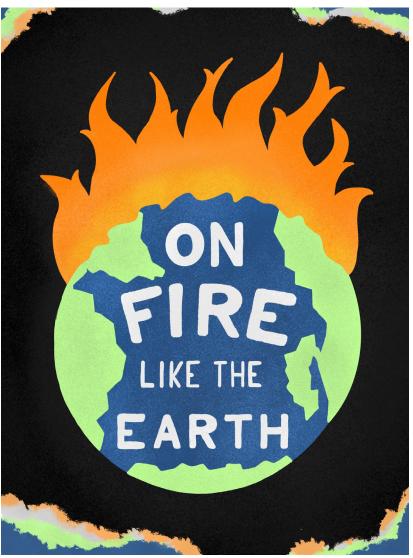
Fabri Fibra oil on concrete diameter 25 cm

I live in a world that i shape at my liking, throughout a virtual pictorial and sculptural movement, transferrig my experiences, photographing reality throughout my filters, refined from years research and experimentation.

Painting for my is the first love. An important, pure love. Creating a painting, starting from the spasmodic research of a concept with which I want to send a message to transmit my message, it's the base of my painting. The sculpture is my lover, my artistic betrayal to the painting. That voluptous and sensual lover that gives me different emotions, that touches prohibited cords...

-Mario Loprete

134 **On Fire**



Digital Painting on Ipad Pro

A comment on the state of our world due to climate change and the many forest fires that have caused mass destruction.

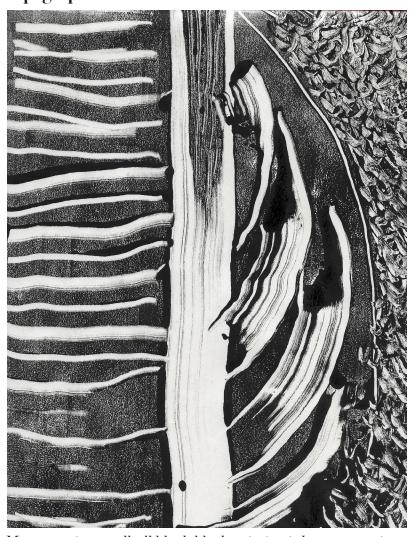
-Abby Radcliffe

Together We Create



Collage created on Ipad Pro

Create together, live together, love together, you are not alone. -Abby Radcliffe



Monotype in speedball black block-printing ink on newsprint As a printmaker I try to create works in the tradition of the painterly print. Sometimes the work resembles Impressionist or Expressionist painting in style. My focus is in monotype and monoprint techniques, both in terms of practice and the study

of its history in the United States and Europe.

-John Timothy Robinson

The Angle of Incidence



Digital painting, done with GIMP

Just as in physics where the angle of incidence equals the angle of reflection, so does it also in human emotions, even though the reflections often are a bit daunting. murky, or confusing.

-Edward Supranowicz

N. Vander Galien

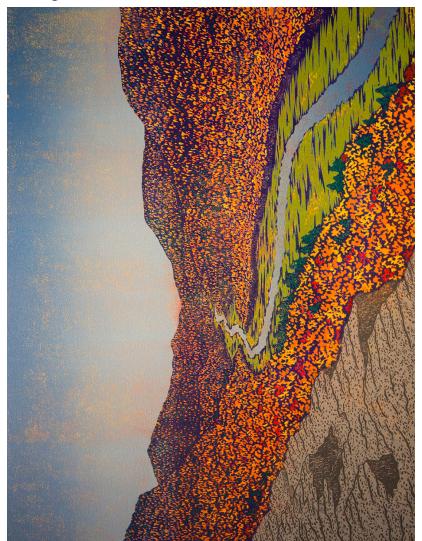


Woodcut, 11"x 14

This image was inspired by the work of illustrator and printmaker Lynd Ward. With Ward in mind, I both reinterpreted and stylized this portrait of my friend Noah Vander Galien. The image was carved onto a cherry woodblock and printed on Hosho paper with Gamblin relief ink.

-Tyler Thenikl

Porcupine Mountains in Bloom



Reductive woodcut, 20" x 14

My most complex work to date; "Porcupine Mountains in Bloom" is based on views of a fall backpacking trip. The image was continuously carved into a slab of MDF and printed using reductive methods. The final image is the product of my experimentation with expressive color and pointillism.

-Tyler Thenikl

140 **Til Death Do Us Part**



Charcoal on drawing board, 13.5" x 10.5

Til Death Do Us Part" is my personal take on a class assignment. The directive was to draw a skull. In addition to this, I chose to add engraving tools and a slab of wood in order to create an interesting composition while alluding to one of my great passions.

-Tyler Thenikl

Author Bios

Poetry -

Matthew Berg is a renaissance man with varying interests and hobbies, he is a man of faith in Jesus and a writer of many styles, specializing in poetry and lyrical writing. As a native to Minnesota, who now lives in the South, he has a unique background for his work.

Rand Bishop's college teaching has taken him to Michigan State University, Sacramento State University, the University of Florida, Case Western Reserve University, McGill University, the Universite Nationale du Gabon (Fulbright Professorship), and the State University of New York. He has published poems in about two dozen literary journals.

Courtney Camden is a D.C. based writer whose work was most recently featured in Flying South (2017 & 2019), Chaleur Magazine (May 2018), The Esthetic Apostle (August 2018), Cathexis Northwest Press (November 2018), and Junto Magazine (December 2018).

Alex Capria is a fourth-year student at the University of Virginia, majoring in English and media studies. He mostly writes short stories that occasionally dip into science fiction, but he also dabbles in poetry. He currently works at the Writing Center, which combines his passions for writing and helping others. He is also an advisor for ULink Peer Advisors and was previously a mentor for College Mentors for Kids. One of his biggest loves is young adult fiction, both reading and writing it. His goal is to work in publishing young adult fiction to help share stories with those who need it most in terms of discovering their identities—kids and teens. He also loves to run and cook despite being mediocre at both.

Henry Cherry has been a cowhand in South Texas, a chef in New Orleans, and a teenage snowshoer in Maine. Now a journalist and photographer, he is based in Los Angeles. A recent story appearing in Slippery Elm was nominated for a Pushcart and a poem published by Free State Review has been nominated for the 2020 Orison Anthology Award. He's been a featured reader at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles and at Litquake in San Francisco. His work has appeared in Scalawag, Australia's Cordite Poetry Review, Silver Needle Press, The Louisiana Review, and Spectrum Literary Journal.

Kailey Collins is a poet from Olivet, Michigan. She enjoys spending time outdoors while finding activities that will challenge her mentally. Kailey simply hopes to be happy in life.

Mary Christine Delea is the author of The Skeleton Holding Up the Sky from Main Street Press, 3 chapbooks, and numerous poems published in many journals and anthologies. A native of Long Island, New York, she now lives in Oregon. Her web site is mchristinedelea.com.

Alex J Frantz is a writer, story teller and theater director. They graduated from Carnegie Mellon University- Drama with college and university honors in 2016. They have studied under the late Poet Laureate of Wisconsin- Ellen Kort.

Keith Mark Gaboury earned a M.F.A. in creative writing from Emerson College. His poems have appeared in such literary publications as Poetry Quarterly, New Millennium Writings, and a forthcoming chapbook through Pedestrian Press. Keith is a poet and preschool teacher in Oakland, California. Visit www.keithmgaboury.com.

Alex Gurtis is a poet, journalist, and grant writer based out of Orlando, Fl. His work has previously appeared in 'Zephyr" and "Storyteller Magazine."

Taylor Heath is from Jacksonville, Florida and dreams of getting one of her poems published. She is 14 and goes to Mandarin High School.

Kristina Heflin is a riding instructor, originally from Northern California. She has served on the editorial board of the literary journal Flumes. She has been published in the literary journals Flumes, Canyon Voices, Fearsome Critters, and Broad River Review, the websites 2Elizabeths, the write launch, Underwood, Shelia-Na-Gig and Passaic/Voluspa as well as the anthologies Diverse Minds and The Beckoning. Future publications include Duck Lake Journal and Coffin Bell Journal. When she's not writing, she enjoys riding her own horse, Lucero, and hiking with her dog, Jessie. www.sagasandmythos.wordpress.com

Natalie Kimbell is a writer who also teaches at Sequatchie County High Schools. She has been drawn to the art of writing since she was very young, but has only seriously pursued the crafting of words for herself in the last five years. Natalie is a mother of two and a grandmother of four. She has recently achieved third place in the 2018 George Scarbrough Prize and second place in 2019 Tennessee Mountain Writers Humor Category.

Frederick Livingston plants seeds: grounded in regenerative agriculture, experiential education and environmental science. He hopes to grow peace, community and delicious food.

Kayla Lynn is a freshman at Olivet College. She studies music but spends her time writing and collecting vintage cameras and clothing. She would like to dedicate her writing to her father, Jason, who has been her number one supporter.

DS Maolalai has been nominated four times for Best of the Net and twice for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016) and "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019)

Riley Mayes is a full-time student and an intern for a transnational

feminist journal, and she currently resides in Massachusetts. Her writing has been published in several print and online publications, including DoveTales Literary Journal, Canvas Literary Journal, and Sudden Denouement Collective.

Athena Niu is a high school senior in California. When she has free time, she likes playing the piano, learning foreign languages, and contemplating what to do in life.

Thomas Osatchoff, together with family, is building a self-sustaining home near a waterfall. Recent poems have appeared in Breakwater Review, Clade Song, FOLIO, HCE Review, and elsewhere.

Kenneth Pobo has a new book out from Duck Lake Books called Dindi Expecting Snow. His work has appeared in, or will appear in: North Dakota Quarterly, Switchback, Mudfish, Nimrod, Atlanta Review, and elsewhere.

Cristina Querrer was born and raised in the Philippines, post Vietnam War, during the Marcos regime, pre-Mount Pinatubo eruption, as a US Air Force military child. She graduated high school from former Wagner High School, Clark Air Force Base, Philippines, in 1985. Her works have appeared in The Milo Review, The Adirondack Review, The Fairfield Review, Stirring, and in print anthologies such as Pinoy Poetics, Babaylan, Bombshells, The Mom Egg, and Field of Mirrors. Her first poetry chapbook, "The Art of Exporting", was published by dancing girl press in 2012 and her first full-length poetry collection, "By Astrolabes & Constellations", by Agave Press in 2019. Querrer received her MFA in Creative Writing from National University and her BA in Creative Writing with a minor in Visual Arts from Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, FL. She was an English Instructor at the College of Micronesia and various other colleges. She is currently residing in the Tampa Bay area. You can view her book publications at http://cristinaquerrer.com/books. Listen to her art and literary podcast: http://www.yourartsygirlpodcast.com.

Radoslav Rochallyi, born 1980, an author looking for what was not written, a student of Heidegger, believing that there is a dialectical equation between Parmenides and Herakleit.

Gerard Sarnat is a retired physician who has built and staffed homeless and prison clinics. He was also a Stanford professor and healthcare CEO. As a writer, he has won First Place in Poetry in the Arts Award, the Dorfman Prize, been nominated for a handful of recent Pushcart and Best of the Net Awards, published four collections and appeared in Stanford, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Pomona, Brown, Columbia, Wesleyan, University of Chicago periodicals as well as in Review Berlin, Gargoyle, Main Street.

Neal Sehgal is a writer, musician, and visual artist from New Jersey. He holds a B.A. in Psychology and an M.A. in Education from Montclair State University, where he was also initiated into the highly-selective Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi. Using different mediums of expression, he aims to explore the human condition, observe the world that surrounds, and share personal truths to inspire others to feel more deeply and live more authentically. He has published two collections of poetry, prose, and photography, entitled "Kiss the Earth" and "Elegy for a Butterfly". The work he has submitted in this application are expressions of his ever-evolving relationship with this world.

Becky Strohl writes short pieces, poetry, and novels. By day she works in Communications and Marketing for nonprofits and multi-billion dollar companies. In her spare time, she runs Baltimore writing groups, writing retreats, and the copywriting service Alpha Moose Editing. Jean's work is varied and often reflects feminist, philosophical, queer, and nihilistic themes. Jean's work and community is available at www.thewritingjean.com.

Travis Stephens is a tugboat captain who resides with his family in California. A graduate of University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, recent credits include: GYROSCOPE REVIEW, 2RIVER, GRAVITAS, SHEILA-NA-GIG, RAW ART REVIEW, CROSSWINDS POET-RY JOURNAL, TINY SEED LITERARY JOURNAL, CIRQUE, APEIRON REVIEW, and THE DEAD MULE SCHOOL OF SOUTHERN LITERATURE.

Haolun Xu was born in Nanning, China and emigrated to the United States in 1999. He was raised in central New Jersey and is currently studying Political Science and English at Rutgers University. Transitioning from a background in journalism and activism, he spends his time between writing poetry and the local seashore.

Photography -

Keely Cruz is a photographer from Battle Creek, Michigan. She enjoys nature, portraits, and action photography.

Sarah Feldpausch is a senior at Olivet College who enjoys capturing moments in her life.

Adam Foster is an 18-year old Scottish photographer living in Australia. He uses unedited 35mm film photos to try and capture the struggle for identity in a suburban town, represented by the streets, artworks, and decorations that residents place in their home to give themselves a corner of the world. His intention for 'Suburban Disaster' was to explore the subtle beauties nestled within the mundane and overlooked, fighting against the melancholic outlook that often feels inescapable in the limbo of suburbia.

Jeremiah Gilbert is an award-winning photographer and avid traveler. He likes to travel light and shoot handheld. His travels have taken

him to over eighty countries spread across five continents. His photography has been published internationally, in both digital and print publications, and has been exhibited worldwide. His hope is to inspire those who see his work to look more carefully at the world around them in order to discover beauty in unusual and unexpected places. He can be found on Instagram @jg_travels

Riley Hancock is a artist from Charlotte Michigan who is looking to broaden her artistic horizons and make connections to other artists

Cassidy Inks is a photograph enthusiast who enjoys taking pictures. Inks enjoys taking pictures of different subjects, but her favorite subject is nature. Inks strives to capture nature's beauty through her photography.

Eliza Velasquez is an amateur photographer from Haslett, Michigan. She began taking professional pictures three years ago, starting with her sister's senior pictures and fell in love with the medium. One day, Velasquez hopes to take her skills across the globe, photographing for big magazines and companies such as Vogue and Gucci. Her mission statement is simple, stating that her main goal is to show her subjects how dynamic, beautiful, and strong they are through her artist lens, and not just through the societal definition of "beauty." You can find Eliza Velasquez on Instagram: @elizaavelasquez and email her at photos.eliza@gmail.com

Prose-

Fatima Alharthi is a PhD in Creative Writing student at Florida State University. Her fiction has appeared in Smokelong Quarterly, Apeiron Review, Flyleaf Journal, and Santa Ana River Review. She believes in the value of fiction to bridge the gap between the East and the West.

Ta'Neeka DeMyers, 21, is a senior at Olivet College. She is a Music: Vocal Performance major with a Writing minor. Her passions include singing, dancing, acting, and writing. Her dream in life is to not only become a professional worship leader or Broadway actress, but a professional author too. With her writing, she wants to change the world and give the reader something to be intrigued by. Writing songs, stories, and poems are her outlet. She loves to let her imagination and creativity flow with whatever she is doing. She also wants her stories and poems to be remembered and enjoyed in the future!

Serra Forshee is a writer who has been writing since she was old enough to pick up a pencil. She has a strong passion for writing and hopes to one day achieve her goal of becoming an author. She is also the author of the short story, "Arachnophobia".

Marah Heikkila is a soon to be English undergrad graduate this year. She enjoys writing and reading and often journals in her spare time.

She's been involved with The Garf and The Echo on campus. She has been published in the 2018-2019 edition of The Garfield Lake Review and in Toe Good magazine, and is soon to be published in Thread Literary Inquiry. When she isn't doing anything school, reading, or writing-related, she usually can be found with her nephew.

Alexander Jones has short fiction and poetry appearing in Akashic Books, Bastion Magazine, Crack the Spine and DASH, among other publications. His nonfiction was recently anthologized by 2Leaf Press. He has a BA in English/Creative Writing and is currently pursuing a second BA in History. He works as a metal fabricator and lives in New Jersey with his family.

Manisha Jukareddy is currently a senior at IUPUI. She's an art enthusiast—often spending hours in front of a 14x16 inch canvas while binge-watching the original Star Wars trilogy. The closest thing to gold that she owns is her high school copies of Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 and Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird. Some of her favorite things to do include ice skating, spending time with friends, and watching sitcoms on Netflix during the weekends. She's been an avid writer since high school and enjoys reading poetry by Elizabeth Bishop, Edgar Allen Poe, Virginia Wolfe, and Robert Frost.

Penelope Katz is an aspiring novelist from Marshall, Michigan. She grew up reading classic literature and fell in love with fairies (the steal your kid kind of fairies). When the stupid gits won't leave her alone, she decides to write about them.

Leah Miller is currently a Junior at Olivet College. She is studying writing and history and aspires to travel the world studying foreign cultures and write fiction in her free time. She loves testing the creative limitations between fantasy and reality, and strives to write in depth, thought provoking fiction. Adventure on.

Melissa Patton is a student at Olivet College from Big Rapids, Michigan who enjoys to write whatever comes to mind. Writing short fictional stories used to be a hobby of Melissa's growing up, and she has taken classes to channel that love for writing for credit.

Bridget Van Houtem is an emerging writer based out of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her poetry has been published in Pulp. She is an editor for BatCat Press, where she also practices the old-fashioned art of letterpress.

Fine Art-

Alyssa Campbell is an artist from Grand Ledge, Michigan. She enjoys drawing and painting, as well as participating in college marching band and wind ensemble. She is passionate about the natural world and majors in both biology and environmental science at Olivet College. She

hopes to find room in her schedule soon to take art classes again.

Christine Craft is a junior double majoring in Graphic Design and Visual Arts with a Concentration in Biological illustration. She strives to improve her skills, gain knowledge, and achieve her goals. Christine is passionate about design because she enjoys utilizing her analytical skills to solve complex problems with innovative solutions. She loves illustration because it grants her the freedom to observe her surroundings and leads her to research interesting concepts she can apply to her artwork. Her favorite part in the process is seeing the visual evidence of what she's learned and improved. Christine seeks to blend her artistic talents to strengthen her skills and enhance future projects. Her future objectives are to gain an internship and expand her art portfolio.

J.E. Crum is a fantastical artist who creates vividly abstracted variations of self-portraits inspired by mythologies such as dragons and mermaids – just to name a few. Working intuitively, Crum creates personal narratives related to thoughts about fate, destiny and the meaning of dreams. J.E. also has an exciting career as an elementary art teacher of nearly one thousand children a week in rural locales of central Pennsylvania. Not only does Crum enjoy showing her own work in a range of exhibitions, but J.E. seeks out various opportunities to showcase her students' artworks, as well. Art by J.E. Crum is available to view on the artist's website at: www.zhibit.org/jecrum.

Riley Hancock is a artist from Charlotte, Michigan who is looking to broaden her artistic horizons and make connections to other artists.

Mario Loprete is a graduate at Accademia of Belle Arti, Catanzaro (ITALY) Painting for him is the first love. An important, pure love. Creating a painting, starting from the spasmodic research of a concept with which he wants to send a message to transmit his message, it's the base of his painting. The sculpture is his lover, the artistic betrayal to the painting. That voluptous and sensual lover that gives him different emotions, that touches prohibited cords...

Olivia Pridemore is a multi-dimensional artist and cofounder of Silver Needle Press. Most recently, her photography, illustrations, poetry, and comics have appeared, or are forthcoming in The Texas Review, Apiary, High Shelf Press, Montana Mouthful, Owen Wister Review, Portland Review, Broad River Review, Memoir Magazine, Utterance, Sand Hills, Tilde, Five 2 One, River River, Bridge, The Ocotillo Review, Pidgeonholes, Round Table, Ampersand, and elsewhere. This winter, Olivia's photography will be featured on the cover of The Texas Review. See more at oliviapridemore.com.

Abby Radcliffe is a graphic design major at Olivet College who loves art, music, and expressing her creativity through many different hobbies.

John Timothy Robinson is a mainstream citizen and minored in Studio Art: Printmaking in college. John is also a twelve-year educator

in Mason County, WV. He is a published poet with one hundred-forty-nine literary works appearing in 101 journals and websites since August 2016 in the United States, Canada, India and the United Kingdom. In Printmaking, he has published eighty-two print and photographic images, though his primary medium is Monotype and Monoprint process with interest in collagraph, lithography and etching.

Edward Supranowicz has had artwork and poems published in the US and other countries. Both sides of his family worked in the coalmines and steel mills of Appalachia.

Tyler Thenikl is a senior at Olivet College, where he studies Studio Art and Graphic Design. Tyler is an aspiring artist with a special interest in woodblock printmaking. In his artwork, he often depicts scenes from his environment which may include landscape or urban elements. Tyler also has a passion for the outdoors and enjoys backpacking.

A History of Olivet College and the Garfield Lake Review Jim Coleman Prize

Prior to the *Garfield Lake Review* was Olivet College faculty member Jim Coleman, a professor in the 1960s and 1970s. It was through him that the undergraduate literary journal we know today exists.

While Mr. Coleman now lives in Connecticut, his Comet connection continues through the Jim Coleman Prize, which has been awarded since 2008 to students who have been published in the *Garfield Lake Review*. The Jim Coleman Prize was established in memory of Tim Boal, Class of 1969, and funded through the Bill Buchanan Fund. The honoree is chosen annually by outside judges.

Past honorees:

2019 Emma Cole, Class of 2018
2018 Adam Walle, Class of 2017
2017 Linda Jo Scott, professor emerita of English, Olivet College
2016 Meghan Eldred, Class of 2015
2015 Camico Green, Class of 2014
2014 Meghan Wilkerson, Class of 2013
2013 Jennifer M. ten Haaf Hodges, Class of 2012
2012 Jennifer M. ten Haaf Hodges, Class of 2012
2011 Jacob "Coby" Heller, Class of 2012
2010 Anabel Montalvo Hall, Class of 2009
2009 Anya Letson, Class of 2008
2008 Katrina Williams Thigpen, Class of 2007

Olivet College, the home of the *Garfield Lake Review*, has a storied history beginning even before the founding of our nation. Pilgrims that traveled across the ocean seeking religious freedom were the first Congregationalists, the founders of the earliest colleges in the United States. These same Congregationalists also funded the defense in the court case of the *Amistad*, a slave trading ship, in which the slaves won their freedom. These revolutionary efforts would trace their way to Olivet, Michigan.

Naming Olivet College after the biblical Mount of Olives, Rev. John Shipherd founded the school in 1844 in a small area of south-central Michigan. Because of Olivet's unorthodox view – offering anyone, including women and minorities, an education – the state of Michigan refused to grant Olivet a charter, so it opened as a private institute.

Into the early nineteen hundreds, Olivet College transformed from a primary school for educators into a true liberal arts college. By the nineteen thirties and forties, young president Joseph Brewer pushed forward with innovative educational policies that allowed Olivet to become a haven for scholars.

By the late 1990s, Olivet had experienced many changes, and the faculty created a new Olivet Plan to encourage students to combine the

founding principles of the Congregationalists and the reforms of President Brewer. The Olivet Plan still exists today, allowing students to focus their education on the global mindset. It is a nationally recognized educational plan.

One of school's proudest accomplishments is the *Garfield Lake Review*. The *Garfield Lake Review* is a production of Olivet College students interested in creative writing, artwork, and music; it began in 1971 as a project in a creative writing class. The founders of the program were Professor James Coleman, Brent Danielson, James Hudson, Andrew Johnson, Amy Leithauser, George Parmenter, and Norm Wheeler.

The *Garfield Lake Review* is the annual literary and visual arts magazine produced by Olivet College students, and it is a proud member of the Olivet College Media Board. From its inception, the policy for the *Garfield Lake Review* has been to accept submissions from students, staff, and alumni. Submissions from outside of the college are accepted as well. Submissions for the magazine are accepted every fall; see guidelines at garfieldlakereview.com.

Works are chosen through a blind screening process that was introduced in 2006. The blind screening assures that no author will be judged by race, creed, sexual orientation, or political ideology. The selections are reviewed, selected and edited by students on the *Garfield Lake Review* Editorial Board.

Readers interested in donating financial support for future issues of the Garfield Lake Review should contact the Olivet College Advancement Office at (269) 749-7000. The Olivet College website is www.olivetcollege.edu.

Olivet College is committed to the principles of equal opportunity and non-discrimination. The college, in its employment, student admissions, recruitment, and personnel policies and practices, will not discriminate against any individual on the basis of age, color, sex, gender identity, disability or disability status, height, weight, marital status, national origin, political persuasion, race, religion, military or veteran status, or sexual orientation.



Projects of the Bill Buchanan Fund

Bill Buchanan died in Sri Lanka before he could return for the celebration of his 80th birthday. Well over one hundred of his former students, colleagues, neighbors, family and friends participated in the service that was held for him. They came from around the country, and recited poems, played music and told stories for three and a half hours. Five years prior to that event, many had gathered in Klock Commons to celebrate Bill's 75th birthday, just like they had for his 70th.

Throughout Bill's 16 years of teaching at Olivet College, his classes were not as populated as the required courses. However, they were no less important. The Bill Buchanan Fund was established on April 2, 2003 to create projects in support of the liberal arts. As the fund grows so will the amounts of the prizes and the award. The balance of the fund is \$40,000, and we are committed to raising \$400,000.

The Coleman Prize has been presented every year since 2008. It goes to an individual associated with the *Garfield Lake Review*, which was established by Jim Coleman in 1970. The Stevens Award recognizes an excellent educator in the tradition of Arthur R. Stevens & Charlotte Whitney Stevens, who both taught in Olivet. The first award honoring Art and Charlotte Stevens was presented at the Honors Convocation on April 17, 2019.

Olivet College strives to provide diversity and depth to students because its founders understood the value of a liberal arts education. Those associated with the fund experience this value. Marty Mason Jennings earned a degree in the fine arts, and Steve Burton studied chemistry. As a philosophy major, my education included biology, chemistry, math and physics. Marty and Steve are advisors to the fund, and I am its founder and representative.

2023 is the 20th anniversary of The Bill Buchanan Fund and the centennial of the birth of Bill Buchanan. By then, additional projects of the fund will be established. In keeping with the intention of the founders, Olivet College has renewed its commitment to a liberal arts education. Those who want to support the projects of the Bill Buchanan Fund may give online at: www.olivetcollege.edu/fundraiser1.

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