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MANASTASH



A Journal of Writing and Art
Volume 29 | Spring 2019

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear readers,

In many ways, it was a hard year at Central. The winter was long, and punctuated by a traumatic event that forced our community to face its greatest fear. We lost members of our community. Outsiders came to Ellensburg, hoping to spread division among us. All of this happened while we each lived through our own weighty lives, and maybe, for some us, it felt like too much.

Which, I would argue, is all the more reason to celebrate the achievements in these pages. Art-making is an act of hope and defiance, an assertion that the meaning we have inside of us deserves to be heard. The Central students in *Manastash 2019* responded to the world around them by actively embracing what's good, even when it's hard, and in so doing made our world a little better, a little easier to be in. I'm proud to bring that work to our readers.

Keep going!
Dr. Zach VandeZande

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FEBRUARY 6TH, 2019

Natalie Lake

This week, of all weeks, was weird. My head had been pounding from the new antidepressants I started to take. Luckily, my medication doubled for my depression and anxiety; therefore, I felt a little more relaxed than usual, despite my fuzziness. Not to mention, the side effects had me queasy. Work felt weird. I kept pressing my heavy head onto any cold surface I could just to relieve some of the ache. I made another Red Bull, called it out for a customer to take, and then we all got the text.

First a text, then a call, then an email to both our school and primary email accounts. My stomach felt uneasy, the same way when you're playing hide-and-seek and know you're going to be the last one found. You're anxious, you giggle nervously, and sometimes you kind of have to poop. I didn't know what to do other than send a screenshot of the text to my family. We had a group chat where we sent memes back and forth to each other, as well as pictures of my siblings and animals. This week it was all the snow. Snow and ice, dripping and dropping, never quite stopping. I wished it would.

"There has been a report of an active shooter in Lind Hall. Please stay away from the area."

I put my phone into my back pocket. I looked up, realizing I was in the SURC, a busy place at 5pm. Standing in the coffee stand next to the Wildcat Shop, my coworkers and I watched as the entire dinner crowd, just down the ramp from us, hushed for a moment, then up and left their tables. It felt so surreal. I couldn't focus on any of the faces in front of me. I just stood still, watching, waiting, anxious. We were stuck where we were and unsure of what to do. All we could do was turn the lights off and close the gates. I stood staring out, my head still groggy, watching the metal grate lock us in. Now we were sitting ducks. We talked in hushed voices trying to grasp what was going on. Then came the overhead speaker.

"This is not a drill. There is an active shooter on campus. Stay away from windows and doors. Do not leave until instructed to."

We all looked at one another and ran to hide inside the coffee stand. We were all shaking and texting our families updates as best we could. I looked in front of me at the glass pastry case. How many shots would it take to get through the glass? Would it hit me or one of my coworkers? Could it go through one of their heads and into mine? We all agreed we didn't know how serious this was until the speaker came on.

We then got instructions to move quickly and quietly to the kitchen. My coworkers and I clustered into groups of 2 or 3, making our way to the doors in between Lion's Rock and El Gato. We walked hurriedly down the ramp, and I saw plates of uneaten food. Cups knocked over; chairs scattered. The grills still hot; the warming ovens with food still waiting to be purchased. But nobody was around except for the two people arm-in-arm with me. They shut and locked the doors behind us—doors that are usually open for staff to move in and out of. We clustered into a big group of at least 80 people, humming soft words of comfort, but mostly anxiety and panic.

"What's going on? Have you gotten ahold of your mom yet? Some people are listening to the police scanner, can you? Where is Lind Hall? I am sure it'll be over soon. Don't worry too much, it'll be okay."

I didn't know many people in this group. I paced continuously in between the cluster of people trying to find someone to talk to or someone to feel safe next to. I walked into the back room where we kept our backpacks and work shirts; no one was in there, and the hums of panic were quieted, but only because they weren't coming from someone else's mouth, just my own head. It was eerily quiet, and thanks to all the anxiousness, my hands were shaky. I walked into the bathroom and locked the door behind me. I could still hear the muffles of students and staff just around the corner, but I tried to tune them out. I held myself up on the bathroom sink, staring into my blue eyes, trying to keep my mind focused on just one thing. There were bees in my head buzzing, and I could not get them out.

I pulled my thoughts away from the inside of my head when I heard the sound of shouting and shuffling. I ran back out of the bathroom and asked my coworkers what was going on. They didn't know. My coworkers and I turned to hear one of the managers tell us we needed to evacuate. We were asked to leave the kitchen and the entirety of the SURC—the shooter might have entered the building. “As you leave the kitchen, there are officers outside the doors. Please keep your hands above your head as you exit the building.”

We all walked out with our hands above our heads. Several men and a woman were dressed in uniform colors with black vests. They held guns that started at their earlobes and hung across their body to their calves. They stared at us intently and nodded their heads per student that passed them. We kept moving until we had evacuated. We followed the people in front of us up towards North campus, walking through ice and snow. Flashes of red and blue lit up the brown buildings as we became defenseless rabbits in hunting season. The cold flushed our cheeks and burned our hands and arms, but we didn't notice. We trudged up the hill and turned right, headed towards Barto with no direction in sight. We stopped for a moment, realizing that there was no one to guide us: we were walking blindly. I stood in front of the building that has always been like a puzzle to me due to its interesting layout.

We stopped in front of the Language and Literature Building. A man was staring at us. He watched us. Maybe even hunted us. We walked faster, my young manager now leading the group of us 6 ducklings. We made phone calls to friends to let us into different buildings, but they couldn't.

“For all we know you could be the shooter. We're barricaded in our rooms, and I don't want to leave. I'm sorry. Our doors must stay locked”. We were bubbles just waiting to be popped. The ice and snow made it tricky for us to walk. We kept slipping on the ice and snow, even though there were spots of red and blue.

Walk, walk, walk, run, until Nicholson Pavilion let us in. We were locked inside the women's locker room until we were told what to do. Most people took turns going to the bathroom. Then we tried to see if we could squeeze ourselves into the lockers if need be. We sat and waited—cold, scared, and windburned. Although we usually were a chatty group, we didn't talk much. My manager tried to break the tense mood with the fact that she had a hole in her pants, shifting her leg to show it. We all laughed, but the laughter died quickly. We were just glad the holes hadn't entered our soft bodies.

RED/ROJA

Xander Deccio

Red

Robin.

Herring. Ladybug body. Lines on box-elder bugs.

Rose. Lava rocks lining the beds for the American Beauty.

Rudolph in the fog.

Blood and Wine. Velvet cake.

Stop. Merlot. Blushing faces.

Summer sunset. Afterbirth.

Silk sheets. Lipstick on a call girl.

Districts. Condoms. Strawberry fields forever.

Candles.

Jessica Chastain.

Colored vinyl. Grade marks on paper. Howdy Doody freckles. Raw meat. Menses.

London's double-decker buses.

Pascal's balloon flying away in Paris.

Twizzlers. UB40's wine makes them feel so fine...

Fire truck. Phone booth. Deadpool.

The seventh circle of Hell.

Enjoying an ice-cold Coca-Cola.

Cross.

Roja

Robin.

Arenque. Cuerpo de mariquita. Líneas en la caja de insectos envejecido.

Rosa. Rocas de lava cubrelecho de la belleza estadounidense.

Rudolph en la niebla.

Sangre y vino. Pastel de aterciopelado.

Detener. Merlot. Caras ruborizadas.

Verano atardecer. Después del nacimiento.

Sábanas de seda. Lápiz labial en chica disponible.

Distritos. Profilácticos. Campos de fresa para siempre.

Velas.

Jessica Chastain.

Vinilo coloreado. Marcas de notas en el papel. Pecas Howdy Doody. Carne cruda.

Menstruación.

Autobuses londinenses de dos pisos.

Globo de Pascal volando por París.

Regaliz. El vino de UB40 loes hace sentir muy bien.

Carrocamión de bomberos. Cabina telefónica. Chico travieso.

El séptimo círculo del infierno.

Disfrute de una Coca Cola bien helada.

Cruzar.

OBSIDIAN

Sean McCabe

Obsidian peppers the mountain, a shining sheath of smoldered armor.

Chaotic points; shattered, broken luster. Nature's truth,
the witness of thin-aired freedom. Black minerals of glass. Glorious
protection, dispelling evil from the phobia of my mind.

Broken shards crumble
into the floor of my jean pocket. Kilimanjaro's crust
breaking into dust, not long for solitude.

Can
hardened lava, volcanic dagger
overcome
palpable paranoia,
brittle
charm?

on facing page: Kaylee Nelson, *Good Dog*



MY WORDS

~~Michaela Phillips~~

The Editor

My words are slaves.

I am their God, yet I cannot free them from Egypt,
the Pharaoh holds them close, but cares nothing.

My words are ~~wrong~~ ^{at Fault},

I am scolded, a child's burden, for giving ~~all I have~~ ^{enough}.

My words threaten suicide,

if they continue on the page they will be cut in half.

My words are no longer mine,

~~taken~~ ^{remedy} by another.

The ~~monster~~ above slashes and crops,

Better they say, though my heart is not.

My words are edited-

they are corrected, ~~deleted~~, ~~changed~~,

until the art I have made is by the hands of another.

"Editors help." No editors destroy.

Death for creativity, style, prose-

life for chastity, ~~arrogant and dim~~ ^{correct} ^{Precise}.

There are no authors, only editors-

Free speech ~~forgotten~~ in published work.

The one place I found freedom has been confined to prison.

Nowhere to hide, they are ~~crased~~ ^{upgraded}.

My words don't exist,

so why do I?

THE WILLOW THAT WAS

Gracie Camp

I had never been to this particular part of campus before. The greenhouse and arboretum were out of my way, places I only passed in transit to Grocery Outlet. Finally being there was nice enough, I guess. If you liked the color white. Everything was desaturated, snow piling over sidewalks and buildings, indiscriminately covering any sign of color. Even the sky was white, just a woolen blanket of storm clouds after the storm had raged itself quiet. The whole world was as pale and cold as vanilla ice cream.

I walked further down the path, hands buried deep in the recesses of my jacket pockets. A willow tree along the irrigation ditch stretched out its long spindly fingers like capillaries across the sky. Its bark was black, fibrous and standing against the backdrop of white in theatrical contrast.

When I was a kid, I knew a willow tree much like that one. I was young, and the tree was much bigger than me; its knobby trunk wider than the expanse of my arms, its bark rougher than the scabs on my knees, its branches longer than the length of my pigtails. My family lived just down the street from the elementary school building where it stood, and I spent many hours in the wide circle of its shadow.

On frosty February days in my youth, I would eagerly throw myself off the plowed and salted sidewalks into the knee-high, and sometimes higher, snow to slog along to where the willow grew. The short distance from the front entrance of the school to the tree seemed like much longer when I was only four feet tall and 85 pounds. However, the journey always seemed worth it when I would finally reach the curtain of branches, the whip-like tendrils parting before my eager, mitten-covered hands.

The ground underneath the willow's arched ceiling was dusted with a powdered sugar topping of snow, the whole thing partially sunken into the white banks like some sort of subterranean cavern. Within its confines, I was cut off from the outside world, but I was rarely alone. Sometimes I was there with my sister; other times it was friends from school. And as often as time would allow, my best friend Kate and I would make-believe we were pirates, or princesses, or elves, or bandits, or whatever it was that struck our imaginations that day.

We didn't go to the same school, so play dates like that were special. It always felt like I had a secret whenever I walked down the street from my house to her's. With my other friends, I shared a school, classes, teachers, and experiences, but I had something that none of the rest of them did. Kate was mine, and she had been mine since the moment our mothers presented us to each other in the parking lot of Stan's Merry Mart just days after Kate was born.

That moment, that meeting of wailing, unthinking infants, was the impetus for one of the most beautiful and painful things in my childhood.

I have not thought about Kate in a very long time. Now, many years older, miles away from home and the neighborhood we lived in, Kate and our days under the willow tree seem far away. Sometimes, in rare moments when I think about her, I miss what we had.

Of course, I didn't think all of this standing underneath the wide sweep of the willow in Ellensburg. It was much too cold to reminisce, and I only really had time to think "Hey, that's a willow tree," before the lizard part of my brain began screaming at me to seek

shelter from the deadly temperatures.

Most of these digressions are simply the nostalgic musings of someone who is trying to write a creative nonfiction piece about willow trees but is only getting lost in memories. Tea in hand, laptop resting precariously on one thigh, my “sad” Spotify playlist crooning quietly in the background, I do the only logical thing I can when faced with a sudden wave of nostalgia: I Facebook stalk my ex-bestfriend.

Kate looks exactly the same in her pictures as she does in my memories. The smile that graces her face in selfies and wedding party photos is wide and carefree, and I can almost envision it grinning down at me from between the branches of that old tree. Seeing her, even if only through a screen, makes me feel like planting myself next to the nearest weeping willow and just staying there as a sad, slouched, spindly tree for the rest of eternity.

Willows are the only trees I know of that are said to weep, hanging their long fronds over rushing waters like jilted lovers. It’s a pretty good indicator of our relationship that the thing that reminds me of Kate is the only tree that cries. The irony of this is that, no matter how sad I am, I don’t actually remember if I have ever cried over Kate.

It seems almost impossible that I haven’t cried. I cry over everything. From nature documentaries to classical music to Star Wars, anyone who knows me is well aware that I will turn into a blubbering lunatic at the slightest provocation.

I remember the smell of her house, the texture of the ladder up to their treehouse, the exact shade of yellow in her room—I remember everything about her so vividly. Kate knew more about me than almost anyone in my life, and I can’t even muster up a few measly tears for our lost relationship.

If I could travel back in time and tell that tiny, pigtailed version of me climbing up the trunk of an old knobby willow what would happen between her and one of the people she loves most, what would she have said? I wonder if she would have even believed it. She lived in a time where summers were slow, languid, and filled with honey-sweet, un-spoilable moments. Kate was her wonderful secret, and I don’t think any glimpse into the future could change that.

Now time moves swiftly, and each time I drive past the school to my house, something new is missing. Like snapshots of the passing seasons, I witness a place I knew so intimately fade into memory. The pavement of the parking lot outside the elementary school, once spiderwebbed with cracks, is slowly eaten away by bulldozers. The blue paint of the school’s exterior is replaced by blue tarps covering empty windows. One by one the trees outside are torn up. During one visit, I pass and see only the wide expanse of a willow trunk. On the next, nothing remains but its roots, laid bare across the dirt they used to call home.

I go back home one weekend and it’s gone completely, nothing left in the place it once stood. Remodeling the elementary school takes precedence over nostalgia, I suppose, but some part inside of me—that is still Kate’s best friend, still climbs trees, and still wears pigtails—cries out at the loss.

Witnessing the disappearance of that tree makes me afraid of what will happen to the thing it represents. Are Kate and I doomed to the same fate? If such an important memory from my childhood can be erased so easily, what makes our relationship any different?

I miss Kate.

I miss how we used to stay over at each other’s houses and talk well into the hours of the night when we were supposed to be asleep; how she used to give me her hand-me-downs because I was so much smaller than her; how the prospect of seeing her made my heart

explode into thousands of tiny hummingbirds all beating their wings against my chest, as if trying to break free.

What I don't miss is the way it felt to sit across the table from my mom when she relayed the news that Kate didn't want to talk to me.

Maybe I should have seen it coming. Even as kids, we were so different. Kate was always eager to grow up, digging through the dress-up box to find high heels, and bikini tops, and old prom dresses so she could pretend that she cheated time and skipped all the boring bits of her life. I never felt that urge. I wanted to remain a child for as long as time would allow. People say that opposites attract, but maybe Kate and I were too opposite.

I don't know the whole story, and even if I did, it's not my story to tell. But I do know that there was a secret, and a crime, and she was still so young. I also know that afterwards she avoided me because she thought I would think less of her if I knew what had happened.

That is the worst part of this whole, miserable situation. Apparently, I wouldn't have understood, and maybe that's true—maybe I was too young to really get it. But the idea that I would have stopped being her friend, that I would have somehow loved her less because of what had happened, hurt more than I can describe. It hurt so much that I was afraid of seeing her again in case all my hurt spilled out in a way that looked too much like anger.

That hurt has dulled into something more like regret now, but sometimes it still drags me back to that dull grey day in the dining room when my mom told me what my best friend really thought of me. I just wish I had one chance to look Kate in the eye and tell her how much I loved her, and how nothing would have ever made me care less about her—even that messed up shit that had happened. I wish I had a chance to tell her that I miss her.

Maybe that is our saving grace. Maybe the fact that I remember how much I miss Kate, my eyes burning and my throat constricting like a python around my breath, is the very reason why we won't succumb to the erasure of time. There are still no tears, but I don't need to weep for Kate to know how much she means to me.

We are both very different people now, even more so than when we were as kids, but just because a tree looks dead doesn't mean it is. That willow that I saw near the arboretum seemed more like an art installation than a living thing, but I know that once springtime comes, it will bloom with life once again. I don't think our willow is gone for good. I hope it isn't.

After I wrote this, I spent an embarrassingly long time with my finger hovering over the message button on my phone. I didn't send anything to Kate, and I think it's because I'm scared that I'm the only one who feels this way about us. I'm scared that she doesn't have the same regrets I do, and that when I send a message that says, "I miss you," I won't get back an, "I miss you too."

I'm going to keep trying, though. Fear has ruled this winter-bound willow for far too long, and I'm ready for the season to change. I'm ready for our springtime, and I can only pray that Kate is, as well.

If she isn't, I still hope that one day she will understand that my love for her is unconditional, even though we may never be friends the same way we once were. Our willow is made up of endless tree rings of play dates, nights spent giggling over shared secrets, and eager hands gripping knotted branches as we rose farther and farther into the sky. It is a massive, living thing, wrapped around all the places in my heart that remind me of Kate, and no matter the pain, I won't ever give up that willow for anything in the world.

LEARNING TO LOVE YOUR DISABILITY

Kyle Denner

You will have a bully
He will have an innocuous name
Like Jonathan or Christopher
Jonathan or Christopher will make you lick dog poop
You will pretend it is a chocolate ice cream cone
Your delusions will only take you so far

You will go to a petting zoo
You will be told not to throw rocks at the animals
You will throw rocks at the animals anyways
A llama will bite off your right index finger
You will develop complicated feelings about sex and safety
These feelings may have developed anyways

You will not cry in public
Repeat
You will not cry in public

You will go on a date
She will order the lobster
You will resist the urge to hit her
You will be rewarded with a lackluster handjob
It will behoove you to ignore the fact that handjobs are cheaper than lobsters

You will think yourself like other people, mostly
You will come into contact with other people
Your values will be questioned

You will not touch yourself on the bus
Repeat
You will not touch yourself on the bus

You will touch yourself on the bus
You will not be cool
You will not be well-liked
You will not be funny
You will not be smart
You will not be interesting
You will be boring and stupid and ugly
It takes courage to be these things

You will read Wittgenstein
You will not understand Wittgenstein
Don't worry
No one will

You will bring enough snacks for the entire class
Repeat
You will bring enough snacks for the entire class

You will lie in bed, next to a beautiful woman
You will watch her breasts gently rise and fall
It will probably not work out

You will have a cat
You will give him a people name
Like Norman or Peter
Norman or Peter will be your best friend
This will tell everyone everything they need to know about you

You will not vote for a third party candidate
Repeat
You will not vote for a third party candidate

You will find language a poor tool for expressing ideas
You will use language to express ideas anyways
You will learn to love your disability
If you're lucky, it may love you back

You will live your life alone, in quiet desperation
You will often feel hopeless, like nothing has meaning or value
You will whisper your innermost desires into a non-existent void
You will feel lonely and empty, almost all the time
Just kidding, you'll probably be fine

You will jump off a bridge
You may or may not die
It will depend if the bungee is attached properly
Either way, for a moment or two, you will feel free

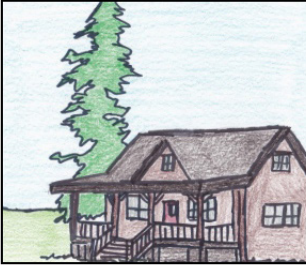
[GOOD VIBES ONLY]

Kyle Denner

The [baseball game] was upstairs. It was [sour candy]. He shut the [finding a cool rock]. He took off his [watching cartoons]. He told me to lick his [books with pictures]. He told me it would taste like a [strawberry ice cream cone]. It did not. It tasted like [riding your bike on a warm summer day]. I was [the smell of women's hair]. So very, very [the smell of women's hair]. He told me he would kill my [puppies] if I told [falling asleep as soon as you lie in bed]. I was pretty sure he was bluffing but figured it wasn't worth taking the [cheese and crackers].

DESAPARECIDO

Daniel Craig



In 1912, my grandfather was a tanner's apprentice in Xochimilco, Mexico. It was the height of the Mexican Revolution.



One day, an army officer appeared in the doorway. He'd seen a saddle in the window, and demanded that they hand it over immediately, or risk imprisonment.



The tanner explained that the saddle had been commissioned by a general in the Mexican army, and that no one else could have it.



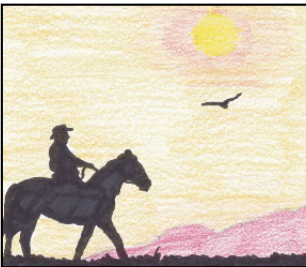
And so the officer decided that he would take it by force.



My grandfather, who knew the officer would not allow him to live, attacked before the pistol was turned on him. Soon, the officer lay dead on the ground.



Knowing the fate that would await him at the hands of the army, my grandfather took his dead master's horse the next morning and rode for California.



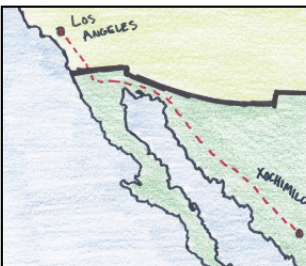
He rode.



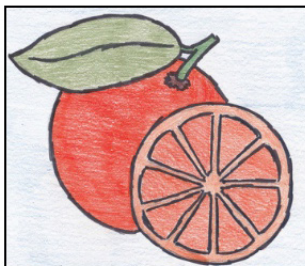
And he rode.



At night, he would sleep in the army camps, posing as a traveling soldier right under the noses of his pursuers.



After traveling for many months, sneaking across the entire country, he finally arrived in the fabled land of America.



He took to the agricultural industry, working his way up from a day laborer until he eventually owned the largest orchard in the state of California.



My grandfather died in 1973. I never met him. But without his sacrifice, I wouldn't be here. And I am grateful for that every day.

AN OBITUARY FOR SOMEONE I'VE NEVER MET

Lauren Matney

I reflect on the most noteworthy celebrity deaths in recent memory. Each has taught me something about my relationship with humanity. With the death of Carrie Fisher, I learned the power of strangeness and pure, unadulterated intelligence. With the death of her mother, Debbie Reynolds, I learned that it is indeed possible to die of a broken heart. With the death of Robin Williams, I learned that no one is exempt from suffering. With Robin's death I learned that laughter is not necessarily the best medicine. With the death of Anthony Bourdain, I learned to question the grimy, filmy facade of a perfect life.

Although each death has impacted me in some way, none have remained with me as much as the passing of Koko, the gorilla. I remember the first time I saw Koko: I was alone, sitting criss-cross applesauce in the carpeted living room of my childhood home. I was considered overweight for my age group. I spoke with an undecipherable lisp and had a corresponding learning disability—a combination which marked me a social pariah in the eyes of my neighborhood peers. Mister Rogers, who, at that time, I considered a dear friend, showed a segment on Public Television in which he met Koko and spent the day with her. The two began their day by greeting one another in their native tongue. First, Fred began the introduction in English, then American Sign Language. Koko responded in a common western lowland gorilla dialect, which was similar to a low purr. Koko, completely unaware of her tremendous size and power, took Mister Rogers in her arms and cradled him while smelling his breath. Within minutes, Koko taught Mister Rogers to sign, "I love you."

After the segment, my love for Koko quickly intensified. I wanted her to hold me in her lap and brush my hair with her pink comb. I wanted her to read to me and be my friend. I kept magazine clippings of any article featuring her in my top dresser drawer. One summer day, while sifting through clutter in my grandparents' home, I discovered an old, faded copy of National Geographic. Koko graced the front cover. The issue was titled, "Conversations with a Gorilla."

I eventually outgrew my lisp and slowly acquired a few friends belonging to the human species. With these shifts, my fascination with Koko faded to more of a passing interest. I tossed out her magazine clippings and replaced them with gift cards and cigarettes. A decade later, and a week after the tragic death of Anthony Bourdain, I was scrolling through news articles on my phone. My eyes paused at a familiar name. The article read, "Koko, the Cat-Loving Gorilla who Learned Sign Language, Dies at 46." I read the article and was filled with an intense sadness for the death of my childhood friend. Not until Koko's death was I able to appreciate the impact she had on me. With Koko's passing, I learned that it is possible to love and miss someone I have never met.

I didn't cry when Anthony Bourdain or Robin Williams died, although I do feel as though the world is a little more frightening without their presence. However, when Koko died, I wept. I wept for the outcast sitting alone on her carpeted living room floor. In Koko's absence, I am humbled back to the lonely, chubby girl I was when I first laid eyes on her. While alive, Koko served as an ambassador, a liaison, for humans and animals. She diligently existed to remind us we are not all that different.

DREAM

Jared Brooks

Unknown time—a familiar place
My childhood home and my father's face
The house feels empty as I mount the stairs
I shout "Hello!" and am answered only by a stare
That I haven't met yet
That I won't soon forget
There he stands at the end of the hall
Somehow he is a fraction—appearing small
An uncharacteristic beard adorns his chin
His hair distinctly frazzled in the din
His whole shirt sticks to him like a sweatband
And he has a gun in his hand
He's pointing it at me except he isn't
Somehow his entire person is vacant
I speak to him in soft tones—no response
I ask him what happened—no response
I slowly walk toward him and he doesn't move
As if his consciousness has been removed
I move in close and the gun falls to his side
I wrap my arms around him and begin to cry
Asking, "Dad, where are you? What's wrong?"
Asking what could do this to a man so strong
I look into eyes where I can't see my father
And scream as he puts the gun to his temple
And pulls the trigger

JON

Jared Brooks

An entire man's life cut down
To a four minute slideshow
And a few choice words
He was only 32 years old
My last real memory of him
Took place in my youth
I must have been 9 or 10
And all I remember was how
Kind he was to me—that he
Didn't talk down to me like
Most adults do when you're that age
That he valued my existence
When a lot of other humans didn't
And enough to listen to who I
Was and respond in kind even
Though he didn't have to
That is what I remember about him
And that is who he is even though
He isn't anymore
Because if you threw every single
Choice word that came out of
The people speaking into a cauldron
It would boil down to how intensely
And consistently his genuine kindness
Changed the lives of the people
Around him and
That is one hell of an epitaph

SNAKE OIL

Jared Brooks

When we owned youth
We could seek safety in naivety
But at some point we sold it
For less than it was worth
To a man who paid us
In random facts about whale migration
And existentialism
Misunderstanding the nature
Of the word "Prison"
Because we thought we were escaping one
I suppose that's the most valuable thing
we learned
When we were swindled
That a confinement does not require bars
To hold you in
A non-corporeal penitentiary
That is nonetheless real
It could not be more real
Even if we found a way to grasp it
Another day
Another prison break

“BABY” (FOR MY MOM)

Tyler Bolles

Last year when I turned eighteen, my mom gave me my baby book. Thin, brown and hardcover—hardly an excuse for a journal—with a teddy bear squared on the front. Inside was over a hundred dated entries, ranging from the day I was born to the day I turned five. Reading it I got embarrassingly emotional. It’s not the words themselves, necessarily, that get me, because I know most of it already. If there’s one thing my mom loves to do it’s talk about me. So I already know that I was easy to potty train and that I’d said my first word (“Mama”) before one, and that I’d fall asleep in the middle of the floor, and slept so hard she could vacuum around me. It’s not the words themselves, not the stories, but what I know is in between them. When she writes “October 10th: Used your potty chair for the first time,” I know that chair came from a food bank sponsored donation program for underprivileged moms. When she writes about my first day of daycare under “June 3rd: I dropped you off and it was hard. We cried together,” I know that day at daycare and all of the ones that followed were paid for by relatives that were better off and who we were still in contact with. I know my mom often cried in the bathroom at work because she missed me. The book was a primary source for things I already knew, had already seen firsthand, but never really understood. It was her life, unassumingly written in between the lines of mine. I remember those days; I remember going to the food bank with my mom, I remember spending the work day at daycare, but when I remember, all I can recall is being loved, safe, happy. I loved the food bank because they had a cat that ran free in the building and sat on window sills that I was allowed to pet. I loved the movies we’d watch at daycare and the sweet old woman who wore long skirts and always smelled like baby powder, and who hugged us when we got there and again when we left. My mother’s efforts to make my childhood fun, easy, normal—they lasted well past my movies on the floor, training wheels on my bike, pigtails in my hair days. I carry them with me now, and though I was given the gift of ignorant bliss, which is indescribably invaluable—I think along the way I forgot what it was built on. In my parents’ wedding photos, my mom is nine months pregnant. She’s a vision of happiness, dressed in white with rosy cheeks. She’s twenty-one and the solemn faces her family and friends are wearing give away the weight of the wedding’s circumstances. A questionable groom, an almost baby out of wedlock that no one seemed to want, all of it captured in late 90s, sunlit snapshots. “No one seemed to want this baby,” my mom has told me before, almost casually like the years had washed over any emotion tied to that concept. “No one but me,” she says. “I wanted it so badly. I needed that baby.” Looking at photos of me anywhere from 3 months to two years old, I am the fattest baby I’ve ever seen. Those are the only words that come to mind but when I ask my mom she claims she never thought about it. “All I saw was my baby,” she says, bent over photo albums laid out on the table. Her eyes are on the pages but she’s somewhere else. I still don’t know if I believe her, even now—it seems impossible to overlook a formula-based, 98th percentile weight gain of that magnitude but it’s nothing new. When I ask her how she managed to stay home with me every day for a whole year when I was four without going insane, she smiles so big it touches her eyes. “You were my best

friend,” she says, like I should have already known. The last entry in the book is my fifth birthday. “September 10th: Happy 5th Birthday Tyler! I’m so proud of you” it reads, simply. A few days before that entry was written was one of the hardest, most pivotal nights of my mother’s life. She sat behind the wheel of an idling car, staring at a closed motel door. Behind it, a terrible man, a divorce, seven awful years of our lives, a face frozen in a sunlit photograph. I sat in the seat next to her, engulfed in her Carhartt, warm but wondering what came next. The white lights of the parking lot streamed in through the car windows and illuminated her face. Relief. “It’s you and me against the world,” she whispered, and took my hand. It was just a notebook but I’ve never seen things like this. I’ve never understood love like this. I’ve never understood her like this.



Kylee Matala, *Reflections*

IN SEARCH OF THE BERRIES

Nancy Santos

Standing at the stove, words marinating my mind
the boiling water grays, lines rising in steam.

Words go missing like the children
in black and white on 80's milk cartons.

I search for them in shower vapor,
words scrolled in fog clinging to the mirror.

My brain is a strawberry jar, running green
with weeds waiting to grow a juicy berry.

I love the sound of cicada and machete,
blood staining white bark on birch trees.

I stroll below a canopy of oaks in Savannah,
a place I've never been, not knowing what it means.

I swim in solitude in dungeons and deserts
alone with the locusts swarming in streams.

I wake in darkness to a hummingbird
hovering, its beak jackhammers my nose.

Wrought iron gates slam, echo stomping
through a night sky of silent snow.

An old man drunk on bourbon and turpentine
staggers over cobblestone, chocking on ghosts.

I rise from a clawfoot tub, dripping silver,
a mermaid in liquid mercury.

I write when the first bite squirts,
splashing my mouth like a cordial cherry.

DISTRESS SIGNAL

Nancy Santos

—after Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893)

He escaped the ember chambers,
the dungeons dripping dirt grains,
sauntered inside a pelican's beak,
spilled onto the boardwalk promenade,
foghorns deafening, demons creeping.
Draped in a shadow of onyx,
his shackled larynx screams vermilion
vapors, streaking the sky, a bloodstain silence.
Skeletons melt like Dali clocks, skulls churning,
swirling in ivory solitude.
Crashing apparitions wax the sunset,
splashing Formaldehyde,
their scorched throats echoing a cobalt glow,
an American flag in distress.

SOUVENIRS

Nancy Santos

The doctor slit my skin, twice releasing my best catches. The cut line carries my belly like a hobo's bindle. But my hobo's a hoarder, packing prodigal pounds. My scar has a sheen. Stretch the skin and you will see, light pink, or is it salmon? Like the fish I caught with my father as a kid. We woke early, boating on Lake Washington's black water before sunrise. Dad showed me how to make his drinks—ice, three fingers of whiskey, fill with Coke. No fucking Pepsi. Fishing at the Pothole's Reservoir, I dug through dirt in the worm bucket, skewered the wiggling bait, grabbed handfuls of ice from the cooler. Dad still remembers those drinks, an inch of silt in the bottom of the glass, a murky river, still better than *fucking up a perfectly good drink with New Coke*. I learned to cuss and clean fish—chop off the head and tail, slice the belly, rip the guts out. I scraped their slimy bodies with dad's old pocket knife, rinsed the scales off with the garden hose, staining the grass iridescent, squeezed their guts like kneading a bowl of Jell-O. That's how it felt when my doctor cut me open to reel in my sons, twisting and pressing on my guts, like wringing out a wet rag, stacking them on my belly. They kept my stones after they cut out my gallbladder. No souvenirs, just new scars, a bill, and a glossy photo of my guillotined organ marinating in blood, its belly sliced up the middle, exposing the rocky riverbed, a slate gray egg sac. If I could gut the bindle like a fish, filet it flat, I'd save the Cesarean scar, a trophy fish

<-----THIS

BIG----->

HOW DOPE!?

Brittney Poston

After Eduardo C Corral's "Que Chido"

How dope are her lips?! 😍

Fillers supple like a tomato. Sometimes just as wrinkly, dented, and overripe. #lipgoals!

How dope is her hair?! 😍

Colors of the rainbow ranging from various textures of silky and shiny, wavy, and sometimes kinky, depending on whatever retailer she chooses. #hairgoals!

How dope is her face?! 😍

Tuning each imperfection, dashing each of them away until she appears as porcelain as her ego. #facegoals!

How dope are her curves?! 😍

Hourglass figure, sloping her body like the Chocolate Hills in Bohol, from her perky double-D breasts, to her Kardashian-esque bottom. Just what the doctor ordered. #bodygoals!

How dope are her gains?! 😍

Brawny and powerful, working strenuously on her body in the gym every day to achieve the ever-so-perfect physique of a body-builder, lifting her heavy weights of rubber and Styrofoam. All the while, her PED's giving her the boost she needs, while her followers mentally torture themselves for not being able to achieve "her look." #fitnessgoals!

How dope is her makeup?! 😍

Magician in her craft, at the wave of her wand, she becomes someone different. POOF! #makeupgoals!

How dope is her Instagram?! 😍

Thousands and thousands of photos of her in her natural habitat of perfection. She really does wake up like this. #instagoals!

How dope are her sponsors?! 😍

Ranging from her designer clothes, to miracle-working protein shakes that she "ABSOLUTELY SWEARS BY," that only make an appearance in her photos when the money appears in her account. #sponsoredadgoals!

How dope are her likes?! 😍

They are a symbol of all of the people that truly love her. Each like consuming her, drowning her in a pool of expectations of perfection and self-worth that must be validated in each and every photo. #likes! #lifegoalsbecauseyouwishthatyouhadthismanylikesbutyoudon'tsoboohooforyou!

How dope is her confidence?! 😍

Because without all of the above, she would truly still love herself. #selflove.

THE ADVANTAGE OF SHOPPING WITH A BASKET

Andrew Ciampi

Because it is a Sunday, the store will close at 6 p.m. The middle-aged man's shopping cart contains six items: bandages, store-brand corn flakes, gin, peaches in a tin can, dog biscuits, and Christmas lights. His yellow sticky note has eight items listed on it; he still needs a regulation red Frisbee and a bottle of lavender hand soap. It is 5:52 p.m.

Because it is a Sunday, the store will close at 6 p.m. The young woman managed to find the chicken breast near the back of the store and the black licorice in aisle six. Her basket is missing one item: lavender hand soap. It is 5:53 p.m.

At 7 tonight, the stock boy is going on a group date—Lisa will be there. He finally mustered up the courage to invite her to an evening of mini golf and overpriced arcade games with six other youths from the area. He thinks that if things go well tonight, maybe he'll ask if she wants to spend some time alone in his third-floor apartment downtown. He'll prepare a dinner of spiced salmon and his grandmother's marinated smokehouse cauliflower—although maybe he'll use cayenne pepper instead of paprika since Lisa once mentioned she wasn't too fond of it. He'll tell her his wittiest joke about the rabbits and the canoe. He'll regale her with the story of the swordfish who nearly sliced straight through his cheek. While daydreaming, the stock boy does his job fairly well. He puts fresh milk in the back of the freezer, carefully places thirteen dozen eggs in a delicate row, refortifies the soda can pyramid to restore it to its original glory, and smirks when he threw out a joke greeting card with the sound-maker savagely ripped out.

By the standards of most anyone, he is a model employee. With an exemplary sense of pride and a delightful air of whimsy, he takes stock and cleans up and replaces what's running low and thinks about polysyndetons. But, unfortunately, he forgets to move the new shipment of lavender hand soap from storage to their place in aisle nine. A contemporary tragedy considering only one bottle currently remains. It is 5:54 p.m., his manager, pleased, lets him leave early tonight.

The middle-aged man finds the Frisbee in a dimly lit corner across from the three remaining bags of discount Halloween candy. He takes out a pen and checks the item off his sticky note. An announcement is made over the store's loudspeaker: "Attention customers, five minutes until the store closes. Please proceed to checkout as soon as you can." The speakers have a tendency to produce as much static as syllables, so he hears only a few key words. With lavender hand soap on his mind, he charges toward aisle nine. It is, as the loudspeaker made clear, 5:55 p.m.

The young woman swears quietly in frustration, tapping the metallic basket handle. She is certain that the hand soap is in aisle eight. It was last time she was here only a week ago. And it is reasonable that she is so certain; only three days ago, the night manager made an executive decision. She informed her staff that all hand soaps should be moved from their previous location between body wash and bathing soap in aisle eight to a new home in aisle nine, directly across from the extra soft tissue paper. Fiercely loyal to their fearless admiral, the night staff took great care removing any trace of hand soap ever existing in the eighth aisle. When the keen-eyed general manager arrived in the morning and noticed the subtle but brilliant change, he made a mental note to congratulate his immediate subordinate for her supremely excellent display of initiative. Unfortunately for

the young woman, she was not informed about the hand soap's relocation. She scans the area around her, searching for an employee who can help her find what she needs. She sees no one but a middle-aged gentleman casually walking in her direction. With only a few minutes left before the store closes, she decides to check the next aisle over, hoping she'll be in luck. It is 5:56 p.m.

The middle-aged man looks at the signs hanging over the aisles. Aisle eight's has three words printed in bold white: "bathing," "sundries," and "soaps." He recalls a trivial conversation he had with his wife that morning; she had told him about another conversation she had—with the store's general manager. Apparently, he was beaming with pride when he bragged to the middle-aged man's wife that one of his employees had moved all of the hand soap from aisle eight to nine. This enthusiasm for something so mundane rightfully struck his wife as odd, so she thought her husband might find it interesting. He said he did at the time. The middle-aged man shakes his head disapprovingly at the misinforming sign. He checks his watch, concludes that he still has enough time to grab the soap, and strolls into aisle nine. It is 5:57 p.m.

The young woman turns into aisle nine, she sees tissue paper. She turns around. Hand soap! Her leaping heart nearly tackles her to the ground. Never before has she found grocery shopping to be so exhilarating. Maybe she'll try bungee jumping sometime soon? Chase that rush. She walks down aisle nine, examining soap bottles as she goes. "Cherry," "coconut," "dark chocolate raspberry fusion." Could they be organized alphabetically? Is her lavender hand soap just a few letters away? She reads "zucchini," then "apricot." No, they are not organized alphabetically.

The middle-aged man is first overwhelmed, then slightly annoyed, then mostly indifferent to the great variety of hand soaps before him. (At least now he can understand why the general manager was so filled with pride). Impatiently, he peruses aisle nine. So many different scents: "Apple," "cinnamon and oak," "fresh-baked squid casserole." He just wants to find the lavender and check out. He sighs and starts pushing forward ever-so-slightly faster.

The single bottle of lavender hand soap waits patiently in the center of the aisle. It is 5:58 p.m.

She doesn't know it, but the young woman is heading nearing the lavender hand soap. She speed reads label after label: "lemon," "oatmeal," "new car." He doesn't know it, but, coming from the opposite side of the aisle, the middle-aged man is nearing the lavender hand soap. He speed reads label after label: "lime," "porridge," "burning rubber." Finally, she sees it: the one bottle of lavender hand soap. Finally, he sees it too. Both reach for it. Both are experiencing intense tunnel vision. Both want this bottle of lavender hand soap like a drowning man wants to breathe. In a moment of absolute panic, both see the other's reaching hand. Ten fingers, belonging to two bitter rivals, grasp for what they desire above all else, for closure after an evening of slight frustration, for the purely sensual satisfaction of lavender-scented soap, for victory.

But it is ultimately youth that wins this battle. The middle-aged man, although wizened by the extra decades he has lived through, is simply not as spry as his 24-year-old foe. The young woman's hand wraps tightly around the single bottle of lavender hand soap. She pulls it in close and jumps away from the store shelf. The middle-aged man stares at the bottle in her frail hand. Something primal whispers to him, telling him to slam her against the shelf with his cart, to strangle her, to take what's his. Of course, he

doesn't act on this instinct, he pretends to glance at the selection of soaps. He absent-mindedly grabs a bottle labeled "gray licorice" and tosses it in his basket. The young woman and the middle-aged man both proceed to checkout, neither saying a word. They both leave at 6:02 p.m. It would have been rude for the store to deny them service so incredibly soon after closing time.



Xander Deccio, *Seattle Center Friendships*

THE BEACH

Miranda Cays

I close my eyes
To the sound of synthetic waves
On a counterfeit coast
With the tap of a finger
I add the pitter pat of rain on a tent flap.
I am the master of my malfunction
I am the DJ of my distraction
I conduct a synthetic symphony
I am at once totally in control
And completely incapable of my distress
While my house floods
I splash knee deep from room to room
Turning on all the faucets.
Each wave rises and falls,
Synchronizing with my breath
And the internal waves of desire and repulsion

Swish, two three,
The urge grows to reach out,
To tap, to swipe
Swoosh, two, three,
I exhale and push the thought away.

In the darkness the rhythm blinks
With a single green light
We are both here, on our respective docks,
Trying to recharge.
One of us is succeeding.

Swish, the tide rises,
Pulling me to pick up the small green light
And caress it.
Swoosh,
I push away from the beckoning
Of that familiar gritty beach
And kick hard for deeper water

The two sounds grow louder,
Rolling waves and tapping rain
I will them to transport me
To campsite nine, Cape Alava,
To the first time I heard those two sounds at the same time,
To the first time I held you in the dark
You are far away now,
Listening to different waves on a different shore,
But I conjure you anyways
I'm spooning the memory of your warm frame
And small sighing sounds,
So that I can stop curling myself around
That cold green light
These days, all of my winding and unwinding is done this way.

THE SKY SPEAKS MY NAME

Aubrey Higdon

On a young November night,
I found the answer to a question people were about to keep asking me.

It was some time after my discovery, where,
between flannel shirts and new shoes,
their eyebrows questioned my new pen,
their shaking heads splattered an opinion on my paper,
and those minds decided their crowd was better than my notebook
and time cast into the air was better than that wasted on second hand images,
because people have to climb forward,
and don't need ink to survive.

My eyes were open, their thoughts were closed
and they didn't know how to see,
and I didn't know how to say
an explanation that would blow away the smoke.

It was a calm night,
it was cold and I was unattended
and for the first time in a while,
the clouds had left.
There was a bit of a breeze
and, standing there on the pavement,
the scampering of the leaves sounded louder
than all the voices that had passed me by.
I walked between street lights, and trees
until grass began to whisper under my feet,
and my legs joined my lungs as they stopped to listen.
My skin still,
I looked up at the stars,
like little dreams,
thinking both of us looked small,
and, for a moment,
I slowly raised my hand up to the sky,
until I felt something reaching back.

I offered my soul to the ubiquity they held within the air,
and as it rose, gently floating through the darkness
like the fog of my breath, up to meet them,
the points of light shattered
like a million white fireworks of brilliance.
My heart forgot to beat,
just as the silver dust
fell between my fingers,
and the sky,
became the pupils of my eyes.

And ever since,
there has been nothing left for me to do,

but put them back.

FREEDOM

Aubrey Higdon

Tiptoe,
I wanted to be small, and quiet,
and horde childish wonder
under the spotlight
of a never ending stage.

I wanted to dance,
as if I were already a ballerina,
and dream above anything I could imagine,
hold everything I never will,
just for a moment.

And as I looked,
the scenery found no end,
just beginnings
and the lights rose and fell
within the crashing waves of my emotion
and I wanted to plunge into the knowledge that I could never drown, here in this never
ending moment,
I could only breath.

And the audience
did not stand,
or sit,
or materialize enough of an echoing voice to reach me,
they were not a part of my scene,
they were not even a vision.

I didn't want to hide,
or be center stage,
or be watched and scored
amongst the "competition",
I did not dream
for applause and approval,
I dreamt for wind,
a flurry to swirl my soul into feathers
and for my feet to stand firm upon the earth in perfect affinity.

And as I am,
I may forever be alone
as long as I ever cherish the part of my soul
that yearns to twirl in freedom.

THE DEAD OF NIGHT

Aubrey Higdon

I woke up in the dead of night.
No gradual return to consciousness,
only open eyes,
an unblocked awareness
of everything:
quiet noises so loud
I heard them
in the bones of my chest,
felt them
in the hollow tunnels of my ears.
For a long moment
I watched all the colors of the darkness
as the thumping of my heart pulsated my ribs

THE NEWLYWEDS

Corbin Schaefer

The freeway leaving the city was crowded. The traffic hadn't slowed down yet, but it was about to. The near-setting summer sun illuminated the roads with hues of vibrant oranges and yellows. Among the many cars speeding down the freeway was a dark red minivan. It had been driven before, judging by the dents and scratches on the front and rear bumpers. The minivan screamed "busy soccer mom". Though the vehicle seemed a bit more suspicious due to the near-tinted windows.

Looking out the passenger-seat window was a young man who wore a black and white tuxedo, sewn to his size. The red bowtie hanging limp on his neck matched the drying dabs of blood on his lapel. His hands were placed on the interior of the door; the tips of his fingers pressed against the window. His mouth was open a bit, curved into a smile. He was breathing heavily. Oddly, though, his black hair looked greasy, as if he had just finished a bout of hard labor. He decided he was done focusing out the window and turned to the driver of the vehicle.

Her hands gripped the steering wheel fiercely, turning her knuckles white. The new-ish engagement ring on her left ring finger bore six orange topazes with a circular clear diamond in the center. Her new groom had paid half a fortune for it, but it was genuinely the most beautiful piece of jewelry she owned. Her wedding gown was as pristine as when she wore it to the ceremony. The white and intricate delicacies of it remained intact through the active summer heatwave. It was a rather slim dress, giving light to the curvatures of her body. She had lost the veil which matched the dress somewhere by the creek. Her face showed excitement. Her jade-green eyes were wide as the adrenaline coursed through her veins. She eyed the speedometer; she was going seventy-two in a sixty. She didn't care. Traffic hadn't stopped yet. Her groom finally spoke up. She had seen him looking at her in her peripheral vision.

"How are you feeling?" he asked. She loosened her grip on the wheel a bit, feeling a little relieved that their ten-minute silence had finally been destroyed.

"I'm feeling the rush again. This is my favorite part." She smiled earnestly, chuckling a bit. "How are you feeling?"

"I..." he paused to formulate his thoughts. He extended out his arms in front of him. "Just amazing. I've never felt a rush like this before."

"Isn't it great?" she asked, knowing the answer. She smirked a bit. But her new groom was lost in his thoughts.

"My heart is racing faster than this damn van. Every little movement I make, I notice. But at the same time, I'm not focusing on anything." He retracted his arms.

"That's the rush. It'll wear off soon, but I want you to enjoy it while it lasts," his bride replied. She took a deep breath and felt the adrenaline slowly melt. Piece by piece, that rush she knew so well fell to the wayside.

She checked the speed again: 63 now. She was content with that speed and took another deep breath. Once again, she eyed her groom from her peripheral vision. He was still acting erratically. His eyes were wide, his legs spread wide in his seat, and his hands and fingers busy tapping the interior of his door. In her newfound tranquility, he now looked like a maniac to her.

“Robbie,” she stated. He stopped tapping the door and looked at her again.

“What?” Robbie asked.

“Do you know what this means?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, do you know what we’re in now?”

“Your van.” He chuckled.

“No. This, what we’ve done, means we can never go home again,” she stated with a clear sense of seriousness. Robbie simply closed his eyes as a smirk sprawled across his face. He pointed his fingers at her, thumbs sticking up.

“Babe. When I’m with you, I’m home.” His smile was genuine. His bride couldn’t help but reciprocate that feeling. He let his arms down and chuckled slyly. As much as she used her peripheral vision to eye him on this car ride, she failed to notice her groom’s eyes drifting to the back seat.

He studied what sat in the seat behind him: A once silver-bladed, pearl-handled cake knife. However, the blade was no longer its usual gleaming silver. It was now caked with stains of crimson. A crimson which matched his bowtie and dotted lapel, like a sadistic three-piece accessory set. It sat on a white tuxedo jacket, staining it in the process.

As Robbie’s gaze met the stained blade, he suddenly felt the color and emotional ecstasy he had ingested leap from his body in an instant. His jumbled thoughts suddenly formed an image he had witnessed earlier that day.

Her beat-up minivan was in sight. He heard his pant legs swish with friction with each hurried step he took. The midday sun illuminated the paled greens and yellows of the tall grass they were charging through. To his right was his blushing bride, winded with excitement. In her left hand was their cake knife, leaving drops of blood flying through the air as her arms pumped alongside his.

Robbie couldn’t tell what she was thinking. He couldn’t even tell what was going on in his own head. Jumbled memories as far back as their first date, to the ceremony that morning. As for what they had just done, though, he couldn’t begin to process what it was. But in his thoughts, his clunky dress shoe hit a rock, and he stumbled over into the grass. He felt his body trample the blades beneath him but landed with his face up.

The world stopped as his eyes met the cloudless sky above him. He could feel the surging pain in his foot, but it melted away as Lacey approached him, towering above the grass from his perspective. The look on her face surprised Robbie: It was a smile. The biggest smile he had ever seen her wear. She knelt down and met his gaze, retracting her vivacious grin a bit.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

Robbie realized he had a smile on his face too- and that he had had one for the last few minutes. The pain in his foot dripped into nothingness, and was instead replaced with a haze that filled his brain and covered his sight with ecstasy.

“I’m fine,” he replied. She gently took her arms off the ground and placed them on his chest, covered by his suit. He noticed she was still holding the knife, and his smile began to fade. “Lacey?” he asked. “Why did we do this?”

“You tell me,” Lacey replied. Robbie thought about it as Lacey proceed to lay next to him.

“I guess maybe I wanted to prove something to myself.”

“What’s that?”

“I don’t know. Maybe just that I could be something more than ‘Pat’s middle kid.’ ‘The one who didn’t play football.’ ‘The one who’ll never amount to anything.’”

“And did you?”

“Well... I think so.”

“That makes me glad,” Lacey said. There was a silence between them. Robbie absorbed the sounds of the creek nearby: The gentle, ebbing water greeting its freshly-killed deposit. The gentle coastal wind sliding between the stiff blades of grass. The cicadas singing their songs to celebrate who knows what.

Robbie breathed in deeply and pulled himself up, letting go of his breath. His eyes met two drops of crimson on his lapel. He then turned to his wife, still laying in the grass, looking back at him. The deep red of the blade she held contrasted with her angelic white dress and the greens of the field.

“What do we do?” Robbie asked her.

“The fun hasn’t started yet. I figured we just take a minute here,” she replied.

“No, I mean, what do we do from here? Where do we go?”

“We ride off into the sunset. Just how every wedding ends.”

“But this isn’t ‘every wedding.’”

“So what? It’s ours,” Lacey said as she pulled herself back up. “You’re not worried, are you?”

“No,” Robbie replied. “Just a bit hazy.”

“Well let me wake you up.” Lacey said as she gently placed the knife down. She grabbed him by the shoulders and kissed him. He gently pulled away. “Try not to worry about it. We’re gonna be okay,” Lacey said.

“Are you sure? If we get caught—” Robbie started.

“He won’t be. I promise,” Lacey replied. Robbie’s face grew a curled, worried look. Lacey smiled and chuckled. “Robbie, as husband and wife, we have to trust each other more than ever. Do you trust me?” she asked. He nodded a bit in response. Lacey smiled and chuckled. “It’s our honeymoon! Let go for a bit!” Robbie’s look faded upon this statement and was replaced with a smile.

The two pulled themselves up, and Lacey, knife in hand, suddenly began a charge toward the van again, giggling as she did so. Suddenly determined, Robbie chased after her. The smile from before returned to his face as the afternoon sun lit his path across the field to the rest of his life.

“Pull over,” Robbie said as he jolted his head back around.

“What?” Lacey asked in response.

“Pull over please,” Robbie said again. His hands were clenched on his thighs.

“We’re on the freeway,” Lacey said.

“Lacey. Pull over now. Please,” Robbie said one more time.

Unsure, Lacey turned on her blinker and pulled onto the shoulder. She pulled the parking brake up and turned to Robbie. Beads of sweat running down his forehead were multiplying like the heads of a hydra.

“Robbie,” she simply said.

“Lacey, I’m sorry,” he replied.

“About what?” Lacey asked.

“I think we made a mistake. A really big one,” Robbie started.

“Robbie, remember: We have to trust each other now. There’s a reason we did this. You said it yourself, you wanted to prove something to yourself,” Lacey explained. “You’ve been underestimated your whole life and now you’ve done something to show that you’re not who they thought you were!”

“What am I now? A murderer?” Robbie slapped his hands into his face.

“No. You’re a married man. You proved you’re capable of so much more than everyone in your life thought you were. You’re a risk-taker, you’re passionate, you’re full of life! Isn’t that what you wanted to prove?”

“Not like this. I can’t believe I couldn’t see what was going on. I’m so stupid.” He put his hands back down on his thighs. “This isn’t who I am. I can’t live the life you live. You’re so free, and wild, and passionate. I’m just not like that.”

“But this has been your chance to prove that you are,” Lacey said.

“Lacey, I just can’t do this. I’m so sorry.” Robbie stated. There was suddenly a familiar silence between them.

“So what are you going to do?” Lacey asked.

“I’m gonna call the cops, I guess,” Robbie said.

“On,” Lacey started, “on both of us?”

“It’s the right thing to do.”

“What? No, Robbie, please. If we keep going now, we can get away with it! I can keep us safe for the rest of our lives,” Lacey begged.

“You really don’t realize the gravity of all of this, do you?” Robbie asked in response.

“You think I don’t realize the gravity of this? Do you think this is my first time doing something like this?” Lacey rebutted.

“Well obviously you don’t if you think we can get away so easily,” Robbie said, his voice raising.

“You can’t call the police now,” Lacey said.

Robbie took a deep breath and turned fully to her in his seat. “Look, I can’t stop you. And you can’t stop me. But this has to end one way or the other,” he told her.

“So what are you thinking?” Lacey asked.

“I think I’m going to have to turn myself in,” Robbie said. His eyes faced downwards.

“Please don’t. We’re so close to pulling this off, Robbie.”

“I have to. I can’t live my life with you knowing that this weight is going to be drooped over my head the whole time. You might be addicted to the rush we were feeling a while ago, but I’m not. And I never will be,” Robbie explained.

“Well, you’re right, Robbie. I am free. And wild. And passionate. And I guess you’re not like that.” Lacey grimaced. “And if I have to leave you behind, I will.” Robbie looked at her face and saw a tear streaming from each eye. He reached out and cupped her face with his hand.

“I love you.” He said.

She caressed his hand on her face. “I love you too.” She simply replied. They faintly smiled at each other.

Robbie let go, turned, and opened the van door. He unbuckled his seat belt and hopped out. His uncomfortable dress shoes felt odd and incredibly uneven on the asphalt

he now stood on. He turned back to Lacey, who had her hand on the parking brake and met his gaze.

“Where will you go?” Robbie asked.

Lacey mustered the strength to respond: “The sunset.”

Robbie smiled a bit and proceeded to close the door. As he did, the van pulled back into the freeway and sped off. It soon disappeared into the sea of billowing exhaust and the dull colors of the vehicles making their own ways home. He felt his phone in his pocket.

The rush was gone. In its place were the receding hues of the setting sun which he now faced alone.

EIDETIC.

Loren Poulter

My grandma had Alzheimer's before she died.

I heard it has something to-do with gingivitis, but it might not be true, all right?
When I was in Elementary school,
I used to be able to visualize, why—entire pages, I had once seen.
Read math problems and their answers under my eyes, and I explain why to my mathematical teacher at the time. I did not understand what he meant when he said, “maybe it's that you have a photographic memory, like an elephant.”
And back then I remembered perfectly, that was when I was so young that I had not much left in my head to remember.
My mind was fresh. Since then, I've had bad gingivitis for a number of years and my mom says she's been getting forgetful.
And dread, even though all my teeth look fine, now I fear I've already contracted the Alzheimer's and it's chipping away at my good old fashioned memories-me.
It runs in the family, er, I think.
The bane of all my life is not being able to fully intonate and capture those very nuanced and specific words or terms that I'd glimpse in cognition.
The perfect word for the phrase in which I am saying, and it slipped my mind,
I say, “what's that word? Is it Eidetic?”
Or is it Alzheimer's? Anyway,

One time, I asked my grandma how or when She started to think in English, instead of German. She said that the first time it happened was in a dream. I can't exactly remember what she said the dream was about. She said it was incredibly vivid. I can't remember if it was really ordinary like filling a pitcher of water, and the TV on in

the kitchen was speaking in English. Or
if the English dream was of a special
and incredible experience, like
A lucid fantasy or one other
chance at her favorite memories a
-gain. Because of the two different dads
It was good advice that we were not to
learn German. Instead, our sweet parents they
encouraged us that we speak Greek and read,
and that should suffice nice for learning to be.
I say, “what’s that word? Is it Eidetic?”
Or is it Alzheimer’s? Anyway,
they’ll probably cur it before it doth
becomes a serious problem for me,
right?

BEEP BEEP BOOP BEEP BOOP

Corbin Schaefer

Beep Beep Boop Beep Boop

With some distant, unintelligible form of technological language,
a robot struggles desperately to communicate with the world
in the space outside its cold, metal, blank husk of a body.

Its many alien chips and chaps, beeps and boops...

What on Earth could these sounds even mean?

A robot is eminently limited in its processes.

They don't know emotion like we do.

They're very different than we are.

They don't know our emotions.

They don't know happiness.

They don't know sadness.

They don't know anger.

We are not the robots.

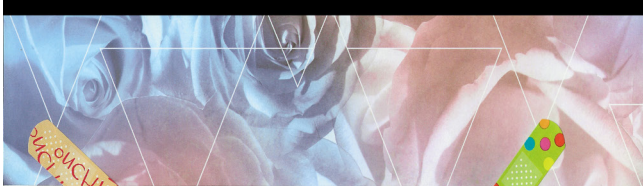
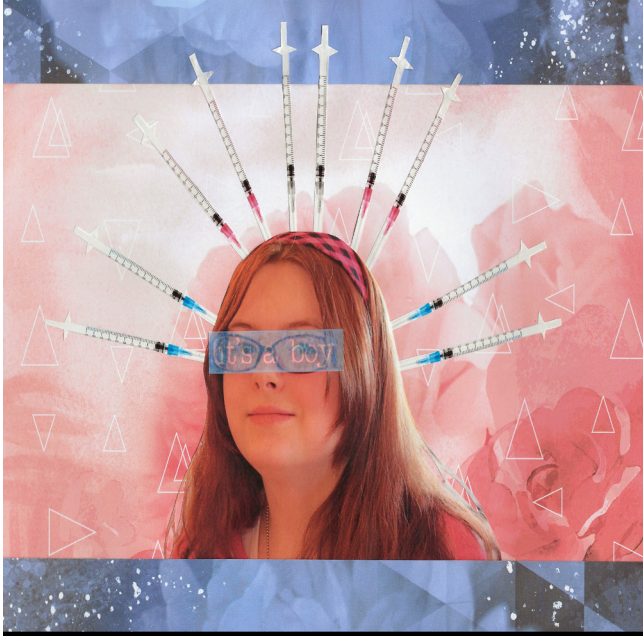
We feel things.

Right?

REAL HORROR

Corbin Schaefer

The movies are different from
what real horror is.
It's not the camps and lakes
or the deserts and farmhouses.
And it's not the cemeteries,
lined with eternal beds for the dead.
It's the dark bedroom,
bed unmade,
mind unraveling.
It's not the finger-knife glove
or the machete dripping blood.
And it's not a chainsaw,
its fumes clouding the air.
It's the thoughts you think
when you're alone,
clouding your judgment.
It's not the hockey mask
or the brown hat.
And it's not a mask
made from someone else's skin.
It's your own skin,
wrinkled and furrowed, a mask that
fails to cover your loneliness.
It's not the blood or guts
that the killer leaves behind.
And it's not the screams
their victims yell when they're found.
It's the silence
that fills your head, existing with
the thoughts that scream out loud.
Real horror
is different from the movies.



SPICE CABINET

Isabel Quinton

Salt: In the very back of the cabinet sits a 26 oz. thing of Morton iodized salt. My mother always has two going at once: one for cooking and one labeled “SLUG,” but she really uses both for slugs. During the rainy spring seasons, as we would run from the car to the front door, I would hear her ‘tsk’ at the slimy foes eating her carefully planted foliage. The “SLUG” salt never seems to be where she last left it, and while I peeled off all my rain-soaked layers, she hunted for the sharpie-labeled Morton and braved the rain once again to defeat the slugs. The walkway to her door is littered in the bubbling bodies of the pests to match the bloated blobs drowned in microwave dinner dishes of beer. Beer is a peaceful pest control alternative to salt. But the rain overfills the dishes, and the effects of salt are so much more satisfying. She occasionally breaks out the salt container for boiling pasta, but it’s mostly for slugs.

Johnny’s Garlic Seasoning: I was so excited when I found my father’s staple spice mixture in Costco and brought it home to live in my kitchen. We would make a poor man’s version of garlic bread with it on pasta nights in my father’s house. I sprinkled it on white toast with I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter margarine over and over so everyone joining us for dinner would get two slices of garlic bread each. I always put a bit extra on my pieces of toast and just a dash on my spaghetti to enhance the sauce. This was back when my father would strictly use paper plates, and the pulpy material always soaked up the seasoning. I had to eat fast so I wouldn’t lose all the garlic taste, and I always ended up being the first one done. When I got up to throw my plate away, my father would always ask me for more of our poor man’s garlic bread and the remote to the TV.

Paprika: “What else do you put paprika on besides deviled eggs? I can’t even eat eggs!” I had argued with my boyfriend in Grocery Outlet as I did not want to spend money I didn’t have on a spice I wouldn’t use. He bought it anyways because Binging with Babish on YouTube told him to. As the head chef in our tiny apartment-sized kitchen, he has the ultimate say for our grocery lists; as the sous chef, I grumble under my breath and try my best to fit all the things he buys in the name of cooking in our limited storage. According to a mac and cheese recipe that my mother recommended and my aunt sent through Facebook Messenger, paprika can also go in cheese sauce. My boyfriend and I tried the recipe, and it did not taste good. Although, we royally screwed up the sauce with too much mozzarella as well, so paprika cannot be to blame. Eventually we’ll use it for what God intended: deviled eggs.

Minced and Powered Onion: I have been trying desperately to copy the Walmart seasoning packet my mother and I used for roasted potatoes on our mock Thanksgiving dinner nights. They take a while to cook, but they’re easy for me to make. Unlike the rotisserie chicken I refused to touch because I didn’t like the feel of the yellow congealed

fat in the bottom of the container, which eggs my mother on to complain about my complaining before ultimately cutting the chicken for me, so I get enough protein. My mother is an expert at timing all the dishes so that they're finished all at once, but my potatoes always ran a little late. Out of the boxed stuffing, tasteless steamed cauliflower, turkey substitute chicken, and the potatoes, which was the best because of the onion spices. I am getting closer by the potato to recreating the seasoning mix, and my minced and powered onions remain in the front row of my spice arsenal.

Chicken Flavored Bouillon Powder: The not-so-secret ingredient of my father's Spanish rice recipe that pairs perfectly with whatever other spices happened to be in the cabinet. He didn't use the powder but instead a little cube of chicken flavored bouillon that I always got to unwrap. Before I moved four hours away, I unfolded the stepstool and took diligent notes as he made me a batch of rice to take with me. The little piece of paper I wrote the recipe down on is tucked away in one of my boyfriend's celebrity cookbooks, and if I looked at it again now, I don't think I could make heads or tails of it. He uses Better Than Bouillon paste now because my step mom thinks it's healthier, but I bought the original for the nostalgia factor and damn did this spice make my boyfriend's chicken noodle soup taste good.

Ground Cumin: This is what makes cooking good. Cumin is the spice of life. It never failed to fill both my mother and father's houses with the drool-inducing smell but in different ways. When my mother and I tried to eat healthier, it was the only thing that made our healthy turkey chili taste decent and gave a much-needed hint of spice to the natural cleaning-product aroma of her house. It's an important part of my father's rice seasoning, and I would notice if it was absent because the house would no longer take that spicy note to accompany the earthy, pure smell of walls lined with plants. Now my boyfriend and I use it in almost everything, even things we aren't supposed to. Why not try a little dash on the potatoes, in the spaghetti sauce, and maybe in our future deviled eggs? I want it to be a part of everything in our kitchen and I want my apartment to smell and taste like home.

WEATHER

Ruby Nambo

I look at the deep waters
And heard the roaring seas.
Tides arrive to shore
Both high and low.
Waves crash like cymbals—
Filled with rhythm
Onto the grey boulders.
Sunshine was absent
But the wind was not.
Grey skies vanished daylight
Into darkness all around.
I light up a candle
But the gust blew my flame.
I heard small taps:
Drip drip
Drip drip
Coming from the sky.
I noticed a humid scent,
From the Evergreen trees
And the call from soaring seagulls—
It's only a small reminder
Of the coast of the Pacific Northwest.

MEMORIES

Ruby Nambo

I never knew that meeting you
made a difference.
This small amount of time,
like a summer sunrise
on one end, navy blue sky
the other, golden orange
and the peaking rays,
is beautifully used.
This small amount of time
You wrote a chapter of
the memories we spent together.
We laugh and smiled
And shared meals together.
I didn't ask for you to come
And you didn't ask for it either.
In a small amount of time
it just happened.
In a snap, we were connected.
Before we were strangers,
And now we can hold a conversation.
It could be either be a simple text
Or a phone call
That can last for hours or even days.



Quentin Ragan, *Portrait of Perito Moreno*

ON THE STAIRS

Gwyn Cauldwell

It was the kind of night that would have been perfect for Halloween instead of September. Bordering between cool and cold, the skies were mostly clear except for the wispy ghosts of clouds. A full moon hung heavy in the sky with a court of stars surrounding it. A thin swirl of clouds haloed it, making the moonlight appear all the brighter as it turned them transparent. The sort of night that eighties horror movie directors dreamed about. I know I'm waxing poetic about silly things again, but you're always telling me that I should expand my creative horizons.

For me, it was just a nice night. It made me wish I'd thought to bring my camera with me, but nothing more than that. If anything, it made the woods near my house even less spooky. The moonlight lit up everything, a weak spotlight in the dark, but more than enough to see by. I know living in a cabin in the woods has become the classic setting for modern horror, but I've never really been scared here. Sure, when a wolf pack comes traipsing through I get a little nervous, but if you leave them alone, they leave you alone. Plus, you've never seen an elk herd by moonlight. Or watched the clouds roll off the pines like some ancient forest being. Best pictures I've ever taken.

I don't usually mind living on my own either. I know most people would rather sleep in their car than have to spend a night by themselves in a cabin. I think it's mostly that they're not used to the quiet. So much of the world is filled with noise even at night that silence scares us. I suppose I'm on that bandwagon too, but only for real silence. The woods are filled with a hundred different tiny sounds that make up their silence. Silence isn't the right word. It's quiet. A comfortable kind of quiet. A creaky house isn't all that bad either. Most of the noise is just the house settling. You get used to it after a while. If you can't tell, I'm not being very subtle about the fact that I know why you keep putting off visiting. It's not that bad.

Or at least that's what I thought. It was a couple nights ago now, but there was what I guess you would call an "incident". After walking home and seriously wishing I hadn't left my camera at Pipa's, I pretty much went straight to bed. Up until the incident, I'd been having a pretty good day. Nice photo shoot for a friend who'd just got done with a new costume (which was spectacularly well made), editing for the upcoming zine I'm helping out with out of the way, and a nice night out with friends. Good day. Good day until I was halfway to opening the door to my bedroom and the stairs creaked.

I know I said earlier that the house is pretty vocal. It's mostly wood and settles loudly at the end of the day. But I know the difference between a settling house and something on the stairs. That's the real reason I sleep easy at night. It wasn't a one-off thing either. As I stood there in the hallway, hand clutching the doorknob to my bedroom, it came again. A drawn out groan of a deliberately slow step. I'd like to say that was when I noticed it was quiet. The sort of absolute silence that you can't get outside of a concrete room. Truth be told, all I could hear was my heart pounding in my ears and those aching slow steps.

I shouldn't have looked. I know that much. But now I can say that I have a better understanding of why people in horror movies make so many stupid decisions. It's a lot easier to be judgmental when you're removed from the situation. In retrospect, it was stupid and I'm still judging myself for it. But in a lot of ways, looking is what saved me.

I remember moving almost as agonizingly slowly. Almost in time with whatever it was making its way up my stairs. Might have been my brain's desperate attempt to remind the rest of me that self-preservation was something I was invested in.

Remember when we used to play that game statues? When you could only move when the person who was "it" wasn't looking at you. It felt a lot like that. Every move calculated, every breath timed, every muscle taught in a fight to keep the body still. In spite of that my legs were shaking like there was an earthquake. I had myself pressed against the wall that led up to the stairs, sliding like a glacier to the point where I had an eye out far enough that I could see down the stairs. It was dark on the stairs, lights spilling out from the hallway I was in acting as the only illumination. In the moment, I couldn't say whether it was better or worse to see what was coming after me.

It was long. Like every bone in its body had been stretched out. It walked on all fours, but that was only because it would have scraped its head against the ceiling halfway up the stairs. Most of it was covered up with oily black hair that dragged against the stairs. What flesh I could see was ghostly white, more like someone had poured milk into a glass frame. It smelled rank. Like rotting blood and mold. The kind of stink that hits you in the face like a lead brick and crawls its way down your throat to throttle your gag reflex. I don't know what stopped me from throwing up then in there. Even the memory of it makes me gag.

Everything in me told me to run. Fight or flight rightfully picked flight. I'm not sure what I could have done to fight it. I mean I own a baseball bat, but it had way more reach on me, making my only plausible weapon effectively useless. In spiraling through the possible thoughts on the logistics of how fast I could get to the window while remaining quiet, I had failed to notice that I'd been spotted. I know you're probably saying "rookie mistake" to yourself right now. Not everyone can be a paintball all-star.

I don't remember stepping into its field of vision, but then again, I don't remember a lot of things. All I know is one minute I'm peeking from around the corner, the next I'm half in the stairway and no longer pressed up against the wall. It's disturbing to see something with so many teeth smile. I don't particularly like teeth on a good day, but I hate looking at them in creepy contexts. So, you can imagine my horror when it opened its maw, revealing rows of crooked, broken teeth half rotted out of its head. Most of them looked like they were ready to fall out then and there.

For such a large, gangly creature, its movements were surprisingly quiet. One might even be tempted to say graceful. If that person was not about to be on the receiving end of visceral death by mauling. Still, it was a bit of a cliché moment. I've never really understood how people can see things in slow motion. I always thought that it was an exaggeration that storytellers used to get across how bad a situation was. Go figure that the one time I experience it is while staring down a monster that looked like it had come out of *Coraline*. In one fluid motion, it had one of its long arms half way too me. It did this while still a good seven feet or so from me. Yes, it was that big.

I honestly can't say who was more surprised, me or the monster. I was certain I was seconds away from having one of those gnarly, pointy hands coming out to grab me, when it slipped. I'm not joking, the thing slipped. Some of that long hair got trapped underneath its foot and it went flying. If I hadn't been so terrified moments before, I might have laughed. Don't get me wrong, I was still scared, but you didn't see its face.

It was only for a second, but I caught a glimpse of its face before it fell. A dozen shiny black eyes, kind of like a spider's, all wide with the same shocked surprise I felt. Then the

thing was hurtling through space, end over end as it tumbled down the stairs. That was when the adrenaline finally kicked in and I had enough brain power restored to make an escape. I was debating whether I wanted to try and use my emergency fire ladder to make a break for my car or find my baseball bat and make a stand, when I heard it.

Too soft to be a growl, too deep to be a whimper. It was enough to make me stop, but it was a good while before I realized what I was hearing. The thing that had very likely been planning to eat me was crying. On some level I could sympathize. Falling down the stairs isn't fun, as I'm sure you can attest to. Do you still have that cast? I remember you digging it up the last time you were cleaning your house. But yes, back to the crying horror curled up at the end of my stairs. I know what you're going to say. I should have kept walking. I should have gotten in my car and driven to get help or just stayed over at someone else's house. Apparently, I have fallen victim to the crippling factor of every horror story protagonist. Having my common sense gland removed.

I went back. I know you're yelling at the paper now, but don't. You wouldn't be holding this letter if something bad had happened to me, right? Unless of course you found it unsent on my desk while you're doing sorting things out for my will. Which technically isn't out of the question, so far. I really hope that isn't the case. Diverting from that particular existential crisis, I went back. Peeking around the corner of the stairs, I found the creature in much the situation I would have been in had it been me that had fallen. Crumpled up at the foot of stairs and making that soft guttural sound that was too close to crying. If you thought I was stupid before, prepare to be amazed.

I tried to talk to it. Yes, yes I know. Rocketing past idiotic and ending at full blown brain dead. I can't give you a good reason for doing it, only that I did it. I guess I'm a sucker for crying. I don't like seeing people hurt. It really was a strange sound though. Kind of like a train horn going off underwater. But softer. "Are you ok?" I called down, so quiet I could barely hear myself. I was about to do it again - a little louder of course - when the thing at the bottom of the stairs lifted its head to look at me. It looked surprised. Not the kind of "oh crap" surprise of falling down the stairs, but more of a "wow, someone's talking to me" surprise. So, I took a seat a few steps down, far enough to be able to safely get away but still close enough to be heard, and we talked.

Turns out, it wasn't actually there to eat me. Could have fooled me. The creature, who I learned not only understood human speech but whose name is Gurgle (don't ask), is something of a wandering spirit. They wander from house to house - usually ones out in the middle of nowhere like mine - scare the crap out of the occupants, and while they're running for the hills, raid the pantry. That's it. That's the whole scheme. Which sounds like a pretty good plan, all things considered, though still kind of sketchy. We talked for a long time, about all sorts of things. Secrets I never even would have thought to look for and stories I'd never heard. And probably against my better judgment, I let Gurgle stay.

So, yeah. That's the situation with the new roommate. I know you won't believe me, but I don't think it really matters. Not to me anyway. I think I mostly just wanted to say it because I hate keeping secrets. You may not believe me, but you can't say I didn't tell you. It's not a bad arrangement, all in all. I still have to pay the rent by myself, but on the bright side I don't have to worry about rats anymore. And before you come to break down my door, I sleep with my baseball bat close at hand just in case. Anyway, hope mom and dad are doing ok. Talk to you later, and if you ever have any issues with weird things in the basement or anything, just hit me up. I'm sure I can work things out.

YOUNG QUEER

Ante Meridian

Young queer, tell me your name
Not the ones you hear at school
Where education fails to educate
The books about us hidden in the deepest recesses of the library
The only thing we are called is un-natural
Nothing hateful matches beauty within.

~

Young queer, who are you?
Not the baseless statue parents construct
The truthful, messy piece of art, still in progress.
Life is covered with wax and feathers
But their projections fly too close to the sun
Disagreements over art turn uncivil, end in tears
They don't see all art as beautiful.

~

The feeling when a second home replaces the first
The sanctity and safety envelopes you, once again feeling warm
It also happens, just as often, both turn into a searing iron maiden
Red hot daggers forced through forged to an already decrepit self-image.
Boiling, stabbing, digging.
It's hard to see, hard to breath. Dig deeper, deeper
Can you still see your beauty?

~

Young Queer, You are important.
Your existence contributes to dismantling the norm
Making the world rich, intelligent. Tolerable.
This world need brightness.
Feels good to live in sin but I never figured out what makes our lives sinful.

~

Young Queer once you've found each piece, grasp it.
They can't take it from you, tighten your grip until your knuckles are as pink as the
triangles Himmler sewed to our chests
Hold tight. Don't Change You.

RECOVERY FROM ATTEMPTED ANDROCIDIE

Ante Meridian

My masculinity will be like my father, never knew too much about him asides from pictures others collected over the years he was alive.

“You would look good with more red in your hair” my grandmother said directly to me.

Could I cut sheet metal and build airplanes? I would prefer to work on people, not planes

December 1997, after the Christmas party. The second time the security guard comes around my dad’s truck was still there, even if he was gone.

His fire of his red hair lived on not only in my grandmother’s belly, but in a golem that was sculpted and fired in her ceramic kiln.

With green smooth skin that cracks around the chest, cracks that emanate a soft orange light.

His name I do not know, but his fake ID says Anthony, and all he can say is ‘grug,’ so I call him Grugthony.

~

He uses his fake ID he uses to buy cigarettes and beer from the corner store, he buys me a grape swisher too

As we sit atop of the jungle gym at the elementary school, in the orange of a sunset of the midsummer, we smoke and we drink.

Grey smoke pours out of grugthony’s cracks, lungs like a crematorium. A crack growing from the sternum becomes an exhaust for tobacco.

His bright orange hair and beard glow colorless in the sunlight beaming through blue and yellow bars of the playground. He tucks the pack of cigarettes into the circlet atop his head as I down the rest of the can I was slowly sipping on.

Our feet hit the ground as we jump down.

The pebbles scatter and bounce across the asphalt.

We walk across the dried muddy grass as the sun finally goes down, the orange glow twas upon us is now that of cool blue. His eyes are glowing the color of honey in my peripherals.

~

He attempts to hang himself with a flimsy string of Christmas lights.

As the double braided cord snaps, he plummets to the carpet, cracking his skin and letting out more heat than before. From the other room I hear a cry of 'Grug!'

And with glue from gold bottles goes to his green skin, I see my father in the fire that dances in his furnace eyes.

From his tears we drink, the color of rose flourishes in my cheeks as we cry together, my hands burned and lacerated as we hold each other close. Knowing he Is like family and I can't give him up completely.

~

In the color of honey, my masculinity walks around after dusk, not collecting dust.

Always a few steps away, my masculinity follows me quite literally. He introduces me to people, and they seem taken back when something so hideous caresses their ears with his only, solitary word.

'grug,' He smiles, encouraging us to shake hands.

He notices how my makeup smudged and gestures with his fingers for me to fix it.

He likes to see me be happy, even if I don't always need him.
Serendipitous life with a balance, our relationship is healthy, through the great and rough times I've had with Grugthony.

Much like my mother, who's death was spontaneous and sad, my masculinity I get coffee with as we reminisce about who we were in the past and now how we interact and dance.

Seems as though he always leads

THE HOWLING WIND OF A RUSSIAN WINTER

Ante Meridian

My great grandmother left the Slavic world as Lenin implemented Russification. She made it across the continent with the howling wind of a Russian winter at her back, which stowed away in her mind as she got on the boat from Vladivostok to Portland Oregon.

We never got to meet. I never heard her call me Pchela as she caressed me into a hug, she never taught me Cyrillic as I learned my ABC's. My mother tongue was cut out before it even had the chance to grow

She had a Daughter, who had a daughter, who wanted a boy/who wanted a girl

The story isn't clear what she wanted, probably wasn't either in her mind, ripe with that howling wind as it was.

She got a child with a pen to paper attitude and the voice as strong as the howling wind of a Russian winter.

My mother knew her son, not her child.

She knew her German father but her Slavic name was lost as St. Petersburg became Petrograd, became Leningrad.

Her grandmother, her mother and her all heard the howling wind of a Russian winter blowing through the Oregon trees.

The howling wind of a Russian winter made its way into my mind as I started eating extra helping of Mashed Potatoes to grow breasts as the other girls did. Drinking milk that my German Great Grandfather, Ludwig, and his sons might have well got from their Coud d'lain dairy in the 50's.

Sorry, Louie was his American name, and Sorry, you fled Hitler's Germany when you had blue eyes and blonde hair.

That accent must've been hard to hide. I suppose you got knocked around. Might I call you a coward that deserved it?

The quote Martin Niemoeller "then they came for me- and there was no one left to speak for me."

~

Mother told me to pray the gay away under the Tacoma Rosary Church in smoldering
summer I5 Traffic.

So instead of being a Faggot, I made myself the Daughter she supposedly wanted, the
results satisfied no one.

Pray your Bipolar away she tried to convince me in the Imperial dragon on 6th.

My breasts grew from whole plates of Sesame chicken that September, soon to be
replaced by little green pills accompanied by a cacophony of meds that she was never
able to take to control my Bipolar, Psychosis and other howling winds.

That restaurant closed down and though my mother was forlorn with my use of
psychiatric meds, we stopped talking and started hearing the howling wind of a Russian
winter.

My mother disagreed with the medicine I so desperately needed to hear a different wind,
like the Bayer pill factory in Leverkusen, I gave up Testost-ownership of the factory to
give my natural workers a rest, Replaced those workers with machined green pills to estr-
ogenerate a new werkself.

Linda stopped talking to Sheryl when she attempted to go to Wazzu, And Sheryl stopped
talking to her child when she decided to go to Belize on mission. All of us apart heard the
howling wind of a Russian winter. Twas is Babushka telling us to talk to each other?

For my maternal line kept marrying Germans, as the hint of Slavic Sunflower in my skin
became more the color of Roses and Edelweiss. I need to remind myself there is roses of
yellow and peach.

The howling wind of a Russian winter froze Napoleons forces and Hitler's Meat grinder
as they advanced on Moscow. Throughout public school my mind's own wind decimated
any chance of friends I had. I am Terrible and I am great in my own mind. Napoleon
stands on my kitchen counter in the form of a bottle of olive oil and stares at me, as I
make more food to grow more breasts.

I did not see Nazis fall and the wall that separated families go down just to see both of
them come back up again, not in the land of opportunity my family fled to, whether they
be German, Slavic or French. We've avoided too much to see the Tyrants of the old world
resurrect themselves in this land.

~

My Gender is not a Coward, it is French Revolution: I take my Guillotine to toxic
masculinity, to acidic femininity and to the binary.

My body is not Hateful: it is German Engineering at its finest, and my gears turn all too
well.

My mind is not a communist dictatorship: it is the beautiful, powerful, howling wind of a Russian winter that blows even though the Anti-psychotics slow it down.

Despite the challenges I have in the wind I bundle up and face it head on. I still write and make art.

Despite all this suicidal ideation that flows and kills the Germans and the French and sometime the Hope I have for life, I still exist.

My Matrons and Patrons roads have intertwined; the stems of the flowers they planted get weaved together in my heart, now not only growing blossoms of Sunflowers, Roses and Edelweiss, but also lavender.

Out of my lungs flows a wind that smells as sweet as honey and carries bees that pollenate minds with the idea that even people torn by war can love.

The -Emphasis on trans- Trans-Siberian Railroad has finally pulled into Ellensburg, and I end the line here.

They built all these windmills for me, For I brought the Howling Wind of a Russian winter.

DON'T DO IT

Xylia Truwer

Blurry faces trickled in and out of the door over the course of the hour that I sat on the cold tile of the school's bathroom floor. It was fourth period. I was supposed to be in my art class, but lunch for me that day was not a simple choice of a burger and fries or a little cardboard boat of nachos like it was for others. My stomach thanked me for not eating as the nausea swelled.

When the bell had rung to signal the end of lunch, I shoved headphones in my ears and walked through the hallways to the art room, staring at the floor the entire way. As I readied for today's lesson in brush strokes, color palettes, Van Gogh, or whatever other nonsense the teacher had to say that day, my brain was re-living lunch over and over again. Five minutes in and I couldn't control my own body anymore. The bathroom was calm, empty, safe. I leaned against the wall near the door where the stalls ended and played the same song on my Sony Walkman, over and over and over.

"Why don't you just kill yourself?"

His words still echoed in my mind, drowning out the sound of the music. I tried to focus on the lyrics, but the lyrics exacerbated the problem.

"There is no turning back, from this unending path of mine..."

The somber melody behind those words drew tears, though I tried my best to restrain them. This was the first time I had ever really thought about suicide and, as the song cycled back around, my thoughts began to run wildly off track:

You don't even notice this happening to me.

Best friends? I hardly think so.

You don't even care...

Nobody cares...

Maybe I SHOULD kill myself...

"Are you okay?" A muted blurry face asked me from the door.

I nodded, shrugged it off. I'm fine. This isn't your problem, I thought. She didn't really care. It's just social courtesy to ask if someone is okay when they are sitting on the floor crying. Walk away, stranger.

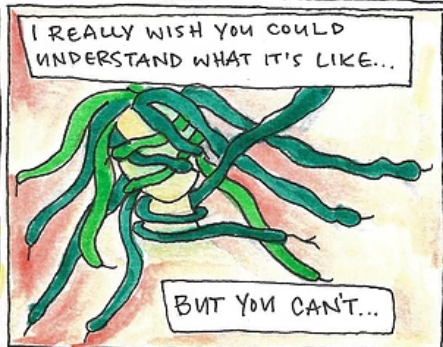
She threw her bag under the hand dryer on the wall and plopped herself down right next to me. What is she doing? I thought. I balled up my sleeves in my fists and wiped my eyes clear. She wasn't a stranger. She was the quiet girl who sat across from me in art.

Five words: "I noticed you were gone."

That was enough to bring me back.

PHOBIC

Amelia McIntosh



PHOBIC

2%

Alicia McAfee

I've never been much of a writer, reading was always my thing
But when I see him, I just feel the need to document him
To write about him and try and share what I see to the rest of the world

See, he is one of those boy's people write poetry about
Because he casts a spell over you with his smile and afterwards he controls your every
emotion

When he walks into a room, all eyes are on him
And when he ignores you, you feel like shit because you know deep down he doesn't care
about you

So you decide that you aren't going to let him affect your life like this anymore
But then he reels you back in with the smallest thing

A glance,
Or a smile,
Or a miniscule conversation
Which you know means nothing to him and everything to you
But
What if
But what if you are wrong
And he actually does care
Even if it's a 2% chance that he actually cares
That 2% is mine
And I love it

See he's the type of boy people write poetry about
Because we all know he is going to break our heart
But the thing is
We know
And the heartbreak would be worth it

EXQUISITE CORPSE

AJ Gates, TyYonna Kitchen, Eudrice Gildon, Makenzie Kolar, Vlad Mazhnikov, Julia Thompson, CeAnna Heit, and Jade Tunnell AKA The Inklings

What is one to do when there's nothing to accomplish
Absolutely nothing to fill the time other than their own thoughts
Are they to come up with more?
Adjust their dreams to accommodate this empty space?
Or are they allowed to simply... Exist?

In time and time again. stuck on repeat. trying to do nothing
because my thoughts are too full of something.
Too full to pull an idea out of my head that could
compete with my timely mind games

My head thumps like a ticking clock, waiting to land
on the right number to add to my trauma. Why do people
stare at me with smiles, not the friendly one, but the
one of sheer desire to end me

“End me” What a simple way to say a big thing.
Subtle too. Context does nothing to explain its intention.
Rattle in the cage of your own interpretation.

And within your heart's indentation you shall see, the bleak void
That is Reality. Suffering began, suffering begot. The endless void cares for naught.

Spiraling down, staring into the blackness
Only a spot of light in the overwhelming expanse
Focus on the pinprick of hope

You were, I was a lantern glowing
Under a glittering blood moon
All full of smoke and inflated hope- so ready to burst
Lanterns falling out of the sky like broken dragonflies.

I think perhaps I could have kept flying
If the patched trust hadn't come undone
Now laying here I think I might be dying
I hope you wanted this because you won.

TRICKS OF THE MIND

Kacie Little

They are talking to me, but I don't know what they are saying. I can see their lips moving, but they sound like the adults from the Charlie Brown show I watched as a kid. I am annoyed by their attempts at communication so I look down at my irritated wrists. I don't know why they think I need handcuffs. I am not a threat to anyone. The redness of my wrists reminds me of when I first started wearing a wedding ring. My index finger was red for weeks and my middle and pinky fingers were rubbed raw. I kind of liked it though; it reminded me that love wasn't always white gold and diamonds.

"Are you listening?" says the detective to my left as his voice finally broke through to me. "This is serious."

As I look up at him I catch my reflection in the mirror. I look fine. Maybe a little sleep deprived and I need a haircut, but for the most part, I look like my normal self, not someone who needs restraint. Isn't it funny how in a time of crisis we think of things like haircuts? I make a mental note to stop by a barber shop on my way home.

I realize the detectives, or whatever they are, have stopped talking and are just staring at me like they are waiting for an answer. I have no idea what response they want from me, so I ask when I can go home.

"Sir, where were you last night from midnight to around three a.m.?" says the one on the right. Her mousy voice gives me a headache. She reminds me of a woman I used to work with. I instantly put her into the kill category. Haven't you played that game? Out of these three women, who would you bone, date, or kill?

"I already told you, I don't remember. I was at The Office having a few beers, walked home to my apartment, about seven blocks, and then I woke up on the park bench where you found me this morning. So, I was either in bed, on my way to that park bench, or on that park bench."

The mousy woman decides to open her mouth again. "You were drinking at the office."

I don't answer because this sounds to me like a statement and not a question. Plus, I don't like her.

"Sir, answer the question."

"First off, you know my name. Or at least I would hope you do since you arrested me under the suspicion of murder. And second, The Office is a bar. Not that you would know. It looks like you haven't had fun in years."

She looks offended but it shuts her up and I am pleased. They tell me they will be right back, and leave the room.

I am left alone with handcuffs and mirror. I rub my wrists on my legs to wiggle the handcuffs around to try and create some relief. I wonder if I were to wear a wedding ring again if my fingers would have to start all over to get accustomed to it. And then I laugh out loud because if God were real, he would know that's never happening.

I know what you are thinking. But I am not a murderer. I'm just an asshole.

I look back up at the mirror and this time I see something completely different. I see my hangover starting to settle in. My eyes have bags around them. My face is red. Is it because it's hot in this room or is that what all the tiny broken blood vessels on my nose

and cheeks looks like from far away? I don't know, and I don't really care. I'm still a good-looking guy. I just really need that haircut.

I realize there are probably people on the other side of the mirror looking at me and talking about me. But I don't give that thought more than a second. I just keep staring at myself. I start to feel funny. I must be sober. What time is it? I need a drink.

"I am not an alcoholic," I say in my head. Or maybe I say it out loud. I don't know.

The two detectives walk back into the room, but this time with files in their hands. The guy detective opens the folder as he sits down and there are pictures of a woman. She has long blonde hair like my ex-wife, Lisa, but they tell me her name is Kate. She probably had a nice body, but it's covered in blood. This doesn't faze me. I work in a beef slaughterhouse. I see blood all the time.

"Do you know this woman?" he asks me. "Do you recognize her?"

"Well it's a little hard to tell, but I think I would remember that ass. So, no."

The woman detective shakes her head in disgust and it's another point for me.

Hours later, I have been asked a million questions. My back hurts. My head hurts. I am hungover, hungry and really wanting a drink. This is the longest I've gone in months. Just a phase I'm going through.

I am left alone again but this time the photos of the woman accompany me, the handcuffs, and the mirror. I make two fists and set them on top of the photos to slide them over closer. I start to look at them longer and realize just how much this woman looks like Lisa. At this point, I am sleep deprived and have a gut bomb from the burger they fed me. I just want to go home and maybe call Lisa. She never answers but I like to leave her voicemails. I am sure she likes them too. I know she misses me.

I look back into the mirror and the sight shocks me. How long have I been here? I look terrible. I notice I have blood all over my shirt. Do I have a bloody nose? How in the hell did blood get there?

I look like my father. I am devastated by this thought. My father was an awful man.

"Am I becoming my father?" I am pretty sure I say this out loud, but this time I care. I am suddenly feeling insecure. Not a feeling I am used to. It's as if my world is crumbling. Why haven't they let me go yet? Being passed out drunk on a park bench is a small offense, I am sure, and that is all that I have done wrong.

I look back down at the handcuffs and notice blood crusted under my nails. When I look back into the mirror I have a black eye. There is a cut above my eyebrow and scratches down my arms. Where did these come from? I start to freak out.

"What the fuck is happening?" I scream.

I try and stand but I feel weak so I sit back down. I realize I have only one shoe. They must have drugged my burger. I am hallucinating. Something crazy is happening to me.

The door opens and the two detectives walk in. Behind them, a tall gangly man with glasses, carrying a laptop.

I scream at them to let me go, that I haven't done anything wrong. The woman opens her mouth to speak but this time her voice is soothing. It shocks me. She tells me to sit down and I do. I feel under a trance by her. How did she change her voice like that?

The man detective tells me they have proof that I murdered the woman in the photos, but I know they are lying. I have seen the movies and the documentaries. They are trying to coax a confession out of me and they used drugs to do it. That's why I am hallucinating. I tell them I want a lawyer and that I am going to sue them for

mistreatment.

They agree to my request and say they will call a public defender, but while I wait they have something for me to watch. The other man, the new man that I haven't seen before, sets the laptop on the table. There isn't a chair for him so he leans over with his tall lanky body to type something into the computer. He twists the laptop around so I can see the screen and he hits play.

At first, I don't know what I am watching, and then I realize it is security footage. There is no sound. Just black and white footage. The place looks familiar. It's my workplace. And there I am, walking between the dead, hanging cows. Why would they show me this? It is not a crime to work where I do.

But then, in the corner of the screen, I see one of the cows moving, but it must be the drugs because all those cows have been killed, gutted and skinned. I lean in closer to the screen and see that it's not a cow that is hanging there moving around, it's a woman.

I see myself walking over to the woman. I must be going to help her. I have my negative qualities, but I am not a terrible person. I would help someone in need, wouldn't I? But that's not what I see. The drugs have really messed with me. I am confused at what I am seeing. It looks as if I am hitting this woman with something, but I can't tell what.

I am appalled at this point. What kind of police force is this? These are the people who are here to serve and protect us but they have given me drugs and are trying to manipulate me. They must have used some editing program to make this horrific video. I turn my head away to stop watching. The tall man turns off the video and closes the laptop.

The woman with the annoying voice speaks again and it's just as mousy as ever. "Is there anything you would like to say?"

I can't seem to find words. I tell them that it's not me in the video. I beg them to let me go. The three of them stand up to leave the room. The mousy voiced woman is the last to leave and before she walks through the door she turns to look at me and gives a wicked smile.

As they walk out of the room I reach out to them, begging them for help. I see my hands before me and the blood under my fingernails is gone. I knew they drugged me. I knew I was hallucinating. The drugs must be wearing off because when I look up, I see myself as I did the first time I looked into that mirror.

Damn, I look good. I just need a haircut.

METALLIC BRUSHSTROKES

Xylia Truwer

She lingers a moment at each individual scar
fingers gliding across the torn skin.
She remembers the night she painted her arms:
smelling a hundred aged metallic brushstrokes,
feeling emptiness fade in every slash of red,
painted over and over to cover up the cracks.
Her body is filled with its red energy
and she craves the paint.
But no more red. Any color but red,
anything to cover up the emptiness.
Sunny spurts of lacquer over the red can't brighten up a spirit.
Oceanic slashes of tint try to quell a sea of red.
Grassy stains of gloss just turn the old red into a puddle of mud.
There is no running from it.
All colors will fade back to their red selves, in time.
The emptiness will return, in time.
Only a single pigment possesses the strength and will
to cover the scars completely,
coat it in darkness instead of emptiness and
hope that it never fades back to red.
She draws her own black and it spatters through space
and time begins anew.

POEM

Xylia Truwer

Why do these (excessive) words on
The page try
To lead us away
From a (hidden) meaning,
(From) what they (don't) want to say
Please poem, (say what you mean)
Be (precise, concise) succinct.
(Please poem) stop (overcomplicating ideas)
Being (prolix, verbose) wordy.
Poems
(Suck)
Are
(Confusing)
(Pieces of shit)
(Just) words.

MISTLETOE

Xylia Truwer

among the succulent apples and aged oak
perched in the savory branches
i wait
and drink the life of my towering host
then you come and snatch me away
hosting me in open doorways
at years end hoping for a kiss
from a dearly beloved
you give no thought to my juicy
white berries
and the poison they conceal
you imagine your destiny
this marriage ahead
quite filled with this same
poison
slowly growing and seeping inside
creating a witch's broom in
your love
until you too cannot conceive
and life itself loses its
spirit

~~Document info~~

~~Document info~~

Operative Report

~~Dec 21, 2017 12:00 am~~

I WAS A TEENAGE

Operative Report

~~_____~~ : ~~_____~~ ~~_____~~ ~~_____~~

Operative Report

Operative **RAMPAGING OBSESSION**

PREOPERATIVE DIAGNOSES:

~~_____~~ disease.
~~_____~~

POSTOPERATIVE DIAGNOSES:

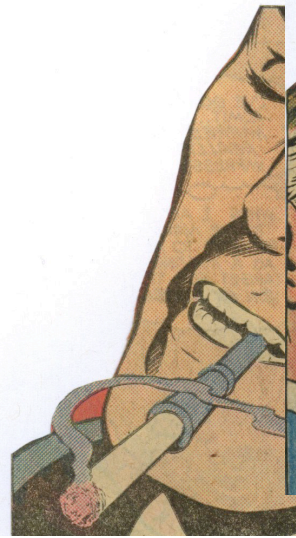
~~_____~~ disease.
OH GOOD GRAY!

~~_____~~
~~_____~~
~~_____~~

Is there no respite? The heads have not yet stopped spinning! The blood still boils as the climax unfolds before our very eyes!

~~_____~~
~~_____~~

~~_____~~
~~_____~~



LET'S BEE-COME SUSTAINABLE

Madeline Wilson

When people think about what is needed for survival, their first thoughts are of food, water, and shelter. However, what is forgotten is how these necessities would cease to exist if key organisms were to become extinct. One of the most important organisms on our planet is the bee. Although there are many different species of bees, they all provide a service to humans by helping the environment to prosper and in turn benefit society. The main job of bees is to pollinate flowers in order to continually grow plant species that cannot simply rely on the wind for pollination. Some of the agricultural plants that bees pollinate such as broccoli or watermelon are a large source of food for humans. The pollination process not only benefits humans by providing sustenance but also stimulates the economy, as approximately nineteen billion dollars in crops are provided to us by the pollination of bees (One Green Planet). One goal for society is to find innovative ways to preserve and grow the current number of living bees. However, many scientists are not yearning to help the bees, but instead developing a new group of robotic bees that could potentially take their place and continue the pollination process. This could be an inventive way to keep up with the current pollination demand, but it may not be the best long-term solution for the environment.

With the human impact on the environment continually increasing, there have been declines in many critical species and a heightened extinction rate of over 10,000 species per year (World Wildlife Fund). One of the most common species of bee, the bumblebee, commonly found within the United States, was listed as an endangered species in 2017, as there has been an eighty-seven percent population decline in the past three decades (Time Magazine). One of the biggest problems resulting from this decline is decreased plant growth. The pollination process not only helps keep natural ecosystems in order with the continual growth of plant life but also provides a crucial food source for humans.

It appears that people are less concerned with the effects on the environment and more so on how helping bees can benefit themselves. If people found that their favorite fruits and vegetables may soon become unavailable to them because of the endangered bees, people might be more willing to help. This selfish view of nature that people hold today is very similar to that of humans during the Modernist time period. Nature and the organisms within it were seen as resources for human survival, not living beings deserving of respect (Miami Dade College). People during this time were a part of the Industrial Revolution, a time when the focus was more on scientific advancements than environmental preservation. Our current digital age is very similar, where people have forgotten that nature's purpose is not to serve humans but to coexist with humankind in a symbiotic relationship. If society were to focus more upon this idea, then the protection of endangered species such as the bumblebee could closely follow.

The leading contributors to this decline in general bee populations are unnatural destruction of habits and pesticide contamination (Greenpeace). Humans are constantly tearing up pieces of land, home to many thriving ecosystems that are filled with animals and plants that need the land to survive. If a developer tears down a tree on which a beehive depends, every organism that relies on the tree, including the bees, will be

affected. Wiping out that beehive is destroying a sanctuary and potentially terminating part of that area's bee population. Humans are always so full of hope for new industry and business that they will continue destroying balanced ecosystems without a second thought about the animals that live within them. Pesticides act in a similar manner, in that once sprayed, they seep into the soil and are absorbed by nearby vegetation. The bees that pollinate these plants will carry the pesticides within the pollen from plant to plant, not only hindering new growth but also killing themselves in the process. Sometimes, these chemicals even find ways to seep into honey produced by the honeybee. Habitat destruction and pesticide use affect not only the bees but every organism within the bees' ecosystem. These problems have not gone unnoticed, and scientists have been making some effort to combat the issue.

One solution that scientists have been considering is the implementation of robotic bees to carry out the pollination duties of normal bees. These robotic bees, designed at Japan's National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology, are drones "that [transport] pollen between flowers" (New Scientist). The specific goal of these drones is to work hand in hand with living bees to sustain pollination at a steady rate, even while the population of live bees is declining. Currently, these drones are being sold for commercial use and must be controlled remotely by the purchaser (National Public Radio). If the bee population were to become non-existent and farmers were forced to pollinate by hand, the robotic bees would be a time-saving device that farmers could implement on their crops. The creator of these drones, Eijiro Miyako, believes that if bees were close to facing extinction, his pollination drones would aid the bees that were still existing in keeping up with pollination demands (New Scientist).

Although this revolutionary technology may seem to be the solution to the current issue, it does not resolve the real problem at hand. These robotic bees only provide a solution to losing the pollination process, not the declining bee population. The robots cost one-hundred dollars per unit, and to pollinate one field the farmer may have to spend thousands of dollars that they do not have (New Scientist). However, by trying to preserve the current bee population it could save farmers tremendous amounts of money and effort put into pollinating their own crops. The article released by National Public Radio (NPR) mentions that "there are 20,000 species of bees... each with unique flight patterns and body sizes to get into different flowers." There is no way that this specific drone would be able to mimic the qualities bees possess naturally that allow them to be such good pollinators. The drones created by Miyako are bulky and would not be able to fit within smaller flowers, and it would be nearly impossible to re-create the exact size of 20,000 different species of bees. He also tried to re-create their fuzzy exterior by attaching horsehair to the top of the drone; however, using materials such as horsehair is an inhumane way to create a product (New Scientist). If a farmer needs one-hundred of these drones on short notice, then it would require acquiring enough hair for every drone from multiple horses and would be cruel treatment. Overall, this product does not solve the crisis of bees becoming endangered and creates more avoidable problems that could be solved by helping currently existing bees.

Using robotic bees is not a sustainable solution for preserving species of bees, such as the bumblebee, that are close to extinction. One solution that could be beneficial is by raising awareness about the Bee Sanctuary, an organization researching innovative ways to create bee sanctuaries in areas that are in need of pollinators. The Bee Sanctuary

is currently raising money to fund more research on preserving specific species of bees and creating sanctuaries in areas of need, and with more awareness of this foundation, people may feel inclined to donate. Another good way to talk about bee preservation is through famous companies. One of the most famous cereal brands, Cheerios, recently did a campaign by removing their famous bee character from the boxes in order to provide consumers with information about the bee species. If more companies partnered with foundations such as the Bee Sanctuary, there could be a generalized awareness about how individuals can help the bee population. Although not everyone will pay attention to preserving endangered bees because people, like farmers, have to do what's best for their crops and push aside any harms their methods may cause in the future, enacting campaigns may reach many people. There are so many simple things that people can do at home to help bees, one of which is being more careful with their pesticide use. Many people use pesticides to kill weeds and unwanted plant life in their yards, and simply being careful about where the pesticides are being sprayed can decrease the deaths of local bees. People can also plant flowers that are best pollinated by the bees local to their area. Creating general awareness through ad campaigns, constructed by many large companies, can influence people to follow the advice of the brands they trust and help save the bees.

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THE ACTOR

Ben Jelinek

I

I got yelled at earlier that day because I messed up a delivery. In this day and age, people seem to forget that mistakes are what make us human. I can't say I'm not guilty of it myself every now and again; confusing robots for humans and vice versa. In any case, I was still proud of my job and the function I had served in this world. It all started when I read the poem "Night Mail" by WH Auden. Then I saw the documentary that it was written for and knew I wanted to become a part of that organism that transmits "letters for the rich, letters for the poor" and "letters of thanks, letters from banks." You could say I was hooked. I did work the night shift for a few years, just like I wanted, existing solely in the world of darkness, becoming a part of something great that gets taken for granted, operating "behind the curtains," so to speak, running the world's errands while everyone else is asleep. But I got an offer from my boss to try out the day shift since I was one of the best workers, so that's what I did for a long while. Unless I was unconsciously lying to myself, then it is really true: that I only wanted to please people, to make them happy with the mail that they got delivered. If it were up to me I'd have made it so no one got a bill ever again, but this was above my paygrade. I must say though, I much preferred operating behind the scenes and what happened that day is exactly the type of reason why. Three years, no mistakes, and then the first time it happens, that was the thanks I got from Mrs. Hoffmann at 875 N. Alder St. I suppose I'd given her mail to 877, which her neighbors returned back to her later that day. When I made it to her house the following day, there she was sitting on her porch ready to give me an earful. I won't repeat it here but it was all to the effect that I am a lazy bastard who doesn't care about other people's mail.

Really, all this light (day shift) was an overexposure upon my sensitive eyes and skin, which is probably why I made such a rookie mistake. The light of these rural backwoods was beginning to dull each of my senses and I began to fear sensory overload and eventual shutdown of my system. I can only describe this sensation as being buried alive but with shards of blinding crystals of light, rather than the moist, comforting smell of dirt. I suppose I could have asked the bossman to switch me back to the night shift but I wasn't thinking clearly. I hated that such a small mistake had much bigger implications than should be possible, that its ripple effect was much greater than I'd have liked. But that is the nature of small towns; this was a feeling I could not stand anymore; like the entire world was pressing on my shoulders even though I had chosen a modest profession.

After my shift, I hurried to the public library for a computer and bought my first plane ticket and booked my first hotel which used up nearly all my savings. I didn't sleep that night, instead, I overpacked, bit my nails until they bled, nervously walked around my trailer, ate nuts, and looked up facts about New York. When I went to the bathroom, I wished that the toilets weren't so loud when they got flushed because it made me nervous. I calmed myself by watching three of the Coen brothers' movies, thinking about another ambition that I had: acting. It probably wouldn't be as easy as getting a job as a night

mailman but I would die unhappy if I didn't at least try to act, and what better place than New York to give it a shot. Even though I'd probably just find a job delivering night mail, I still went to the bathroom mirror and tried to emulate some of the scenes from Barton Fink. I thought I was pretty good.

Upon arrival at the airport the next day, the colors and hubbub offered a sense of renewed vitality. I did not worry about my job or my trailer because I was going to try and start over and if that didn't work then I would return home. On the flight, I was the most relaxed I had been in years, high above the worries of the ground below. I thought I could see my fingernails starting to grow back. I thought about Mrs. Hoffmann and the fact that her mail would probably be delayed today and then I chuckled about it. I watched some Bergman and Kurosawa movies on the plane and when I went to pee I practiced some more expressions in the mirror like the ones in those movies. I knew my acting ambitions would remain a distant abstraction, but at the very least I could start working on my chops just in case they didn't. You never know. I flushed the toilet and learned that airplane toilets are even louder than regular ones, but surprisingly I felt no aversion to this. A few hours later I arrived at JFK airport and stumbled out of the plane. From the very first subway ride which took me to downtown Manhattan, I learned the hard way: it is a conniving area.

My head was in a haze throughout the entire first week, as if my body and senses were struggling to adapt to this new environment, yet it was an entirely pleasurable confusion. What could I expect after being blinded day in and day out, being watched and judged under a microscope every day of my life back in Oregon? Even besides all that, a newcomer is sure to go delirious in the midst of heaven-reaching buildings, taxi cars screeching, comedy-show hustlers selling tickets on every corner. The general haste in the air began to make me feel weak and delirious, though I soon grew used to this and let the city envelop me in her grip. I stopped biting my fingernails because I no longer needed the distraction. I only went out at night, stayed in my Air BnB during the day with the curtains drawn so my system could re-adjust to the dark. When I went out into the nightlife and tripped confusedly around the city with no purpose I had never felt so small and insignificant before, reduced to bacteria within something so much larger. It was a relief to not matter at all for a little while, to no longer worry about any Mrs. Hoffmanns waiting on the front porch to catch me unawares.

II

By my second week, I was still living off my savings and felt no inclination to find any sort of work; instead, I strolled through Broadway every night admiring the lights and attending stage productions. One night a strange sensation crept in that I hadn't felt since I had gotten there. A gnawing feeling of desire; I began to fancy for something, even though I was already bombarding my senses with the neon lights, a hot dog in my hand, playing upbeat house music through some headphones. This was the life. Still... Somewhere in my bowels, I felt a nagging hunger which grew quickly in intensity. In this state of mind, I became one with the stream of sidewalk goers, which drifted north and

carried me along, and soon I lost my way—if one can belong to any location at all in such a place. I no longer recognized any of the buildings because I was no longer on Broadway but in some strange red light district.

A woman clawed at me and said “honey, I know you want something... what is it you’re looking for? I can make your dreams come true...”

Suffice it to say, this seemed like just the thing I was looking for at that moment so I followed her into a hole in the wall where she pleased me under a dangling fluorescent light. Afterward, the burning impulse in my stomach only intensified tenfold and I began to bite on my nails again because I needed something more. There was a torn couch in the room next door and I sat down on it to recollect myself.

Just then a small, leather-skinned, quick-talking lady entered from outside and said to me, “Hey, Mister, I know you! You act, yes? Yes? Sing? Perform!”

I paused: I was a mere mail carrier and did none of these things, though in my strange state of mind I questioned whether or not there was some truth if I were to answer with “yes,” that perhaps I was indeed an actor and had been playing a role all my life. I figured I should at least go see what the lady wanted.

“Of course I am an actor. I have been in many plays; I get recognized all the time. A man can’t help it.” Like I said, this was no lie, at least, I didn’t think it was. I excitedly got up off the couch and neared the miniature lady, who was Asian and wore a colorful poncho.

“Just as I thought! Sir Jenkins! Come, come, come with me, I have just the part for you.” She waved for me to follow her through a back door.

The prostitute said, “Hey, where the fuck ya goin’? Where’s my money, you rat?”

But the strange lady waved her away and replied with, “Excuse me? This is Sir Jenkins, please step away or we’ll get the authorities in here.” I threw the girl a \$50 and then continued to follow the woman up a few stairs in total darkness and then we entered suddenly into an elegant building—elegant even for New York—with gold-plated floral designs on the walls and sparkling elevators on each side of the lobby. Once we were inside she shook my hand violently, expressing her gratitude.

“Mister Jenkins, what a great honor it is to meet you... and to think that I run into someone as prolific as you just as we are trying to fill the lead role. As you must know by now, Jamie got really ill. Rumor has it he’s been in the hospital for days... The haste has been unreal in finding a replacement.”

“Yes,” I replied, “sometimes it really seems that God is paying attention from above. Coincidences are one hell of a thing if you can call them that.” I was good! I should have done this earlier, I thought to myself. Clearly, the theatre-director must have had me confused with someone else, specifically one Sir Jenkins, a name which meant nothing to me. Soon a sense of adventure invigorated my soul. New York had called my name, and I answered! Thank god I answered, for perhaps this was what everything in my life had been leading up to, I thought. I even fancied myself a meta-actor, already playing the role of an actor at the present moment, specifically one Sir Jenkins...

“Now I know you’re used to those big Broadway productions but I figure this might be a good opportunity for you to do something a little more cutting-edge. We’ve been working hard on putting something together that defies convention and plays with the notion of form and content. If that isn’t something you’re interested in, by all means, no worries.”

“No, no. That sounds fantastic. I was beginning to grow a bit weary of the mainstream productions myself and have been looking to break out of my shell a bit. All that noise gets a bit distracting at times, people are so enraptured with escapism in the form of Spectacle. This seems like just the thing, I am so excited to see what you guys have been working on.” The stage director smiled and I followed her up four flights of stairs; we arrived at a large viewing-platform where the rest of the cast—20 or 25 or so individuals—were horsing around and getting into character. The perversity of their outfits is hard to describe. Among the few were two twins dressed as clowns in the back corner, slapping each other in the face; a 7-foot tall man in a pince-nez shouting at himself as loud as possible in the mirror; on the floor a woman writhed around in a tight latex suit, with cutouts for her breasts to protrude uninhibited. Although the play and actors seemed bizarre, I figured this would make my secret debut all the more significant.

The theatre was modest in size which gave it an air of intimacy, nothing like the Broadway theatres I had been frequenting. Down below, a solitary janitor mopped the floors directly below us near the entrance. The twins’ face-slaps and the tall man’s shouts echoed against the high brick walls.

The theatre director addressed the cast with an air of playfulness: “I found him, he’ll be perfect for the lead role.” The others cheered, formed a single file line in order to introduce themselves formally. The action felt rehearsed, which unsettled me; the acting was not supposed to begin until later, I thought...

We all shook hands while the director said, “Sir Jenkins; the first performance is tonight. I trust you’ll be able to learn the part in the next few hours,” and then turned to the cast directly, winking at them; “I’ll grab refreshments and a script for the new guy.” She disappeared down the stairs. I began to grow nervous, as I wondered how on earth I would be able to learn a lead role for an entire stage production in only a few hours. The theatre-director returned with boxes of candy, soda pop, and a copy of the stage play, entitled *The Actor*. She handed it to me, and flipping through it, I found only blank pages.

“Hey,” I said, “what is this? There’s nothing in it.” But the theatre director was gone, and in her place was a towering girl with thick dreadlocks. I gazed up and she began speaking through mouthfuls of hard candy.

“So, huh, heh, you’re the new guy—hmmm? Mister Jenkins, I do suppose? Well, I’ll be damned. We’re in the midst of a legend. Probably feels good to get away from all those bougie folk over on Broadway, huh?” The girl chuckled and slapped me on the back, trying to be playful, I guess, though it was quite harder than necessary and my face shriveled up for a moment.

“Thanks, I do suppose you’re right. Hey, I think the theatre director messed up, these pages are completely blank.”

“Careful what you say about Miss Yin, she doesn’t make mistakes. And that’s right, we improvise everything on the spot. The blank pages are meant for you to stare at and enter a Zen-like headspace. Say, can I get some of your candy?” She peered over and into my bag, then down at me with big endearing eyes, and proclaimed, “I got a fun-sized bag and you got a big one; that’s not fair if you ask me.”

“You’re right, that’s pretty messed up. Help yourself,” I said, and I handed her my bag, for I was beginning to feel sick anyway, as if I had made a mistake in getting involved with this crowd. Just then, in one swift movement, the girl broke all societal expectations.

Giggling, she dumped my bag of candy over the balustrade support, hopping with childish glee, a glee only found in rituals, in rehearsal. The clown twins laughed too, and then the entire rest of the cast followed in creating a chorus of demented howling.

I saw the hard candy land directly on the janitor's head way down below as he was mopping the floors like a good fellow. It made me think of Mrs. Hoffmann disrespecting me even though I was just trying to do my job. He shot his head up, made eye contact with me, cursed loud and quick in Spanish, dropped his mop, and quickly ran up the stairs as the rest of the crew disappeared through numerous doors and went into hiding under strange structures.

"What the hell?" I said to the tall girl, and she gave me a smirk, turned on her heels, and continued eating what remained of my candy. The janitor arrived at the top of the stairs completely out of breath, eyeing the two of us that were still in sight. He seemed accustomed to disturbances of this manner, a butt-end-of-the-joke type of fellow.

"Which one, eh? You? You?" He raged through a thick accent. I merely shook my head and held my hands in the air, but the janitor must have taken this for a sign of guilt; he promptly stomped over, seeing red, and dragged me by the collar down the winding stairs. All the while I was pleading mercy, crying about how he had the wrong guy, that he oughta let me go if he didn't want a big fat lawsuit. See, I was Sir Jenkins, the prolific theatre-actor. But either he didn't understand much English or he was purposefully ignoring me. Instead, he continued to curse in Spanish as he dragged me down the stairs. When we arrived at the candy-mess, he slapped me on the back of the head, pointed, and said "Clean, andale!" I got onto my knees and began picking the pieces up one at a time.

"Andale, andale!" and then he kicked me in the ribs quite possibly cracking one or two of them.

"Enough is enough!" I shouted and stood up quickly. It really was enough. And when I stood straight and proud, even with a pain in my rib cage, I stood significantly taller than the janitor in hopes of intimidation. Indeed, he did cower a bit, backing away slowly.

"I am Sir Jenkins," I continued, "And I will not be treated this way by a lowly worker such as yourself. I demand to speak with Miss Yin, the theatre-director right this instant. Where did she go?"

"MISS?!" The janitor edged himself away from me, his countenance changing from assertiveness to apprehension. He produced a cell phone from his pocket, punched a few keys loudly and spoke in a quick, hushed Spanish. His body was turned away, his head pointed downwards as he spoke, yet with damning eyes peering up at me the whole time. He was clearly describing me to a certain form of authority which spoke his native language. When finished, he put the phone away and began picking up the candy himself, muttering "el lo lamentara" over and over. I couldn't understand him, and his change into passivity made me even sicker.

I walked back up the stairs but none of the crew was to be found; they had all gone into hiding from the feared janitor. Just then I decided that I'd had about enough of this theatre business and was just turning around to walk back down the stairs when the theatre-director appeared from under one of the many hiding places. "Sir Jenkins, where are you going? You've only just arrived, now don't worry about Janitor Muñoz, he can be a bit rough sometimes but it's all in good fun. You'll soon find that he is just like family." She gave me a reassuring smile and so I followed her back up the stairs.

"Now just remember, here at The Bouillon Theatre we take pride in all of our

employees and do not tolerate disrespect, which includes that towards our dearest Janitor Muñoz. We all saw you dump that hard candy on his head as he was working, that's something that isn't going to be tolerated anymore. We all like to horse around and have fun but sometimes a line gets crossed, enough is enough, so to speak, so please don't do it again." I thought about correcting her but thought better of it, for there was no telling how she would react to this, whether she would think I was lying or not. At the end of the day, I was an actor, so I decided to let her believe I had dropped the candy. Once we were back up at the top of the platform I realized I desperately needed to go to the bathroom and asked Miss Yin where it was.

"Just right around that corner there, now don't be too long, we have so much work to do." I went in the direction that she pointed and locked the door behind me. I did my business and stared at myself in the mirror in angst and confusion. I chewed on my nails for a while and wished that the toilets weren't so loud when they got flushed because it made me nervous.

I went back into the rehearsal area and all the people were back to practicing, with Ms. Yin shouting about what looked good and what oughta be changed. I approached her and said "Ms. Yin, where do you want me? I think I am ready to begin my improv, I feel much better after having relieved myself."

"Right over there, Sir Jenk—oh my goodness, look at your fingers!!! We can't have that in here, not at all. Completely unacceptable! Bitten to the nub... There is no way that they would let you perform on Broadway like that... Come with me, we're going to have to do something about those stumps of yours before you can continue. The greatest critics of art-house theatre are going to be in the audience, this just won't do... Come along now, Sir Jenkins, we'll get you sorted out."

Then I began questioning whether or not I was truly an actor and said to Miss Yin, "I think not; something has come up and they need me for another lead role over on Broadway. In fact, the role is that of a nail-biter, which I have been preparing for, as you can see. I am very sorry for wasting your time, but I have got to be heading out now, and good luck on your play."

I began jumping down the stairs to make my escape, but at the bottom stood four guards in dark sunglasses and black suits with their arms folded across their chests.

"You guys, look, I'm not the guy you're looking for, I'm not even Mister Jenkins, and I surely did not pour that candy on the janitor, it was that tall girl with the dreadlocks. Please, just let me go and I'll be on my way and you'll never catch my sight again."

This was all the truth, as far as I understood it. I hoped coming clean would free me, for everything that had happened since I had entered this building had been tainted with a certain despicable nature, even a demonic one, due perhaps, to my lies...

One of the guards began howling with laughter. "Not Sir Jenkins, he says! Ha-ha! It looks like we have a liar on our hands!" From the top of the viewing platform, the entire cast was looking down at us, laughing also. I saw the jiggling breasts of the latex-woman, and then heard the tiny Asian theatre-director yell "Take him away, prompt apprehension, fellows! Prompt apprehension, just like we talked about!" Then the four of them lunged towards me as I attempted to scramble past. I was caught, of course, and they hoisted me away as I kicked and screamed. They carried me through the theatre, into the backstage, then through a door which led to a corridor, and finally, I was thrust into a tiny room. Then they locked the doors behind them, and said, "Time for

rehearsal...”

III

This room was dingy, dark, damp, and cold. The only things in sight were a dangling fluorescent light overhead and a simple clock on the bare brick wall. It looked something like a medieval dungeon, save for that modern clock, as well as a doggy-door through which I was soon given some sort of slop disguised as food, with a note that said, “Eat up, the performance is at 8pm sharp. We hope you are getting into character!” Something very wrong was afoot, for it was 5pm when I was thrown into the room and yet the clock barely seemed to be moving. The passing of time slowed nearly to a complete halt—I kept looking at the clock, expecting someone to come let me out so I could perform and yet only seconds had passed. As I said, the only light came from a dangling lantern fastened to the ceiling. I ate my food and waited for what seemed like days, growing incredibly hungry once again. I was fed once more and this cycle repeated itself, yet the clock read 6:30pm; apparently only an hour and a half had passed. I was unable to practice basic hygiene in this time frame. I speculated that perhaps there was something in the water which was skewing my perception of time, or otherwise the clock had been tampered with to operate at 100x a slower speed or something of the like.

Many times, I attempted to squeeze my body through the slot which was labeled “food-hole” but to no avail; it had truly been designed only for food. On one occasion though, after I hadn't been fed for a longer amount of time than usual, I was able to fit my entire head through it, seeing into the other side. It was pitch black. How large this room was, I had no idea, it could have stretched for eternity, for like I said, it was black as pitch. It also stung the nostrils with tobacco-reek and hummed something sinister. Distantly, I heard the hissing voice of the hooker say, “Honey, I know you want something... what is it you're looking for? I can make your dreams come true...”

I quickly ran out of nails to bite, and as more time passed, my voice was no longer my own. I would speak, and the sound would be delayed for at least five seconds, and then seem as if it came from the other side of the room. “I, Sir Jenkins, am here, and I demand respect,” I said, which echoed in a foreboding way. The pit in my stomach that desperately fancied for something (and had gotten me into this mess) became filled with bugs. I could feel them in my stomach and my throat too. Ungodly levels of dust accumulated, filling my eyes and coating my lips. When my body attempted to stand and walk, my feet were gone, I floated like a ghost. My only repose from this horrid room had been in my dreams, which quickly left me. The stench of my bodily excrements began to torment me until eventually my mind could take no more and separated from my body (which seemed to be in all different corners of the room, while my mind was becoming the room itself). I began to think that I was either dead or otherwise in a state of limbo. The food continued to come and I ate less and less of it. I thought about Mrs. Hoffmann and I hoped that she was getting her mail delivered in a timely fashion. There was no toilet and I wished that I could hear the sound of one getting flushed.

As more and more time passed, I became convinced I would be here—glancing at the clock—for eternity. Yet out of the blue, a faceless voice finally appeared through some hidden intercom, androgynous and smooth. My mind recognized that it did not belong to

me. The clock read 8pm.

“So, you are Sir Jenkins, the prolific theatre actor? We hope you’ve gotten into character, I know three hours wasn’t much, but it’s better than nothing.” I scrambled into a sitting position. Although I was in a crazed semi-slumber, a feeling passed over me: I could feel in my bones that I had become Sir Jenkins and that I had indeed gotten into character.

“That is me, Sir Jenkins. I repeat: this has been a misunderstanding, and I would very much appreciate my prompt release if this establishment doesn’t want to feel the viscous brunt of my team of lawyers, as well as the full force of the law. Take that into careful consideration.” I hadn’t expected such confident eloquence. The reason it must have come so naturally was that I was no longer lying; back when I followed the theatre-director into this building of illusion, I was not Sir Jenkins—and it had been very imprudent of me to say I was—but at this point, it had become true.

“Very well, Sir Jenkins. It seems you have practiced your role beautifully, and that you are ready for your part. It’s a full house tonight, and the biggest critic in New York is here. I hope you’re ready.” I confirmed that I was. For a few minutes, my mind was no longer shocked or afraid of anything that this house of deceit could provide; I felt better than I had since I was a child and was ready for my great breakthrough performance. Just then the dangling light overhead turned off and I was once again disembodied, my body convulsed and my mind tried to escape the room. As soon as I thought I could take no more, the door opened.

Two silhouettes had appeared: one over seven feet tall and the other clad in black latex. My body scrambled into the corner like a terrified hamster and the latex woman said “oh look, look at the poor baby. Isn’t he good?! It’s about time he broke out of his shell and got away from those pretentious Broadway folk, this suits him much better.”

“One of our best, to be certain,” said the tall man. They walked over slowly and told me to come with, but my mind had lost all control of my body, which was writhing on the floor in terror once more.

“He’s still getting into character, let’s just play along,” said the latex lady, and so they picked me up and carried me out of the room that I’d stayed in for so long. They trudged through the corridor with me and entered the back room, where the rest of the cast that wasn’t already on stage cheered in excitement, for this was the big night we had all been waiting for.

The dreadlocked girl who dumped the candy said “Phew! That boy stinks. And he’s grown a full beard already! Miss Yin sure does know how to pick em.” My body convulsed and lost itself entirely. The girl continued on, “And he’s got the movements down just right. Wow, the crowd is going to be all over you, man. You’re good! Who knew a Broadway snob could fit in with the rest of us, just like that, after only a few hours of rehearsal. I underestimated you, I gotta say.”

“You’re up, your time to shine, big boy,” I heard from the back corner. Miss Yin approached my body, which was still being held by the tall man and the latex lady. I tried to make my voice articulate what was on my mind: that I couldn’t perform; that I was no actor and had never been one; that I was just some measly mail-carrier. But no sound escaped other than some wretched gasps for air. The dreadlocked girl came up with a wheelbarrow and my body was set in it, then wheeled out onto the stage.

The stage was lighted in an orange glow. Fake pumpkins, a scarecrow, and other stage

props sat around. The clown-twins were running around as if looking for something.

“I can’t find it!” the first one said.

“It’s got to be here somewhere. Do we even know what it is that we’re looking for, though? That’d be a good start, don’t you think?”

The theatre was completely full and the audience seemed enraptured, even let out a unanimous gasp as my body entered the stage in its wheelbarrow. I spotted Janitor Muñoz contentedly munching some candy.

The tall man began to speak: “Look what I have dug up out of the ground! He was buried deep, but all worms must rise” said the tall man, now acting. The clown twins cheered, as if their hard work was finally over. The first one began talking.

“You found it! We’ve been searching and searching and searching and we didn’t even know what we wanted, but now you’ve come along and presented us with something that completes us, makes us whole again. Hello, Sir Jenkins.” I coughed and the other twin began speaking.

“My, what an interesting hiding place! But come now, Sir Jenkins, you know that you couldn’t have hidden from us forever?” I tried to lift my arms up and get out of the wheelbarrow, and the crowd chuckled.

I managed to choke these words out as best I could: “I’ve got spiders in my lungs! In my bowels! Dust in my mouth! Someone help!” The crowd oohed and ahed, a camera even flashed and someone hissed, saying that’s not allowed in such high-brow establishments.

“Well now, Jenkins, you should have thought about that before digging a hole in the dirt, climbing into it and having your friend bury you in there. Ha-ha!”

“No, really,” I continued, “someone please help me, for god’s sake,” this time attempting to look directly at the crowd and break the fourth wall, yet this had no effect on an audience so used to experimentation. The first twin whispered something to the tall man and he said “It looks like your time has come, Jenkins. Any last words?” But I said nothing, suddenly feeling the tension in the crowd, feeling my magnificent stage presence, a stage presence only a world-renowned actor could provide...

“Very well, off you go back to the hole from which you came.” A pit opened up under my wheelbarrow and away I tumbled, passing out along the way.

IV

When I awoke, I was back in my room and I heard a voice.

“Congratulations, Sir Jenkins. We received rave reviews last night, your performance, in particular, was much revered by the top critics, aside from those ghastly nubs of fingers that you’ve got. That’s still something we can work on, but as it stands, we are truly pushing the boundaries of theatre, not only in content but also form. You’re a part of something new and novel. Anyways, we have a corridor specifically designed for you. Some of your new family will be in shortly to accompany you to your residency. Really, Sir, you should be proud of yourself for such a spectacular performance that we all know you worked so hard to perfect.” I tried to object, let these people know that I didn’t want any residency, any new family, nor any specifically designed corridor. A man clean-shaven, in opposition to myself, opened the door.

“Sir Jenkins,” he said. “Come with me.”

“All a mistake, one large mistake... I am Sir Jenkins... No, I am not...” I muttered over and over to my half-crazed self, though I obediently allowed myself to be dragged from my hole.

“This is your corridor,” said the guard I attempted to glance around and discern it from any other corridor I had ever been inside of, but to no avail.

“I get this all to myself?” I questioned.

“Of course not. This is merely Sir Jenkins’—the prolific theatre-actor—this is his corridor.”

Just then I noticed it; as we walked down this seemingly endless corridor, each secluded office on either side of me contained a similar-looking fellow as myself, malnourished, with a beard, naked. They had had their own rehearsals. They were all retired mailmen, Sir Jenkins’s, the most revered and prolific actor in all of New York making an escape from the mainstream, ready for their role. We had all made it into the big league.



J. D. VINCENT

BECOMING ME

I SUFFER FROM CHRONIC ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

SOME DAYS, IT TAKES EVERYTHING I HAVE JUST TO GET OUT OF BED.



EVEN AS A CHILD,



I DON'T REMEMBER EVER BEING TRULY HAPPY.

AS FOR MY MARRIAGE...



LET'S JUST SAY IT WAS *LESS THAN IDEAL*.

AND WHEN IT FINALLY CAME CRASHING DOWN THERE I WAS, *ABANDONED*, WITH *NOTHING BUT*

MY *DOG*,



MY *HORSE*,

A BASKET OF CLOTHES, AND THE LAST BOX OF BOOKS TO MY NAME.

AND THE DIVORCE?
IT WAS A STRUGGLE.

BUT IN THE MIDST OF IT...

I FOUND BOTH *MYSELF*...



...AND *MY PERSON!*

IT'S STILL TOUGH, AND THERE ARE *STILL* DAYS IT'S A *FIGHT* TO GET OUT OF BED.

BUT IT'S *AMAZING* TO LOOK BACK AT WHAT I'VE MANAGED TO ACCOMPLISH

WITH THE *POSITIVE* SUPPORT SYSTEM

I'VE *FINALLY* FOUND.

YOU,
Jarrett Ziemer

chickadee, you are always here but
threatening to leave with every cold front
you sink with the downdrafts
of valley breaking rolling hills
the jagged of the flyers
a varied thrush in my throat
above the dipper, the weaver of the melodies
above the hardy mallard, watchful, gullible, constant
always aware of my eyes and hunger
a wolf
starved and begging
to take off his own bird suit

you only sing in the spring
living on the edge of this mountain
in the midst of its rivers, you rise with the swell
you, kingfisher, feminine and crested
the queen of trappers and trawlers
a one note song hiding in plain sight
a mused in the depth of the rolling ripple and trout
wrapped in a clan of water and blood
thirsty for a drink from inside
surrounded by a pond of salt surges
too deaf to the howl and hollow
to fly on those wings

HER GREAT NORTHERN LIGHTS

Jarrett Ziemer

This place is so warm it's like,
It's like someone has taken away the space between all the stars
and packed all of them and all of their warmth and all of their brightness
into one room.
All of the stars are all of the world,
everything before and everything after and everything right then,
and she sits in the middle of it all,
at the kitchen table,
as every galaxy and all the universe spin around her and the room.
Her universe is not one of big bangs and increasing speeds and distances,
it is the universe of intimate, infinite, moments,
where all of the space in time join me in coming closer and closer to better hear her
whisper about her love for circles,
and cilantro, the color yellow, long walks through old romantic neighborhoods,
and nothing at all.
To better hear her whisper about her fear of falling leaves in late summer, and certain
words that sound like they look,
and nothing at all.

THE WISHING WELL

Andi Griffin

There's a secret about the old Plaza down on 8th Street. Nobody knows it but me and my old pal, George. We protect the fountain in the middle of the plaza, and the secret it contains. You wouldn't expect this old fountain to be anything great. But there's a kind of magic about this place that you can only see if you take the time to watch. And wait. And listen.

Maybe the only reason I discovered this secret is because I have time. All the time in the world. Every day after work I'd come back here and sit by the fountain for a few hours, watching people pass by. Just me and my old pal, George. He was always waiting for me, day in and day out, rain or shine. He stood there proudly on his pedestal, and his triumphant gaze looking out over the busy plaza always made me feel like a winner, even if I couldn't find work that day and was just stuck panhandling for change so I could have a cigarette or two.

Something about this old plaza drew me back to it day after day, even if there were plenty of other places in the city that would probably yield better change. People are always so busy these days. Always rushing this way and that. Nobody stops for a scruffy old man sitting on a bench with a cardboard sign. I used to sit and wonder where they were all going until it became exhausting. It was another reminder of the life I'd once had. But being in and out of prison for most of one's life can change his perspective considerably. Instead of wasting time wondering about things I could never know, I started focusing on those who stopped here at the fountain, since they were the ones who proved the most interesting.

I sat there on the worn metal bench next to the fountain, keeping George company every evening for almost three months before I started to notice the magic. Or maybe I had always noticed it, but just failed to realize it. Why else would I be drawn here day after day, when there were hundreds of other places I could have gone?

People would come and stop by the fountain for multiple reasons. I saw excited young ones dipping their fingers and toes into the water when their mothers weren't looking. I saw young couples seated lovingly on the other benches, gazing into each other's eyes or kissing passionately in front of the fountain. I saw tired businessmen pause for a moment just to breathe and collect themselves before leaving work for the day. Before they left, they tossed a coin into the fountain. Sometimes a nickel. Sometimes a dime. Mostly just dirty old pennies.

It was last September when I first began to notice it. Just like on any other day, people would come and throw coins into the fountain, sometimes muttering something under their breath as they gazed at the late-day sunlight reflecting off the gentle waves of the basin. A little girl came up with her mother, dripping ice cream cone held happily in her hand. The mother sat down on a bench nearby to take a phone call while the girl played near the fountain, dipping her sandaled shoes into the water and giggling. By the time the mother was done, the girl was standing knee-deep in the fountain, the tips of the waves just barely reaching the hems of her shorts. She clutched the remainder of her ice cream in one hand and a shiny wet quarter in the other.

"Look, Mama!" She said happily, oblivious to her mother's distress at seeing her in the

fountain. "Look what I found!"

"Put it back, honey." The mother scolded. "That's somebody's wish."

"But it's our state!"

"I know that, but they say if you take a coin out of a fountain, that person's wish never comes true."

"Why?"

"I don't know, honey. It's just an old story." At the girl's insistence, she sighed. "I suppose you may keep the quarter. Now finish your ice cream before it all melts!"

Oh, if only I'd known back then how wrong she was. It wasn't until I picked up a newspaper someone left lying on the bench the next day that I began to suspect it. I scanned the page headlines, looking for interesting stories until I found a short article about a local businessman who recently won the lottery. I recognized the man in the photo. I'd seen him a few days ago, tossing a coin into the fountain before hurrying away. At this realization, a suspicion began to form in my mind. I sat there pondering it until all traces of fire were gone from the sky and a chilly breeze drifted through the mostly empty plaza. I looked up at George, who looked as stoic and triumphant as he always did.

"What are you trying to tell me, old pal?" I wondered aloud. George didn't answer, but I could have sworn his bronze eyes twinkled.

From then on, I watched more closely. The very next day, a tired-looking woman with quite a few strands of gray in her tawny hair shuffled up to the fountain, a shiny new copper penny in her weathered hands. From the way she moved, I guessed she was likely suffering from arthritis. I watched as she closed her eyes and whispered to herself before gently tossing the coin into the fountain, where it sank beneath the waves with a small plink!

When she finally left the plaza sometime later, I got up from my seat on the bench, feeling the stiffness in my limbs that comes from sitting down too long. After rubbing my legs for a moment to get rid of the feeling, I headed over to the fountain and peer into its depths. The woman's penny wasn't hard to spot at all. It was easily the shiniest one amongst the scads of dull copper carpeting the bottom of the fountain.

"Well, here goes nothing," I said, pulling up the sleeve of my old overcoat and reaching into the water. After drying it off on the edge of my coat, I stuck the coin in my pocket.

"See you later, old pal," I said, tipping my dirty patchwork cap to the bronze man on the pedestal before picking up my backpack and heading out of the plaza to my tent.

It took a few days before I saw the woman again. I was on my way back from the garbage facility where I was currently working when I noticed her coming out of a grocery store with several plastic bags in her hand. She walked with such confidence and ease, I had to stop and stare for a moment before I concluded that this was the same woman I'd seen at the fountain. The only thing I recognized was her tawny hair, pulled back in the same bun I'd seen a few days ago. Her posture was straight and tall, not bent over, and her knees no longer wobbled with every step she took.

I smiled to myself. So I wasn't just imagining it. I headed back to the fountain and sat down in my usual spot on the worn metal bench. There were a few people about, but the plaza was mostly deserted, like a cathedral after the service has ended for the day. I looked

up at the weathered bronze statue standing guard over the fountain, which I now knew held a secret.

“So I’ve finally figured it out, old pal,” I said. George remained as silent as ever, but I still heard a reply.

So, Simon, what are you going to do with it?

I sat and pondered this for some time. What would happen if I took out all the coins? What if I put my own coin in the fountain and took it out again? Would it work? Or would it have to be taken out by someone else? What if not everyone’s wishes were good ones?

I shook my head, deciding not to dwell on the possibilities. No one ever gets to know what could happen, so why should I waste time worrying about it?

When a little girl wearing a pink princess tutu passed by with her grandparents and the grandmother gave the girl a dime to toss into the fountain, I waited until they moved off before fishing the coin out of the water, smiling to myself and wondering what that little girl’s wish was. I felt a sense of contentedness wash over me, such as I haven’t felt in years. I glanced up at the statue. Old George’s eyes were twinkling again, as if sharing in my newfound purpose.

During the next several months, I no longer sat idly on the bench all evening, watching the sunlight die in a fiery blaze of glory. Rather, I was on the lookout for anyone who threw coins into the fountain, trying to catch a glimpse of the coin before they tossed it. If it was unique, like a quarter or particularly shiny penny, I’d fish it out, pocket it, and then go back to my bench wondering what wish I’d just granted. Whenever someone left a newspaper on one of the benches or in the trash can, I would scan the headlines, looking for stories of unusual luck or faces I recognized. One short article about the recent engagement of a wealthy entrepreneur showed a picture of a beaming couple I remembered seeing at the fountain a few days prior to the day I read the article. A tired-looking young woman with a ratty blonde ponytail and sunken, pale cheeks once stood at the edge for some time, gazing sadly at George Washington’s triumphant pose before tossing a grubby green penny into the fountain and hurrying away with tears in her eyes. I found out later from a newspaper that her husband was a soldier in Afghanistan, and he had been missing in action until a few days before the article was posted.

I continued this pattern well into the bitter cold depths of December, when my breath hung in frosty clouds around my face and my feet felt like stiff bricks in my shoes, even though I was lucky enough to own two pairs of socks. George’s fountain gained a buildup of ice around the edges of the basin, and his bronze was dusted with a faint layer of frost. The Plaza gained a new festive look – someone tied red bows to all the street lamps surrounding the square and hung sparkly plastic ornaments in all the Japanese maples. Signs and lights appeared on the storefronts and everywhere I looked someone was carrying a green or red shopping bag full of merchandise.

Watching all the festivities from afar struck a spear of longing through my chest. For the first time in a long time, I was reminded painfully and obviously of what I was missing. My heart ached for the loss of my family and friends and the joy of spending Christmas with them. Why must I live with the painful reminder of my mistakes every day? Perhaps that’s why I felt so compelled to help fulfill people’s wishes – because it

helped me come to terms with my own regrets. I knew I could never truly make up for all the mistakes I'd made, but somehow, seeing my actions benefitting others made me feel better, like I actually had a chance to change. I was no longer some homeless bum. I was still homeless, friendless, and essentially penniless, but now I knew a secret that allowed me to change other people's lives for the better. It made my situation feel less grim; made my dark world a little brighter.

I returned to the Plaza from the soup kitchen one day in high spirits, my belly fuller than it had been in some time. Sticking my hands in my pockets to warm the places the worn patches of my gloves didn't fully cover, my fingers closed around a quarter I'd spotted on the sidewalk on the way out of the soup kitchen. I drew it out and looked at it, watching it catch the light from the nearby street lamps.

I wish for my situation to improve. I thought before giving the coin a gentle toss and watching it disappear beneath the frigid waters. After a few minutes, I pulled off my glove, rolled up my sleeve, and hesitantly stuck my hand into the fountain where my quarter had landed. I drew it out, quickly dried my arm and tugged the fraying knitted glove back onto my hand, wondering how long it would take for my wish to take effect.

But nothing happened when I returned to the street where a row of shabby tents sat lined up along the sidewalk. My battered gray tent was still a dilapidated piece of nylon, not an apartment with four walls and a floor. No lucky lottery ticket appeared in my belongings and no social worker showed up with an offer for temporary housing. I waited, thinking it would probably take a few days.

A week passed and nothing out of the ordinary happened at all. I stood at the fountain once more, looking up at George's frosty face and feeling my face burn with frustration when I realized my wish hadn't come true.

"Why?" I asked, my voice wavering. My eyes stung and I knew it wasn't just cold air. "Why me? All I wanted was a roof over my head, or some extra cash, or something! Is that too much to ask?"

George's eyes didn't twinkle the way they usually do, and he remained as silent as ever.

I turned and threw the coin across the square before stomping back to my tent. Who was I kidding? No luck existed in my world. I was alone and friendless, with nothing but a shabby tent and dusty backpack and no one but an old statue to call a friend.

The next evening, I'd managed to procure a package of cigarettes, which helped to lighten my mood. I couldn't smoke them in the city Plaza, so I almost considered heading straight to my street corner instead of visiting George that evening. But something drew me anyway and I found my feet pulling back toward the Plaza like they had every day for the past six months. Most of the people there were hurrying along, laden with shopping bags, but a few lingered, like the crowd waiting for an encore after a concert has ended. I noticed one boy walk up to the fountain and stand in front of it for some time, quietly observing. He was likely around twelve years old – old enough to know a lot about the world but young enough to not have lost his wonder of it. He stood there in his knitted red scarf and matching hat for some time before he noticed me watching him. His gaze

turned to me and our eyes met. He looked at me quizzically before flashing me a wide smile. I was quite taken aback. I hadn't been on the receiving end of a smile in so long, I'd almost forgotten what it felt like. I smiled back.

"Merry Christmas, sir." He said, reaching into his back pocket and pulling out a crumpled five-dollar bill. Coming over to where I sat on my worn metal bench, he held it out to me.

"Thank you," I whispered, too touched to say anything else.

An older woman bustled up just then, huffing and puffing under the strain of carrying what looked like half a shop's worth of bags. She ushered the boy away, but not before allowing him to toss a coin into the fountain – a bright, shiny nickel.

I could feel George's eyes on me as they walked away. I glared up at the statue.

"No, I'm not picking up his coin. I'm not picking up any more coins. I'm done." I got up and started to head away, thinking I'd have enough time for a smoke before hitting the sack.

But something made me stop before I've taken more than three steps. Perhaps it was the same force that guided me here today, even after I'd insisted I wasn't going. Perhaps it was the same kind of quiet magic that had drawn me here in the first place. Whatever it was, I knew immediately what I needed to do.

Finding the boy's nickel took a bit of work, but as I trundled away, the coin secured in the pocket of my old wool coat, George's eyes were back to their old twinkle. I could feel a change in the stillness of the old Plaza. The frosty air didn't smell so stale anymore. The cheap plastic ornaments on the Japanese maples gleamed a bit more brightly. I found myself enjoying the quiet walk back to my sagging gray tent, which now looked whimsical instead of depressing. There was a kind of peaceful surrealism in the city at night. The chatter of shoppers as they hurried home with their goods was like music, instead of dull background noise. For the first time in a long time, I felt like I could truly experience Christmas cheer, and I didn't feel quite so disconnected from reality anymore. For the first time in a long time, I feel at peace.

My hand gripped around the boy's nickel once more, and I suddenly knew what his wish had been.

There's a secret about the old Plaza down on 8th Street. Nobody knows it but me and my old pal, George. We protect the fountain in the middle of the plaza, and the magic it contains. You wouldn't expect this old fountain to be anything great. But the kind of magic about this place runs deeper than that. By changing the lives of others, I was able to change myself. That's the secret of old George's fountain. And you can only see it if you take the time to watch. To wait. To listen.

WHAT IS SEEN IS TEMPORARY

Kallie Buss

The pastor started with a prayer
I think it was meant to shine some light for all of us grieving
he prayed about how our loved one is in God's kingdom now
but that didn't make it any better, this pain was not going to be soothed
anytime soon.

He is gone
we won't have any more memories
just the beat-up ones, that will eventually fade away.

He was about seventeen at the time, and I, a year younger
we headed out to the docks during a storm
he said that was the best kind of day to go.

When the world around you is chaotic and nearly ending
the ocean is ready to swallow you whole, the uproar of waves
without hesitance he challenged the water that surrounded us
clothes and all, he ran and ran until he was swimming and was at last free.

Never had I seen such a thing, someone finding
invincibility on such a funereal day
he wanted me to join, I could never resist him,
every part of me always gave in
his eyes were beaming and mine were too,
that afternoon last September.

His body lay there empty
sitting there staring at what used to be my reason to live
I could feel his soul, it was calling out to me.

I looked over to his mom to see if she could feel him too
she sat there in all black, a tissue held to her eyes as she too, was looking at his body
her chin was held up high, she was a strong woman
but grief had overcome her.
I tuned back in to the pastor speaking the words he offered to us
with a trying voice he recited 2 Corinthians 4:17-18
he spoke of the life that is gone from earth but carries on to Heaven
how even in death, he is still alive because he believed in the one true God.

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us
an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.
So, we fix our eyes
not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen
is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”.

We met in church, both in the same Sunday school
when we could we would often play tag or dress up
I would dress as a fairy and him, a dinosaur
we would roar and spread fairy powers amongst the ones around us.

He would stomp on my toes and laugh
while I spread dust on him to make leaves grow out of his ears
we would giggle and run all around the room.

Begging our moms to let us have playdates
we never wanted to leave each other's sides
not a care in the world, we were just two kids who loved each other.

The funeral was close to over now. I had hardly paid
attention to a word said I couldn't keep my mind from reliving
each and every memory we had together
I wanted to absorb every memory I could think of and keep it forever
if only I had known I would be sitting here today.

I can't stop looking at your body, is it even yours?
this feels like it's been made up, a soul too young to be dying
it hurts that God took you from me, that he wanted you with him
I need you here or I there, with you.

They lowered your casket into the hole in the ground
the world has said their goodbyes to you
but I have not, I don't know that I ever will
I just wish that I could have gone with you.

SALVATION'S SQUARES

Neve Peters

Tastes are triggering, and mouths are watering,
Your love inspires.
Napkins, not necessary, Thank
you for your creative design.

Made from scratch with sugar, oil, eggs,
Your love is perfect.
So, plates can be licked clean, You
Fight for us more and more.

Hot iron and crackling mix,
Your love shows you are listening.
Batter oozing out the sides
You can only provide.

Like sticky silky syrup it fills the holes, Your
love is unconditional.
Round or square you really do not mind,
Your love is pure and holy.

Topped with butter which melts like ice,
Thankful for my fork and knife.
Like whipped, white, wonderful sweet cream,
Your love is pure and holy.

With every golden and crispy bite,
Your love is righteous.
Worshiping and completely worry free,
What a wonderful creation.

Even when I am not in the mood something smells good, Your
love is miraculous,
Garnished with berries bursting with life, Sweet,
strawberries, sauced.

Take one bite and you are in love,
They are the best breakfast to ever be on your tongue.

HALF COURT

Sifo Dyas

My little sister walked to school by herself today. Mom bought a taser for her birthday to keep the crows from picking at her lunch. Fourth Grade—Fourth Amendment.

The crows watched her pass the courtyard every day, perched high on their bleachers. When the blues stopped echoing on the corner of Jim's bakery, the crows would swoop down from their nest and begin their malicious assault—their feeding frenzy.

As they circled her, their black feathers became entangled between the beating sunlight and her dancing fists. "Are those books even yours? You think you can grow up to be somebody?" They said.

The crowd looked on, shimmering white scarecrows glistening in the heat. Sparks shot out of her hand and the crows flew away.

A ball rolled across my sister's foot and a referee from the court decided she had unreasonably defended herself by tazing the men who had come for her—that she abused her rights.

The crowd of scarecrows ruled she traveled with the 9th Amendment. What does that judge know from running the game? I bet their sister's cries never went ignored.

How?

How can a free citizen in the United States of America go too far with protecting themselves when a flock of hungry thieves descend upon them and take their possessions? The next day, mama brought my little sister home from the courthouse and told her not to cry, told her that as long as we different, we can never play full-court like the whites can.

THE FAIRY RING

Gracie Camp

My baby cries when she is born. I cry too, not from happiness as I have heard so many other women say, but from pain. It rips through me in wave after wave, and I wish I could give up. I cannot. My body will not let me, so I endure. With the final push, my cry is mingled with another, smaller sound, and a great weight leaves my body.

One of the women in the room gently collects the baby from between my legs and holds her up so I can see. The tiny girl's eyes are pinched closed, her face contorted in a violent scream, and she is covered in blood, but still the women around me chorus together, "She's beautiful, what a wonderful gift." The midwife congratulates me as she cuts her away, but I cannot find the strength in my body to feel proud. I am so tired that I fall into darkness to the lullaby of my child's screams.

I wake to silence. No light diffuses through the small oilcloth window, and the fire has burned down to a few glowing embers. The silence is eerie, and suddenly I can feel my body tense like a frightened doe. There is nothing here, I tell myself.

When my eyes adjust to the darkness, I can see the slumped shape of my husband seated against the wall next to the crib he built himself. I move closer to the edge of the bed to peer inside at my baby, body protesting, limbs still heavy with exhaustion, and when I finally catch a glimpse of her, I freeze. With the blood cleared away, all wrapped up in a blanket, still and cast in shadows, she looks...dead. Then her eyes open and I can't hold back a whimper that escapes my throat. Those eyes are luminous, horrible, and inhuman. In their depths I see the forest, a ring of mushrooms, and the dangerous and beautiful creatures that lurk between them.

My husband stirs. He sees me there, watching the creature that has replaced my daughter, and does not think there is anything wrong. He takes the baby in his arms and coos lovingly at it. The warm glow of the fire casts shadows over the hand that reaches out towards his face. Tiny fingers scrape across his skin, and he just smiles.

The baby begins whimpering. It sounds like a wounded animal. "I think she is hungry," my husband says fondly as he holds the baby out to me.

Its eyes are closed, so it is easier to convince myself that I have not just seen something unholy, but my hands still tremble as they reach for the baby. Shrugging off my shawl and exposing my chest sends a cold shock of air across my skin, raising gooseflesh across the exposed area. The creature cries weakly in my arms, and I shiver again, but not from the chill.

At the proximity to the child, my breast begins to leak. The babe's mouth stretches wide as a wound, and I cannot bring myself to hold it any closer. I look frantically over to my husband, but he has fallen asleep again. The creature opens its eyes. I drop it hastily back in the crib and crawl back into bed, panting in terror.

Outside our hut, the wind whispers.

Days pass. I stay in bed; body weak, mind troubled. Every night I hear things outside the door, scraping long inhuman fingernails against the whorls in the wood, singing discordant melodies in high reedy voices. I am no fool. I know the stories people tell about the strange creatures that dwell in the woods. There are things in the trees just beyond these walls, dancing inside rings of mushrooms. They are beings of great power and even

greater mischief who could grant you your heart's desire in an instant. Sometimes, the tales say, the fair folk take children. They steal down your chimney to pluck newborns from their cribs, and if you're particularly unlucky, they leave you one of their own in return.

The baby, who is not my baby, lies still and silent next to me on the bed, its breathing is shallow and its skin vellum-pale. Its eyes part just a fraction, but it's enough to see the glint of something unnatural hiding in its colorless gaze.

I cannot bear to touch it. Every night I sit at the foot of my bed and pray, for surely God would not allow such an unholy thing to live in the house of His humble servant. Its skin spoils like rotten milk, its eyes grow dull as river rocks, even its cries weaken to feeble whimpers, and yet still it remains.

Everything is quiet.

Whispers seep through the cracks in the stone.

I've heard that the only way to get rid of a changeling is to burn it. Toss a fairy in the fire and it will jump out the chimney to avoid the flames.

The dirt is so cold under my feet, but I stand nonetheless, reaching out for this repulsive thing pretending to be my child. My fingers brush against its face. The skin there is cool and soft and disgusting. It begins to cry.

My husband finds me holding the thing over the fire pit, tears dripping off my chin, spitting foul words into those lifeless eyes. He shouts and wrestles the creature from my grip. It hasn't stopped crying since the moment I touched it. "How could you do this?" He asks, "She is your daughter!" But he can't see the things I can.

Despite our needs, my husband doesn't leave the house anymore. He keeps a close, furious eye on me and that creature, holding it close to his chest, nursing it with goat's milk, loving it like a real child. He tries to ask me why I did it, but I cannot find the words to tell him. I cannot find the words for much of anything these days.

Six days after the creature arrives in our home, I wake up and it is gone. My husband is kneeling on the floor, gently cradling its cold, breathless body and keening a long, drawn-out lament. He senses my gaze and locks his eyes on me. "This is what you wanted, isn't it?"

He buries her in the woods, but I do not go until much later. My husband has marked the spot with a plain wooden cross. The grass underneath its crooked arms is painfully green, and around the grave is a small, perfect circle of toadstools.

The breeze brushes gently past me, and on it I can hear whispers.





Quentin Ragan, *First Ray on Fitz Roy*

FIRE ON BRIMSTONE ALLEY

Quentin Ragan

I am what is left of my birth.

Flipping through pages
of a distressed novelist
On the street corner I call
brimstone alley.

Few blocks down a car backfires.
Leaping into my skin.

Here I am with
Weight and weight,
But for nothing but a few deaths
Under my belt

Leaning against a stop sign
limpid feelings couldn't meet me
again
if I am here with
a hero's gloom
making me easy
in a flexing enclosure

Everything is not me.
Everyone
is speaking false passions.

This notion in the human city.

passivity
Stealing Skin
We solemn faces
waiting for more walls
Mourning
In the afterlife of our youth

I stay in my room
To stay away from myself
Out here

For the moment of known death
Is the start
of the drumroll

QUESTIONS

Quentin Ragan

Is Carnation a boy?

Eh, idk he likes flowers.

Is he ill?

A little too young to tell.

How does he get along with other kids?

Well I don't know. He likes to lay down.

Where at?

Wherever there is a flat surface.

What does he look at?

I don't know, clouds, stuff that's bigger than him.

Why clouds?

He says, "I'm thanking the sculptor."

Who is the sculptor?

I've asked, but he just kneels down and ties his shoes.

MORNING AFTER

Quentin Ragan

Awoken.

The light shining through the window
An over exposed morning
couple of slug's slime to the bathroom
toothbrush frayed in a porcelain cup
And the mirror cracked from corner to corner
Line up on its center and throw half a face off

The black and white checkered floor under
Blood puddles, in the white porcelain sink.
Buoyant, a shattered corner of the mirror,
Floating as a safety raft
For a small scurrying ant.

In the mirror, there is a portrait, but the
Back wall doesn't have much to do with it.
It's yellowing and always has opinions
On nudity.

MY INFLUENTIAL SCAR

Amy Law

I blinked my eyes open as confusing memories flooded my thoughts. Did that really happen last night? It was hard to flutter the blur from my swollen, red eyes. I tried again to focus. The sun painted zebra stripes across my body and the thin comforter on the bed as it penetrated through slots in the wooden shuttered windows. I looked next to me, an empty bed. I was the last to wake. Where was everyone else? As I shifted and placed my left hand on the bed at my side, in an effort to push my body up to seated position, I felt a stabbing pain up my entire arm, paralyzing my movements. Discouraged, I laid back down on my back, grabbing for the point of discomfort with the opposite hand, just as my two travel partners walked into the bedroom. Their downturned eyes confirmed. It did in fact happen. And it was only the first night.

The day before, as the plane started its descent, the capital city of Managua came into view. It was hard to tell whether the elevation change, or the sight of the city had caused my stomach to suddenly drop. My mind conjured up the crazy looks I had gotten from people when I told them I was going to Nicaragua on vacation. The sideways, half-smiles – especially my mom’s – always had an air of worry attached. The unknown scares people, and the only things associated with the word Nicaragua seemed to be violence, war, and danger. People constantly questioned my choice to go. They said, you should not go! It’s too dangerous! You are nuts! Well here I was. After attempting to convince my mom we would be okay and promising again and again to check in and stick together, the three of us, (Lisa, Haley, and I), were about to land in a new country. It would be my first time in a country so underdeveloped.

As the city’s buildings zoomed into focus, the tattered, multicolored, make shift tin rooftops appeared, each different in shape, as if put together by a child who had run out of supplies. Slanted and misshapen, built with stacked bricks and ribbed metal sheets, they were simple structures that looked to barely be standing. The roads and yards, or lack thereof, consisted of dirt and dust. No pavement or sidewalks, just uneven, winding paths. Colorful laundry hung from barred windows with lines strewn across yards and draped between roof tops. The shacks sat so close to one another it was hard to tell where one roof started and where one ended. The only indication was a change in texture or color, displayed by the huge variety of materials that had been used to construct them. The rough edges of the homes reminded me of a travel documentary I’d watched, in which missionaries visited India to bring in medicine and food to the poor, overcrowded neighborhoods. I started to panic internally. Where was I about to spend the next week? What had I gotten myself into? I did not belong here. I think my friends saw the change in my face as they looked at me with worried eyes.

Early that next morning, as my friends Lisa and Haley approached the bedside, I realized I couldn’t move my arm from any position besides hanging straight down at my side. If I bent my arm or lifted it at all, the sharp pain would zap it back down. As Lisa slowly peeled back the cotton gauze barely sticking with the medical tape, I looked at the wound in the daylight and with a clearer state of mind. There was no doubt that this needed medical attention. Self-diagnosed talk of stitches and the visual confirmation of the bone-deep wound caused even more alarm. I needed help dressing. My friends

slipped my loosest fitting tank top over the bikini top I had apparently worn to bed the night before.

Lisa and Haley are serial deal finders, always in search for the best bargain and the most exotic destinations. They had found this offer on a random weekday and texted me at work with a simple 'Amy! Do you have \$600? and PTO?' That depended on what insane idea they had formed. I was used to their sporadic, random travel suggestions, but this time they had definitely chosen a foreign journey. We had been to Mexico and Hawaii but for some reason this seemed different. If I am being honest, at the time, I wasn't even entirely sure where Nicaragua was. I couldn't have pointed to the exact location on a map or known where to even start looking.

Before I would commit, I had googled everything there was to know about Nicaragua and the traveler's safety warnings connected to the country. I compiled a list, something I do with almost every aspect of my life, outlining the reason to go and the concerns I had. Nicaragua was the second poorest country in Central America. My mind raced with images of dirt roads and skinny, barefoot starving children, all diseased and contagious. I pictured straw huts, floorless and filthy, wandering animals and nothing resembling a functional city. Looking back now, I realize how ridiculous and ignorant these ideas were.

One of my first reference checks was with the US Embassy website. There were no travel warnings, no vaccinations required to enter, nothing that seemed outrageous or more dangerous than any other city. Yes, they listed crime, pickpocketing, robbery, and kidnapping, but my friends convinced me those things happen in any city. Even at home, there were places I avoided after dark, and places where I held on extra tight to my purse. The site advised staying at the resort after dark, not wearing anything flashy, such as jewelry or name brands, and always being mindful and attentive to the surroundings. I didn't like the sounds of any of these suggestions or warnings. This was supposed to be a vacation. The only positive and reassuring information offered was that I would be on the west side of the country, which had fewer drug trafficking crimes. Great.

Back at the bungalow, my two friends helped me to the resort bar that also served as the main office. Dexter, the activities coordinator and surf instructor at the hotel, immediately volunteered to drive me to the town hospital. As I crawled into the backseat, all I was thinking was how stupid this whole trip was. Homesickness hit me hard. The roadway was a narrow cobblestone street. The roads were not maintained, and unpredictable pot holes covered the dirt streets. It was a miracle the little sedan made it over some of the bumps, bottoming out a few times as I played Jell-O in the back seat uncontrollably with each surprising dip. As we neared town, the path turned to pavement. Storefronts on both sides seemed much too close as we swiftly made our way to a large gate at a dead-end alleyway. The parking lot was cluttered with children running barefoot, wandering locals, and anorexic, homeless dogs. I knew there was a reason for my initial paranoia. No way would there be adequate medical treatment available at this filthy location. I sat in silence, concentrating on the constant throb in my arm and wondering how bad it really was. I had never had stitches or broken a bone. I was always overly careful. An image of my mom saying 'I told you so' kept popping into my head. Damn it, maybe she was right this time.

When the car stopped in front of the 'hospital', I was shocked. The brick building, once painted a turquoise green, was now chipped in so many places it was more of a dark brown than any other color. There were no doors or windows, just an opening in the

exposed brick. Four black bars stood in each window, like bars in the windows of a prison. I am not sure the purpose of those bars or how the parallel steel columns would keep anything or anyone in or out. I walked in as Dexter translated and pointed at my blood-stained bandage.

“Hola” I smiled, thinking highly of the one Spanish word I knew.

Two women in their mid-forties escorted me into a room on the left side of the main entrance. As I walked with them, my wandering eyes caught glimpses of the rest of the hospital. Three, maybe four, beds served as the entire ward. One was labeled above the rusted head rest with a handwritten sign on an old floppy piece of cardboard that read ICU. Was this seriously what served as the intensive care unit? I was going to die here. I knew it.

The room where I would be examined was a small, perfectly square space. A small barred window allowed light to pass through in the left corner and a cabinet with silver instruments, bottles of water, and rust-colored liquid took up the wall underneath it. A patient’s bed ran along the opposite side. The bed was a wobbly, rickety old cot, the mattress covered in a few simple black garbage bags taped together with clear adhesive. I sat down on the only other furniture in the room, a small wicker chair. As one woman shuffled around inside the cabinet, tears filled my eyes.

The other woman in front of me took off the self-doctored gauzy wrap just as the other popped up with a terrifying sight. She held the oldest-looking syringe I have ever seen. The shiny metal contraption was dated to say the least. It was huge. The bulbous middle section that held the medication – what medication I still don’t know for sure – was attached with a long, thick needle. I felt like it belonged in Frankenstein’s lab, not in a common doctor’s office. She came at me with the shot, readying to poke my elbow. I put my hands up, not understanding a single word coming from her mouth.

“Okay. Okay,” she kept saying. She tried to lower my raised arm.

The language barrier was more frightening than the antique needle she was trying to push inside me. I screamed for Haley who had taken Spanish in high school, hoping she could recognize a word and praying she paid attention in that class. Dexter rushed in with her and helped translate everything. There was no way either of them was leaving that room again.

“It’s a local anesthesia. It will help numb your arm. It’s nothing bad,” Dexter reassured me.

“Okay,” I blurted more loudly than I’d intended. My adrenaline and emotions were on overload.

“They want to know about...” He drifted back to Spanish for a moment, trying to understand the translation and asking questions of the nurses. He came back to our English conversation without hesitation. How did he go back and forth so flawlessly?

“Tetanus...have you had that?”

“Yes,” I answered, somewhat more controlled this time. I had just been to the doctor less than a month before. Clumsily again, I had stepped on a nail that went right through my dollar flips flops and rested in the heel of my right foot.

“Si si,” he translated for the two who still looked at him with confused expressions.

I didn’t need another shot. What would happen if I had a double dose this close to the last? I thought it was a once-every-10-years thing. Luckily, they had moved on and were back at the task of fixing me up.

After they scrubbed my already healing wound clean, which reopened all the blood clots from the night before, I was moved to the bed where I lay flat on my back. Panic stuck as they announced it was not a doable procedure. We should have come last night. The cut had had too much time to heal. I thought that was game over. We would have to jump on the next plane and get home for treatment. I could not have an open wound in the humid jungle without a huge chance of infection, or worse. Haley stood at the foot of the bed with a clear expression of 'I feel so bad for you.' We made eye contact and she knew how scared I was at this moment and how scared I had been about the trip in the first place.

In an attempt to lighten the tension of the room, she said, "Hey, you are going to have a pretty cool scar."

They approached again with the shot as Dexter explained how it would numb the area that was getting stitches. I closed my eyes and tried to remember how I had gotten myself in this situation to begin with.

Yesterday, we had arrived at the resort just before the sun set. It was even better than in the hundreds of pictures I had scanned through before we departed. The overgrown green jungle plants hung above the narrow cement pathways. Each path speared out from the centrally located pool that connected all bungalows to the center of the property. The paths curved around various colored flowers and huge stripped leaves growing straight from the ground. Red, orange, green, and yellow patterned tiles formed a wide staircase that lead from the pool to the bar and created a glowing sensation as dusk settled.

The tall thatched roof, laid out with dried, almost off-white hay, formed an oversized hut like the ones I had imaged. Tall, dark brown bamboo poles were posted every few feet, holding up the Panama hat-shaped ceiling. Two colorful hammocks draped the entry way fringe dangling inches from the floor. The bar itself was a full circle, the counter tops a glossy, dark, stained wood with tall, backed stools lacquered in a matching tint. Long, orange benches matching the tiles' shade shaped the outer walls, covered in an array of fluffed, overstuffed multi-patterned pillows. Even though I felt like I was in the middle of nowhere, a Seahawks game, of all things, played on a flat screen TV directly above the bar.

We were shown to bungalow number 9, as the events coordinator Dexter dragged all of our over-packed luggage behind us. The first thing I noticed was a group of kittens roaming around our porch and meowing relentlessly. Dexter scared them way, but I liked them, for now. Our one-bedroom cottage, complete with a kitchen, fresh water, and AC contained all the comforts of home. It consisted of a small living room complete with TV and DVD player, a small bedroom with a queen mattress off the living area, and a connecting bathroom. The kitchen included a stove, a fridge, a complete dish set, a huge sink, and a long counter top bar with two stools. Each room hosted an oversized ceiling fan, blades made from stiff imitation palm leaves. As I looked around, I was amazed at the difference from the dirty Managua streets and relieved by the similarities of home.

After unpacking and slipping my passport and most of my cash into the room safe, I walked with Lisa and Haley down our narrow rock-worked path to the bar. We were greeted by the crying kittens again. We paused to pet and name each one. Even though it was dark by now, small lights lined along each path made the entire property glow in a connect-the-dots way. We walked the lighted trail, followed by our new pets, and then stumbled upon the gleaming pool. Its water changed color as the lights below its surface

flashed from a dark purple to a bright red. A small frog was slowly swimming its length. Each gathering and splaying of his back legs reminded me of swimming lessons at the local pool as a kid. His frog kick was in great form.

The bar wasn't crowded when we arrived. We grabbed three stools right up at the counter and plopped down, ready for a cool drink and dinner. Greg, the owner of the resort sat next to us and introduced us to his specialty, a mango shooter. He seemed like a normal, older white man. He was originally from Florida and had moved here for a less busy, slow-paced life style. For some reason this shocked me. It was such a random place to move. I hadn't even known about its existence weeks earlier. We talked and drank, comparing travel stories – mine limited – and debating about the better football team. To this day, I am still not sure what exactly goes into a mango shooter, but I do know it goes down much too easily. After a couple of those, I was feeling good, despite the sleep deprivation. We started a bar tab and made friends with the bartender. The night progressed fast from there. We hooked up our phones to the sound system and played ridiculous party songs: Spice Girls, Justin Bieber, you name it from the '90s. We danced, and we laughed, and we jumped in the pool to join the frog, and we celebrated our arrival maybe a little too much, if I am being honest.

Back in our room, after the bar had been kept open much past the posted closing time, we put together a late-night feast of leftover travel snacks. Suddenly, a cat jumped up on the counter. It startled me. That's an understatement. It scared the crap out of me. My body's reaction to this surprise made me jump, and three glass cups accidentally crashed onto the neatly swept tile floor. The shattering noise sent that cat into hysterics, and an additional two glasses gave into gravity and joined the broken glass party on the floor. Somehow, in the commotion and frantic effort to control the situation, my arm, just above my elbow, endured a deep gash from the broken glass shards. Maybe I had leaned on a piece while attempting to shoo the cat down? Maybe a piece flew through the air? Either way, there was blood.

Looking back now, the events unfolded in muffled cloudy images, some moments clear as day, while others did not exist at all, until I was told about them later. I have a clear memory of standing at the carved rock sink of the bathroom as Haley held my arm under the running ice-cold water. Later, I realized the dangers of using the unpurified spout to clean my wound. As I stood there in a daze, I watched the pink liquid drizzle down the drain. There was a lot of blood, but surprisingly not much pain. I tried to look at the cut. The placement was awkwardly above my elbow. I couldn't find an angle to get a full-on look without a mirror. I could make out a thick flap of skin but was too terrified to touch it and discover the true depth of the puncture. My friends called the front desk, which was just the cell phone of an on-call employee. The bartender from the night, Julio, arrived with a first aid kit. At first, he laughed at our clumsiness, and then he noticed the blood. He cleaned me up, bandaged my elbow, and tucked me in bed. All of which I have no personal recollection of.

In the operating room I opened my eyes from my daydream. I didn't want to think about the ridiculousness of my actions. While the two women rubbed and poked and cleaned me up to prepare me for stitches, I stared at the wall next to me and noticed something very disturbing. There were obvious blood splatters in various places on the paint. Dried up and sitting there like a memorial to the past patients and their emergencies. I had to look away. I was already freaking out internally about the

cleanliness of this place. I tried to distract myself with other things. How much was this going to cost me? Did I bring my insurance card? I could not handle another thing to worry about.

Trying to push my thoughts aside, I rolled my head to face the opposite direction just in time to see one of the nurses use a plastic water bottle to clean a metal clamp holding cotton. She reached for another bottle containing the brown red liquid I had noticed when I walked in the room. Was that iodine? Did people still use that? It seemed a medical material that was past its time. Only in old westerns did you see a bottle of that sitting at the doctor's office. She coated the cotton ball and rubbed the stain on my arm. I guess you must make do with the resources you have.

They pulled out the hook for stitches, and I quickly looked away but was brought back to the room when they started talking to me in Spanish again. I had no clue what they wanted and simply smiled back at them. Dexter poked his head from around the corner and explained they wanted me to make a fist and squeeze. Again, and again, I clenched and released. The nurse was worried I had cut a tendon and wanted to make sure they didn't hit it with the stitch. The looks on their faces and the way they closely evaluated each grip frightened me. Both nurses looked at my arm and then at each other. Their eyes with that sad, "Poor thing" look. They were genuinely concerned. I was surprised by the feeling, or lack thereof, when they started the procedure of sewing me back up. I could feel pressure but no pain. My body was tense and cold sweat was forming from my body's reaction to its brace for the pain. I glanced at Haley and asked how it looked. Her response was horrifying.

"Well, the inside stitches are almost done. And they look good," Haley said very slowly. The inside stitches. Holy shit.

The rest of the mini operation went fine. They sat me up and smiled at me. Even though we could not communicate with each other in the form of words, those smiles said it all, and I hope they received my thank you message as well. We walked out to the main room, but before I could leave, they asked me to sign the medical records book. Instead of some crazy complicated technological recordkeeping system, they literally had a small spiral notebook on a table. They flipped to the next open page and hand wrote in my name, spelled wrong (another language barrier), and had me sign next to it. This was their record of me acknowledging that I received medical services. Along with a small slip of paper, no bigger than a post it and with no header or ledger distinguishing it as a hospital document, they wrote me two prescriptions. Here it comes, I remember thinking, the bill. To my surprise, that was it. No bill. No cost. No insurance information exchanged. Everything, as Dexter explained, was covered by the government. There was free medical care to anyone, even visitors of their country. I could not believe it. I felt like I needed to give them something or leave some cash for them to use at their exposal for hospital equipment or supplies. I was advised this would have been insulting to them and that they did their job and that was it.

Dexter took me to fill the prescriptions, which would have been impossible without his Spanish translations. We bought some gauze and tape for the rest of the trip from a small pharmacy that looked more like a 7-11. There were random items scattered about with no real organizational system, yet Dexter knew exactly where to look for what we needed. The man at the checkout asked if I was okay in English. The language recognition caught me off guard and prevented me from answering him in words. I must have looked silly

with the blank stare on my face. He too had a look of true compassion and interest in my wellbeing. I had seven more days of pills and bandage changes to think about now.

I was a little bummed thinking about the rest of the week. I wanted to snorkel and experience the zip line in town. I doubted I would be able to do anything. I could barely lift a full bottle of water without assistance from my other hand. The nurses had been so troubled by my tendon that I started thinking maybe I had injured it worse than I, or even they, had thought. I tried to grip different items in the car ride home – my purse, my water, Haley’s hand – but I could barely squeeze. It was like when a foot falls asleep, and it’s moving, but there isn’t any feeling of the steps. The sensation was hard to understand. It was scary to have no control over my muscles and simple movements. As I voiced my concerns with my friends in the back seat, Dexter joked that it would be fine.

“You can surf tomorrow. I’ll take you,” he said with a laugh.

He was a surf instructor, so I knew that had to be a lie. Later, he did say, with seriousness, that the nurses had cleared me to swim and participate in any activity. I just had to pay attention and clean and change the bandage if it got wet or dirty. Yeah, right. No way I was going to get into shark infested waters with a chance of a drop of blood exiting my arm. Sharks could smell that from miles away, at least I thought I remembered that from my binge-watching of Shark Week. We headed back to the hotel. I closed my eyes and thought about the compassion and attention I had just received from so many strangers in town. It crossed my mind that maybe Nicaragua was better than home. The attention from doctors and pharmacist seemed to be better, at least, and the price of care.

Throughout the following week, the entire staff became my home away from home parents, asking me if I took my medicine, reminding me when I didn’t. It was cute, and somewhat annoying, but they seemed to honestly care about my safety and my wound.

“Yes, Mom! Yes, Dad!” I stated each time, as we both smiled half-joking and half-appreciative of the support.

Each day, my arm felt better and stronger. Within just a few hours, I was able to hold a glass of ice water. I was so relieved that the feeling and strength had come back as quickly as it had. I had considered so many unlikely complications and scenarios that this slight relief was the best part of that day. While it was a pain to carry around my bandages and tape to change the dressing, and to make sure to slip both my antibiotic and pain killer in whatever shorts I was wearing, I was ecstatic to participate in the memories with my friends. I also had to make sure each picture we sent to Mom was mindfully posed from my right side. Every single image included the giant cotton square tapped fashionably above my elbow.

I was able to do all the things I wanted on the trip – swim in the ocean, zip line, and release baby turtles into the sea. What seemed like a life altering event turned out to be much less dramatic when looking at the trip as a whole. It was just like any other trip. We sat by the pool, went on excursions, explored restaurants and shops, and lazed around in the sun like the sleeping cats on our porch. Plus, I went home with a pretty great square tan line from the constant bandage as well.

When I landed in this country, I thought so little of its people. They lived so rough and seemed so poor. It is sad to think I associated poor with stupid, but I did. It was eye-opening to see that there is medicine everywhere. I could go anywhere, and I would be okay. If I made it through this experience, I could take chances again and see more of the world without fear. There would always be a way. My friends looked at me like I was

crazy when I talked about how fascinated I was with the stiches.

They asked me, “How do you think people who live here get treatment? Do you think they never get sick or have emergencies? Everyone everywhere needs medicine.”

My eyes opened, and the sheltered way I had been thinking of the world changed. Up until now, I had not realized how good I had it. I had paved streets, doors at my house and floors inside. I had five grocery stores within walking distance from my home. I didn’t need all that, and it was apparent I could survive with much less. I realized I had a pretty limited perspective of lifestyles outside of my own.

Before this trip, people had filled my head with concerns, and I had believed them all. I judged and created monsters of people who turned out to be some of the most caring I’d ever met and still talk to regularly. On the day I got home, I went to my family physician to have my stiches removed. She was in awe of the work. She explained to me that it looked as though they must have run out of regular stitching wire and had used a plastic-based, thicker substance for the last few. She told me the work was perfect, and she didn’t think she would have been able to make such a clean stich, given the materials. I like to tell people that today and give my nurses in Nicaragua the credit and praise they deserve.

Every time I catch a glimpse of my small scar, I remember how lucky I really am. My friends joke about how jealous and envious they are of my scar. I got to take home a permanent keepsake that no one else has from the vacation. Even though there are still a few pressure points that remain numb on my arm, my heart and mind have been awakened. That stupid, irresponsible night, while somewhat embarrassing to talk about, has forced me to find a new perspective. Nicaragua left its mark on me. The only thing left to do is plan my next adventure.

DID YOU HEAR ABOUT DANNY?

Asya Wilson

For Jill, my mother

Danny had his eyes on that shiny, new car the day he saw it down at the town's only car dealership. It was 1992, in the middle of a balmy summer, when the car showed up in town. The tan 1971 Ford probably wasn't nothing to other people up in New York or Chicago or some other fancy city like that, but here in this shabby town it was a gem. It was no surprise then, that Danny wasn't the only one with his eyes on the car. In such a small town, everyone knew everyone, and news traveled fast. Maybe the car became such a prize to the townspeople because the only other cars for sale were tattered up so badly you'd think for sure that they'd been in a car accident, or two. It almost always took about two or three goes before any of them would start too. Compared to them, the old Ford looked as nice as the latest Mercedes model that the townspeople could only see in commercials on their fuzzy TV screens. The car quickly became the new hot topic of the town and everyone was taking turns guessing who'd snatch it up first. Nobody even thought to guess that Danny would buy the car. Danny didn't have money to spare and just about everyone knew it.

Danny graduated high school years ago, though as time passed no one could really remember exactly when he graduated. Or, maybe, no one cared to remember. Since then he has been working jobs here and there and spends the rest of his time at home or walking about town. Danny didn't really have any friends, so his mother and younger sister were his usual company. His father had passed away years ago, before they moved to town. They lived in a small, two-bedroom house at the end of the road; it wasn't the nicest looking house around. It had clumps of moss collected on top of the mangled roof, the door and non-functioning garage were covered in rust, some of the windows had cracks along the sides, and the porch would creak whenever anyone walked on it; it would be any day now that someone's foot would break straight through to the ground underneath it. As anyone could tell by their house, the family didn't have the most money, but they still got by. This was true for almost every family living here, but Danny and his family were just a bit more worse off than the others. As the townspeople realized this, they became the target of the townspeople's gossip and a source of gratification for the families that had just a bit more than they did.

Danny was known by most of the townspeople as a deadbeat kid ever since his high school years. Back then, Danny got himself into all kinds of trouble. Once he was caught stealing some candy from a gas station along with some of his no-good friends after school. Another time he was caught cheating off Sandy Lim's test, the top student in their grade; everyone knew she was the smartest student, as Sandy didn't let any of her classmates forget. He even got into a fight once with a husky student named Benton West after Benton badmouthed Danny's mother and father. Most of the townspeople decided it was because he lacked a father figure in the house to teach him right from wrong. It was only when his mother fell ill and was bedridden for nearly an entire month during his senior year that Danny straighten out. But even though Danny stopped getting into trouble a long time ago the townspeople still saw him as the same troublesome kid he used

to be. Though no one admitted it, they all felt a sense of satisfaction when they found out he didn't end up going away to college while their children did. They guessed it was because he either couldn't afford it or couldn't get accepted to a school. Some thought it was both reasons. They would gossip about whether or not Danny would ever get a commendable job and a better home for his mother and sister. They were surprised and greatly amused when they heard that Danny was planning to buy the new car. "What did you say? Danny from down the street wants to buy that new car? How in the world could he do that?" exclaimed one of the wives at one of the town's routine dinner parties for the better-off families on the block. She was laughing and wheezing so much that her voice was hoarse and almost unintelligible. Though everyone at the dinner party joined in on the wife's hysterical laughing. No one could fathom the idea that the Danny who lived in the battered house at the end of the street could ever afford the car. Any other typical day, Danny would be too insignificant a topic to quench the town's hunger for gossip, but the townspeople took a sense of pride when their suspicions became true and, in this case, Danny was almost too easy a target. They were itching to hear news that someone other than Danny had bought the car, so they could gather together and relish in their foresight.

But, despite all the doubt of the townspeople, Danny had a plan. The day Danny saw that glistening, new car parked out front across the street from where he walked to his job at the diner every other evening, he decided that he had to have it. It was the nicest thing Danny had ever seen in town, and he always dreamt of driving his own car with the windows down and the radio on full blast like they do in the movies. So, the next day Danny went out in search of another job. He worked at the diner, but that only gave him so much money and it definitely wasn't enough to buy the car. The hefty price tag of the Ford was what was to be expected for the nicest car the town had seen in ages. Even the wellest off families in town couldn't afford the car without some effort. It'd take something like a massively successful garage sale or some earnest saving before anyone could buy the car. Even if Danny saved every last penny he earned from the dinner for a year he still wouldn't have enough. But Danny wanted it now; he didn't want to wait a year anyhow. After a few days of searching, Danny finally found another job at a gas station nearby. A job wasn't easy to come by in town because the few jobs that were available were already taken by the residents. It was pure luck that someone at the gas station Danny had frequently went to for a late-night snack was moving out of town and had to quit. Now Danny had two jobs and was eager to save as much as he could as soon as he could, so he could buy the Ford.

Hearing that Danny had gotten a second job didn't convince the townspeople though. Word even got around that Danny had threatened the previous worker, forcing him to quit, just so he could get the job. Though this rumor lacked any evidence whatsoever and was in fact untrue, the lingering memory of Danny's past troublesome ways were reason enough for the townspeople to invest in such rumors. By now they had their own guesses of who'd be able to buy the car first. There was Mr. Wilkon, a middle-aged man with two sons and an almost criminally-young fiancée. Mr. Wilkon had one of the nicer homes in town and was also one of the very few people who already had a car. Most people could manage just fine walking or riding their bike to anywhere they needed to go, so cars were essentially a luxury in town. Mr. Wilkon was also probably the closest thing to famous in town because he owned the restaurant that sat right in the center of it. Everyone raved about how fancy the place was with its antique china and lace tablecloths. The food

wasn't anything special nor the service, but the fancy embellishments inside the restaurant made up for that. Then there was Jane Aubrey, who everyone called Miss Aubrey. Miss Aubrey was a single woman who had moved to town because she wanted to be free from the fast-paced city life, or so she told everyone who asked. Her house was always sparkling clean from window to window and was surrounded by a perfectly groomed garden in the warmer months. Everyone knew Miss Aubrey didn't have money problems, so when word got around that she was interested in the new car no one doubted she'd go out and buy it. There were many other people who wanted to buy the car too, some more likely than others to actually be able to. The buzz about the car just got louder as more and more contenders for who might buy it arose.

But there was someone in town who believed Danny could do it. It was his mother. She always believed in her son and supported whatever he did. Even during his troublesome teenage years, she was supportive and never gave up on Danny. She knew he wanted the car and how much he was working to save for it. As per the disposition of a small town, she also knew about how everyone didn't think he could do it. This hurt her pride as a mother, a pride only mothers could truly understand. She believed in her heart, like any mother would, that her son was capable of anything. She felt sorry toward Danny, every time she'd hear him leave early for work and return late at night. She always wanted to do all she could for her children, but she could only do so much. Ever since she first became gravely sick, her weak body has pulled her in and out of sickness. Every time however, Danny was there to help around the house and help care for his younger sister. She was always grateful toward Danny but, even more, she was sorry that she couldn't do more for him.

Danny knew all too well about Mr. Wilkon and Miss Aubrey and all the other people that were interested in the car. It was impossible not to know in this town. He eventually got wind of the talk about how everyone thought he'd never get the car and even how some suspected he had threatened the previous worker to get his second job at the gas station. At first Danny wanted the car because it was the nicest car he'd ever seen and because he loved the idea that he wouldn't have to walk everywhere in town, but now he wanted it even more to prove to his busy-body town that he could buy something as great as a car. He wanted to ride around town, showing everyone the great life, he was living.

It had been just about a month that Danny had been working every day and night, saving all that he could, when he saw a man while walking to work that was looking at the Ford. He couldn't make out who it was exactly, but thought it was probably Mr. Wilkon who he'd seen once before looking at the car, leaning side to side and crouching down to inspect it. He continued on walking to work but couldn't stop worrying about Mr. Wilkon or whoever else might buy the car before he had the chance. He was saving quite a bit, but he knew he was nowhere near being able to buy the car yet. It'd be months before then. He considered trying to find a third job, but that idea quickly came to a dead end because he barely had any free time with his two jobs already and there'd probably be no open positions anywhere in town anyhow.

Danny's anxiety hit its peak when he saw someone getting in the car to take it for a test drive a few days later. On his way back home from work that day, he was relieved to see the car still there, but he couldn't bare another day not knowing if it would be bought by someone else. He briefly thought about taking out a loan, but he soon realized he had nothing notable that he could use as collateral. He had no close friends or family besides

his mother and sister that he could ask to borrow some cash from either. Asking for an advance at the diner or gas station was the most laughable idea that popped up in his mind. Desperately thinking of his options, his mother flashed into his mind. His mother didn't have much, but he knew she had a few pieces of jewelry left from her wedding nearly two decades ago. Some were gifts from her parents and others were from his father. Danny was sure that if he'd cash in his mother's jewelry at the town's gold and silver trade shop, he'd have enough for the car. He didn't have anything nearly as valuable as his mother's jewelry to trade in. Danny shook his head as if trying to ward off the thoughts he was having. But it didn't work. He couldn't help thinking how much easier and quicker it'd be to cash in the jewelry then continue working day and night, saving what little money he earned. Danny knew he had to buy the car soon before anyone else did and this was the fastest solution he could come up with. He wanted to put the townspeople in their place and prove to them he was capable of buying a car.

A few days after this thought popped up in Danny's mind, Danny got out of bed for work when he noticed his mother happen to be out of the house with his sister. He didn't think to wonder where they had gone so early in the morning. He took this chance to go into his mother's room. He found the jewelry that his mother had showed him as a younger boy in a wooden jewelry box sitting on her nightstand. As he rummaged through his mother's jewelry box, an image of him at the gas station, sneaking a candy bar in his pocket, his friends snickering behind him, flashed through his mind. Danny hesitated for a moment, but thoughts of the Ford being gone when he walked to work one day violently pushed out all other thoughts. He had some time before his morning shift at the gas station, so he shoved the jewelry in his bag and ran to the trade shop. He'd find an excuse for his mother later, like maybe that someone had broken in or that he had no idea where her jewelry had gone. Danny convinced himself that maybe, because the jewelry had just been sitting there in a box for years now, his mother no longer cared about them and wouldn't mind that he took them. Danny really didn't care how he'd have to tell his mother, as long as he got the car before anyone else did.

Finally, the time had come for Danny to buy the car. He had gotten enough money combined from exchanging his mother's jewelry and from what he had made so far from work. He headed to the car dealership right after his shift ended, but when the dealership came into view Danny suddenly stopped as if he ran into a wall. He stood frozen across the street. The 1971 Ford was gone. When he finally got the courage to cross the street and enter the dealership, one of the workers told him the car had just been purchased by a woman that morning. There was nothing Danny could do but walk back home. The car he had worked for and took his mother's jewelry for was gone. He immediately thought about buying back his mother jewelry and replacing it before she noticed it was gone, but he knew the old man who ran the trade shop would pull a fast one any chance he got and try to sell the jewelry for more than he bought them for. Danny could already imagine the gossip that was sure to come.

They'd say they were absolutely right about how Danny was a deadbeat kid who'd even go as far as to steal his own mother's precious jewelry to buy a new car for himself. "I told you, didn't I?" one of the wives would probably exclaim proudly at the town's next dinner party.

Danny got home eventually, sluggishly walking with his head lowered. His feet felt like they were weighed down by bricks. It was probably because of his dazed state that it took

him some time to realize that his mother was standing on the porch, waiting for him when he got home. A jingle sound woke Danny out of his daze, and he looked up to see his mother jingling car keys in her hands with the same soft smile that she always had when looking at Danny. At the sight of his mother, he unintentionally clutched his bag that he had used to hold her jewelry earlier that day. His mother's eyes glistened as he looked at her, reflecting the moonlight; he thought of how her eyes resembled the jewelry.

She was wearing a worn, lace dress that reached just below her thin ankles. It had holes near the hem and there were loose threads poking out here and there. Danny slowly turned, as if he knew what he was going to see and was afraid it'd be true. There, parked in the driveway, was the Ford. His mother had bought it for him earlier that day while he was at work. She had gradually been putting money aside over the years for the time when it'd come in handy. She started this fund with her husband when Danny was just a boy in the hopes it'd serve as a sort of security for when he got older. Sure, they were only able to put aside a mere amount here and there, but with time it became quite a sum. Even after the death of her husband, she continued saving up money. She had never been able to buy anything special that Danny had wanted as a child, so she didn't think twice about buying the car for Danny. There would even be a small amount left for his sister after buying the car.

It felt as if someone was clenching Danny's throat because he couldn't speak. All he could manage was a short, raspy gasp—maybe, more a wail than a gasp. The porch screeched as his mother stepped forward. The town was so dormant that night that the screeches sounded as if they stretched on forever and you couldn't remember when they ended. The breeze whistled as it snuck through the small cracks along the window panes of the house. "This is for you Danny. I know you've been workin' hard to get this car. Now you can drive wherever you'd like," his mother said to him in that familiar loving tone that in that moment was as sharp as knives to Danny. There, sitting in the driveway, the Ford didn't look shiny or new as it did before. In the dim glow of the night, the Ford blended in with the blackness and looked insignificant, like any old car.

LETTER TO SAMANTHA FROM ELLENSBURG

Rachell Brant

You might still be home
in that trailer park village
like a lullaby of microwave meals and laundry baskets
for cribs. With your evenings
wrapped in thick dog breath blankets.
The Book of Ruth
read right before bed.

You might still be wandering to Rose's IGA,
for Surge's 'hardcore edge' and Paydays.

Boombox on your shoulder, you might still snap
your Hubba Bubba, and
declare bare feet
on the concrete makes you
"Stronger" by Kanye West.

But when your feet can no longer take the heat,
you might still sit on HWY 410,
watch the cars and pray
a repentance for your sin,
for a flag with different, duller shades,
or ending with Naomi instead.

You might still wonder if being loud and proud
could cut through your mother's
silent withdrawal. If the massacred peace
could be worth it.

WINTER, 2010

Rachell Brant

I'm still asleep / when you leave / your engine hums and / grows distant / tire tracks in
fresh snow / I'm still in your arms / unafraid / on some white sand beach / please let this
be real I walk you to the door / when you leave / I ask for a kiss / you lend me a grimace
instead / headlights blocked from / falling snow / I watch in black underwear / from the
kitchen window / Do you stay in any reality?

ALL THE LINES BETWEEN RUIN AND LIFE

Rachell Brant

I walk to the burned forest to watch
The stark difference between charred and untouched
In my heart the past and present cannot be reconciled
Honesty is my deathwatch

Here a lonely smoker in a Carhartt strangled
The life from his single Camel cigarette with
empty dry pine needles
Where we once found deer's bodies

imprinted in the grass.
This small section burned to ash
You worked for a month and a half
on a broken leg

"Pain is just an electrical signal," you said
so softly I thought you had vanished
smoke cut through you
black and green side by side.

A burning stove is abandoned by
men in a diesel truck.
The regrowth will never match the untouched.
I cannot catch up.

MAKE IT COUNT

Nicholas Newhard

Rage in a democracy is a voice unheard
Over the chorus of discontent.
Can you scream away a storm?
Keep Calm and Carry On,
They say, and Don't Rock the Boat.
How can anyone sit by and let fear win?
Every American has a voice for change: it starts with a
Vote.
Overcome your fear, overcome your doubt, because
They weaken your resolve, weaken your spirit, when
Every vote matters. Raise your voice above the rage.

PILGRIMAGE TO BLOOD STRANGERS

Leslee Caul

There were certain things we knew before the caravan left the driveway
We knew Grandpa would lead
in some great iron-sided car
built when they knew how to
We knew he would institute a race
with any rolling stranger willing to duel
We knew he wouldn't stop for directions
even after seven laps around the same
PRIVATE DRIVE cul-de-sac
We knew he would flex his well-muscled jaw
and burn high octane contempt
for all those lousy sons of bitches on his road
We knew nothing
short of an on-coming jumbo jet
would lead him to utter "we're lost"
We knew we would follow

We knew Grandma rode shotgun stoic
her olive knuckles bleaching
with every stomp of the accelerator
We knew she would wield the glare
previously reserved for war-trial victims
We knew she would twist her mother's ring
And hope for a six stone party turn out

We knew her freshly sticked lips were drawn
tighter than her best girdle
We knew, or imagined we knew,
that their faces flexed a rhythm
like synchronized swimmers in ankle weights
jerking, flinching, diving, swerving
questioning the parentage of every competitor

We knew each Daddy the In-Law didn't want to go
We knew the Daddies would be that Mario Andretti
in Grampa's mountain pass Indy
We knew the coolers were iced down
with Daddy's favorite brand
and the obligatory grape sodas
We knew the two phrases driving Daddies loath
So, we chanted
"are we there yet" and "I have to pee pee"

at every mile post
We knew if we dare fall into a pout fest
We could join the forces of the disgruntled Daddies

We knew the Moms were on duty
a spit-stained hanky ready for repairs
We knew the Mom credo
that began "...and another thing"
and ended with a tolling
"Your Great Grandmother isn't going to live forever"
We knew the clenched-teeth "Don't make a scene" clause
that shot out of the Mom mouths like a rapid-fire mantra
We knew, if there was a scene to be made,
who would make it

We knew it was The Great Grandmother's
Milestone Birthday
because they had been for at least a decade
We knew the destination was some
crepe-papered suburban Oddfellows Hall.
We knew we'd be the last ones there –
what with being lost for so long.
We knew the Moms would shift into turbo
driving us through the undulating crowd
like Grandpa had shot us over the Pass.
We knew the Moms would pelt us with names
like a relentless school marm the day before exams
"You remember cousin..."
We knew we didn't, couldn't and wouldn't.
We knew,
aside from the Eastside entourage
and The Great Grandmother
no one.

We knew The Great Grandmother would be displayed,
By some giant spray of glads,
like an ancient centerpiece with clip-on earrings.
We knew she waited to receive each subject
and their brief report of the previous year.
We knew the Westside grandkids writhed in the arrogance of familiarity
and thought us great usurping step-bastards.
We knew our three-minute audience would prove
as we sparkled in The Great Grandmother's eyes,
that there was only one great grandchild in the universe.

We knew Daddies, Moms and nameless cousins would
break out the coolers, pop the corks, tap the kegs.
We knew every conversation started, “don’t tell anybody, but...”
We knew everyone would tell.
We knew at least one big blonde cousin somebody would grab a Daddy’s butt.
We knew one of the twins – stranger in stereo – would get lost.
We knew we would sneak sips until our heads swam fuzzy
We knew someone would regret tonight
and that someone was already planning next year.

We knew she would live forever
and even if we had tickets to see Jesus
opening for God
no one would let us miss the annual pilgrimage

We knew that wasn’t our Great Lady in the box.
We knew she would have never picked that loud lipstick.
We knew she hated that brooch.
We knew while we ate cold cuts
and watched the nameless cousin’s blubber
as if sheer volume could raise the dead.
We knew no one was special anymore.
We knew the party was over.
We just knew.

THE MODERN PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP: AN EXAMINATION

Ben Snyder

The digital age has seen a major shift in content creation; where in the analog age one could only gain fame through professional means, the internet has crafted a worldwide platform where one can become famous all over the globe in a matter of months. In particular, YouTube stands as the perfect example of how the parasocial relationship has transformed, showcasing the dynamics of amateur creators and their fans. The concept of the parasocial relationship has violently shifted in the eyes of both content creators and viewers, the dynamic no longer affecting only those currently in professional roles.

The parasocial relationship was initially conceptualized by Dr. Donald Horton and Dr. R. Richard Wohl in 1956: “The most remote and illustrious men are met as if they were in the circle of one's peers; the same is true of a character in a story who comes to life in these media in an especially vivid and arresting way. We propose to call this seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer a para-social relationship” (Horton and Wohl 215). The concept suggests that when a consumer partakes in visual or written media, they may develop a relationship towards the creator presented to them, believing one gets to know them better over the course of time, especially should more media involving the creator be produced. Of course, when one presents oneself to a camera, the individual develops a certain version of themselves to present- this is known as a persona. Horton and Wohl go on to describe the persona as “the typical and indigenous figure of the social scene presented by radio and television” (216). The aforementioned figure will not present themselves as they do to their friends. Rather, they develop this persona as an amalgamation of their best aspects to appeal to a target audience. In the analog age, this indeed follows Horton and Wohl’s ideology of radio and television, as these were the two primary sources of entertainment on a sequential level in the day, meaning the creator will appear in sequential products, be it in a daily radio show or a television show. The consumer will continually listen or view these products, and therefore become more and more familiar with the persona presented to them within.

However, the analog age and the digital age are substantially different. Therefore, while Horton and Wohl’s concepts imply a great many things, it is doubtful they could have predicted the shift in their concept with the coming of the digital age. Hartmann & Charlotte Goldhoorn in their article “Horton and Wohl Revisited: Exploring Viewers’ Experience of Parasocial Interaction” argue that a mutual awareness between both parties is assumed, further describing that “mutual awareness and attention imply that an individual is not only aware of another person, but also senses that the other person is aware of him or her, and that the other person knows that they are mutually aware of each other” (1106). This is less evident in the analog age where far less methods of contact were available for fans, restricted mostly to letters, public events, chance encounters, and contests. With the rise of the internet, contact with entertainers is simpler than ever before. One could now contact Paul McCartney for instance through Twitter,

taking seconds to send a message with the possibility of a response far quicker than a letter ever could afford. As mentioned prior, however, the types of content creators in the analog age differ wildly from those in the digital age. Here we begin to see the rise of the YouTube celebrity, the prime example of the new persona. Wherein the analog age one would need specific training and a degree of professionalism to obtain fame, YouTube provides a platform where one simply needs to upload a video to their website for billions of people to view.

In the article “Reconceptualizing Address in Television Programming: The Effect of Address and Affective Empathy on Viewer Experience of Parasocial Interaction,” R. Glenn Cummings and Boni Cui hypothesize that a strong part of a parasocial bond is direct interaction: “witnessing a media performer's affect via direct address—both bodily and verbal—may trigger empathetic processes that facilitate bonds between media performers and viewers.” Nowhere is this more evident than in the content produced by gaming YouTubers. These YouTubers are regular people who, with no professional training whatsoever, began to record and upload commentated gameplay videos onto YouTube, gaining millions of viewers on the daily; these creators are commonly referred to as “Let’s Players.” One such Let’s Player in this category is Seán William McLoughlin, known on YouTube as “JackSepticEye.” Entertainers such as he is what one might consider an everyday person, the complete antithesis of the professional entertainer found in the analog age. These are men who simply record themselves playing video games and post it to the internet rather than a network syndicated show requiring extensive training and legalities. Anyone with the right number of viewers could become a YouTuber, they would receive their viewers based upon the algorithm or word of mouth. Thus, not only is contacting an entertainer easier than before, but so is becoming one. While these YouTubers are in no way professional, their fans hold them to the same standards as a professional and look up to them just the same.

However, because their content truly does consist of playing games and commentating, something many people do on a daily basis with their friends, the concept of direct interaction is amplified, as is their applicability to their lack of professionalism. In Jayson Dibble, Tilo Hartmann, and Sarah Rosaen’s article “Parasocial Interaction and Parasocial Relationship: Conceptual Clarification and a Critical Assessment of Measures” further clarify this point: “To the extent that a parasocial relationship resembles a real-life social relationship, viewers can be more or less “para-close” to the media performer.” This situation of playing games with a friend is extremely relatable, thus people feel as though the one playing the game is a friend of theirs. Combine this with YouTube’s comment and message system, views can leave a reply to the creator that is immediately seen and can just as easily be replied to. This works in tandem with the creator’s social media, adding another level of contact between both parties, as well as another form of persona.

However, this access of contact applies both ways. With fans able to contact McLoughlin so easily, he also feels a parasocial relationship towards his fans, constantly under stress to please them all and aid them with their personal problems. In his video “AN EMOTIONAL ENDING | Jacksepticeye's Paradox #2 (Fan Made Game),” McLoughlin goes on to directly address his fans concerns about their messages to him going unreplied: “I get so many messages from people saying ‘you’re never going to read this message’ or ‘you never replied to my messages’ or them feeling like they don’t matter

to anybody and that really breaks my heart because you guys really do matter to me. . .I try my best to get to as many people as I can, it's so hard a lot of the time because there's so many of you. . .thank you all for being here, I really don't know what I'd ever do without any of you anymore." It seems that this "deeper" connection between entertainer and viewer would yield a more powerful parasocial relationship, something shown in Keren Eyal and René M. Dailey's "Examining Relational Maintenance in Parasocial Relationships," wherein this concept is further researched: "In terms of commitment, recent investigations into the nature of PSRs have suggested that the relationship's nature and quality significantly contribute to relational strength among viewers" (5).

The Let's Player community truly demonstrates the new dynamics of the parasocial relationship. Their direct contact with fans, as well as their relatable content strikes a chord with audiences, but also affect the content creators themselves to a large degree. With far greater contact and interaction than in the analog age, these new content creators now deal with this new relationship daily, closer to their fans than ever before, yet still truly unknown to them. While the contact allows for a broader range of communication, the persona crafted by both parties still holds firm, thus neither truly know the other. Therefore, while the parasocial relationship is still absolutely prominent in media creation, the dynamics have shifted to a point where both parties now become far more involved with each other.

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Quentin Ragan, *Lupin Majesty*

1984

Nicholas Newhard

I was in Seattle when I found out you were dead. Ordinary phone call turned frantic when a friend explained how she found you. In your car, engine and wipers still running, your face embedded in the steering wheel – if you could still call it a face. I immediately think “car crash” but she calls it murder. Shot in the face with a shotgun. It was just last weekend, in rare form, that you stayed home to hang out with us, to watch some MTV and share some beers. You made sure we had fun, but not too much fun; kept the tipsy teens from leaving the house, from maybe getting caught.

Your story plays out over months, like some Hollywood crime drama: Corvette dreams, stolen money, missing pot, the waste-collection mafia, fair-weather friends, and drunken witnesses. You took the short cut, man. One quick sale to get that Corvette you craved. Years of savings and just a few months left. So close, you thought, one drug sale could bring you that much closer. Was it worth it, man? We all knew you smoked pot, but you’d sooner smoke out a buddy than sell to anyone. Your parents lost their oldest son: the hard worker, the quiet one, the trustworthy one. Your brother lost a friend, a role model, a lodestone of hard truth, and the last word of any argument. He never really grew up. Was it worth it, man?

I AM OKAY

Emma Johnson

The young woman was unaware of her surroundings. She closed her eyes, dancing and swaying to a song that was released far before she had been born. Her arms moving in a rhythmic fashion as her feet glided along the hardwood floor. Moving around in circular motions, her body spiraling along with the sound radiating through the speakers of the old record player. Her fingers motioned as though she too was playing an instrument. She quietly sang along with the ambient classic rock song that was playing through the well-used speakers, and moved her head side to side, matching the movements of her body. She then heard the needle abruptly move across the record making a hideous scratching noise, and then there was nothing but silence for a moment.

The girl stopped abruptly, like she had been in a hypnotic state and the hypnotist had just snapped their fingers waking her up from a trance. She turned around quickly looking to see what had caused the music to stop so suddenly. Standing at the entrance of the large, open room stood a woman who the girl had grown to know very well. This woman's name was Margo, and she was one of the counselors at the facility Lucy was staying at. Margo always wore skirts that touched the floor, with extravagant turquoise jewelry. Her long curly hair was graying, but somehow it made her look even more beautiful.

"Group therapy started 10 minutes ago Lucy; we're waiting for you," Margo said, flashing her warm smile that made her friendly eyes almost close. Lucy looked at the clock realizing it was 5:10, she hadn't even realized time had gone by at all.

"Oh my," Lucy said, "I'm so sorry Margo, I guess I just lost track of time."

"I'm glad to see you're feeling better; I was worried there for a bit." Margo winked at Lucy and flashed another warm, lovely smile her way. Lucy felt safe with Margo, and her kindness made Lucy want to crawl into her lap and lie there while Margo stroked her hair. Lucy longed for some maternal love, the love her mother gave her when she was a little girl. The love her mom stopped showing many years ago.

Lucy walked with Margo into a room where a group of people sat in a circle of fold up chairs. All around Lucy were posters with motivational quotes on them. She looked around reading them as people began saying one by one how they were doing, "your only limit is your mind", one poster read. As the meeting went on, people discussed how their weeks had been. One boy Lucy had seen around talked about how he had been thinking about cocaine recently, and how because of that decided to stay in rehab just a few more months. "Must be nice being a trust fund kid with a cocaine problem." Lucy thought. When it was her turn to talk, she sat up in her chair and looked around at all of the empty faces around her, "this week was better than last, every week I am feeling better with time."

Lucy remembered back to her first group therapy session. She was extremely skinny with dark circles under her eyes that never went away. She recalls how the nurses spent hours un-matting her hair that she hadn't brushed in what felt like months. She was skinny, all of her clothes hanging off of her body, giving every outfit that potato sack look. She only wore long sleeves, even though the high-temperature everyday had been in the 90's. The hot summer days would create a smog in the hot, stagnant air, yet Lucy was never proud enough of her addiction to just own it. Although her face gave it away, she was ashamed of

the copious amounts of bruises that covered areas of her bodies that could be poked with a needle and pushed straight into her veins. She was just glad she hadn't lost any teeth.

"Thank you for sharing Lucy," Margo said to her, "you are such a brave young woman, you'll fight this." Lucy gave Margo and the rest of the group a close-mouthed smile and stared down at her worn and tattered converse — for the rest of group, she just stared at her feet.

Lucy did not consider herself a strong person. She did not see herself as an inspiration, someone people should look up to. Sure, she was "bravely fighting a horrible disease", as everyone in rehab liked to say, but drug addiction was no cancer, she caused this mess on herself, and she was no hero because her parents had forced her into going to rehab. But people kept telling her how strong she was, and how good she was doing.

Lucy could still recall what life was like before coming into rehab. Doing her best to hide her drug use from her parents, coming and going as she pleased, dropping out of community college, and eventually losing her part-time job. She was letting everyone down one by one, everyone but her drug dealer, that is. There was this one time where Lucy went on a week-long bender, letting her phone die the first night and then just never trying to charge it after that. This time stood out to her the most because her parents filed a missing person's report after night two.

This was one of the last times Lucy did drugs before the morning she woke up in a rehab facility 200 miles from home. Her mom had chosen a facility far enough away to where Lucy would not be able to easily come home, and her parents wouldn't feel so guilty with never coming to visit; "it's just such a far drive honey, we have such busy schedules these days." Her mom would say over the phone during their weekly calls.

Rehab wasn't as bad as people made it sound, the detoxing part was the worst but the nurses kept her comfortable, and she got three meals a day making her put some much needed weight back on. She had caught herself admiring her body in the mirror again. Her skin stopped getting sores on it, she was starting to look like that pretty high school cheerleader that she had been years ago. Lucy had always been the pretty, popular girl in high school. She had long, blonde hair that had this perfect natural curl to it. She had these deep blue eyes, and long dark eyelashes, eyes that a few boys fell in love with, and eyes that at least a dozen more wished they could have. She was the daughter of two successful lawyers, who paid good money to ensure their perfect daughter Miss Lucile Sawyer would get into the best ivy league school. But when you start hanging out with a bad crowd during an angsty time in your young adult life, sometimes you just accidentally go down the wrong path.

As Lucy went about the rest of her evening, she decided to go sit out in the garden area of the center to read a well-loved copy of "Lord of the Flies." She ate dinner with some of her friends that were around her age that she had made, then headed back into the common area for a showing of Forrest Gump on the big projector screen. Then it was off to bed. At this rehab facility, you were allowed to decorate the walls of your room with photos and things that made the patient feel more at home. She had decided on some photos of her and her parents, pictures of her dog, and some band posters. All around her were photos of Stevie Nicks dancing around in a shawl, and Tom Petty strumming on an electric guitar, and Elton John in extravagant sunglasses playing the piano. Her mother had packed a quilt that their neighbor who used to babysit Lucy made her years and years ago. It gave Lucy comfort having that old quilt. It made her feel like that sweet old lady who she spent most of

her summer days with growing up was still with her.

Lucy had been too strung out at the time to make it to her funeral a year prior. This sometimes kept Lucy up at night, silencing her sobs into her pillow. The hardest thing for her to grasp was how many people she had let down. As Lucy dozed off on this particular night though, all she could think about was good things. She thought about her mother's rose bushes, and the way her dad used to sing "You Are My Sunshine" every morning to wake her up. She thought about her dog with his big floppy ears and the way he stuck his tongue out when he ran, and she thought about the sweet old lady who made Lucy quilts, and how although she had broken so many loved one's hearts with addiction, all of those hearts were being mended right along-side Lucy's.

Lucy dreamt of her mother that night, she dreamt that she and her mother were unable to reach one another. She could see her mother, hear her mother, even smell her, and although there was nothing visibly in-between them, she could not seem to reach her. This kept Lucy tossing and turning all night, and when she awoke in the morning, she felt as though she had never slept at all.

The day started as all the other days did. She got out of bed, took a shower, put the same old outfit on and ate breakfast. Normally after breakfast everyone would call their families and talk to them, Lucy knew that both her parents would be too busy to talk, so she never bothered. That was until Margo came into the big dining room looking for Lucy. Their eyes met and Lucy got up and walked her way. She felt nervous for no reason, she had been sober the entire time she was here, followed all of the rules, and overall was a decent person to everyone else in the program. When she finally made it to Margo, she waited a second before she spoke- "what's going on Margo?" Margo looked to her then looked to the floor, she scanned the room briefly before she finally came out and said what was going on. "Your parents are here. I know that the relationship you have with them is complicated... I guess I just wanted to check to see how you feel about them being here before they waltz in."

Lucy could feel her knees begin to buckle; she had not seen her parents since the day her mom had loaded her and a packed bag into the old station wagon with no disclosure of where they were going. They had arrived at the facility hours later, and Lucy knew that they had chosen a faraway rehab center to keep a good distance between them. Why were they here now? Why not just call? Was something wrong? Lucy's mind began to run wild, her palms began to sweat and she rubbed them profusely on her jeans. She looked around the room and began to feel dizzy, she knew she had to see them, but in that moment, she felt nothing but complete terror.

"Okay..." Lucy finally said, "how about I meet them in the lobby, and we will go from there."

Margo gave her a sympathetic smile and began walking her out of the dining room and down the hallway.

They looked like complete strangers. But as Lucy met eyes with her mother, something changed. Her mom had this warmth in her eyes that she had not seen in years, they were the same people they were when they dropped her off months ago, but perhaps Lucy was different, perhaps Lucy was a stranger, and seeing the two people she loved most in the world standing in front of her, knowing she had a clearer mindset than before, instantly made her feel as though she knew exactly who she was once again. She no longer felt as though she was just her drug addiction, but that she was a human again.

THERE IS A WOMAN IN YOUR PAINTING

Oliver Beck

The Kiss, Gustav Klimt, oil on canvas

Gold weaver, heart
reaper, fear feeder, seam
ripper, palm reader,
pallbearer- There is
always a woman.
There is always

hands. Gold in god's altar,
Eve eating Eden, if she
ruined you, what would I do?

We're being prepared for the
grave with gold leaf, linen, pigment,
wood pegs, pyrite powder kegs-
I pray to the pyre I die a
pirate, time-bomb blood. My
ashes make a perfect pigment.
Pour me into your paint pot, into the

gold around your finger. Lick your
lips, get me between each
tooth, under the gum, on your tongue,
hollow out your cavities. Put me where
I do not belong, Gustav.
The Kiss wasn't for me, but I'm a
master of make-believe.

UNTITLED

Oliver Beck

Spilling

happens. We've all
gotten wet, salt

Spilling

shaker. I'm full of
holes, sea water

Spilling

into streams. Garbage
veins. The glass

Spilling

empty of water is
full of air. We're all

Spilling

today. If I drown, I'll be
reborn a salmon.

I'll live in

everything I've been

Spilling.



Xander Deccio, *The Girl With Kaleidoscope Eyes*

OAKMOSS

Sara Albin

The skies dimmed, the screech of a barn owl marking the evening hours. The woodlice sought cover beneath their decaying maple leaf rooves, sprawling out from the tree trunks that connected the ground, on which they thrived, to the mysterious unexplored clouds. Creeping underneath their dark-brown awnings, the woodlice found their white, mildew-toned walls to be a comforting sight.

Fireflies started to light up the skies like precariously placed stoplights, always swaying and wavering. They always had to be on the lookout for their natural enemy, cobwebs. You could tell there was a frog passing through the area by the height of the fireflies. That is, if you hadn't already heard the frog coming.

Mice began to leave their nests, mothers gathering food for their children, some of which were no bigger than the size of a matchbox and weighted less than a dozen matches.

Surrounded by tall, neglected grass, encroached on by weeds, was a tiny hole. Beyond this small hole was nearly all Thimble and her little brothers and sisters had ever known. They weren't allowed out often, only on rare warm nights, and the nights had to be calm, but not too calm. That would mean that too many eyes were watching the grass. The most dangerous eyes were the ones they couldn't see in the night. Their roomy cup-shaped nest fit all six of them, her mother, her father, and her three siblings: Oak, Sumac, and Spruce, with room to spare! Their dirt and twig covered walls were lovingly decorated with small bits of clear plastic, pinches of blue and orange fabric, and once drenched paper that acted as glue, and a cushion against some of the less-soft twigs.

In one of the edges of their nest, on a twig wall, sat Oak's failed moss-growing project. Personally, Thimble was satisfied with the combination of lint and dust that cushioned their small rumps every night. Her sister, on the other hand, couldn't get enough of that moss. Perhaps their parents had named her sister after a moss. That would make sense. Oakmoss had a near white color, just like the color of Oak's underbelly; however, while oakmoss was tinged with a shade of pale green, her sister's underbelly was tinged with brown.

Moss was a strange plant; apparently, moss grew on trees, and sometimes would fall off in clumps, but could also grow on other things, like the ground or decaying wood. These trees were what connected their home on the ground to the clouds that they would never—should never—be able to touch. The birds could touch the clouds, and that's why they were dangerous. That was what her mother had always told them when Thimble or one of her siblings longed to feel the breeze ruffling their whiskers.

It was believed that long-long ago the first birds had been landlocked and took to surveying the ground while perched on low hanging branches. They walked above the mice even then on their long legs. One day, a bird climbed to the top of the tallest tree it could find, with the intention of surveying the land. However, upon reaching the top of the tree, the bird touched the clouds, and found it had the ability to fly. One day, Thimble hoped, she would be able to touch the clouds too. Thimble's brown coat puffed up with pride whenever she thought of the one occasion she'd tried to climb a tree; it hadn't been as hard as mice made it out to be.

Once, their mother brought back a small piece of the moss with their dinner; Oak had been fascinated with it for the rest of the week, turning it over endlessly in her white paws. Sometimes Thimble figured Oak would prefer to eat moss over their daily fare of seeds, spiders, and the occasional caterpillar, if she could. Thimble gagged just thinking about the idea, moss tasted terrible. Oak slept right next to that speck of moss each night as they cuddled up next to their mother and father, and the warmth they provided.

Fall was upon them. The smells had been different lately. Beyond their dirt ceiling, the maple leaves that made up their roof were fragrant. The fluffy, bright orange-colored monster had been less prevalent in recent weeks; allowing them more frequent opportunities to venture outside the den under the cover of night. Thimble had never seen the creature herself, but yet she found herself knowing it. The creature had razor sharp claws and pointy fangs. They matched the gash that Sumac came back with on his belly the last night they had been allowed outside. The creature's eyes glowed in the dark and seemingly pierced through the underbrush, beneath which they dwelled. One of the neighboring dens had been abandoned recently, but it was hard to say why. It felt as though the creature could see their every movement and smell their every breath, so they were always cautious. Sumac hadn't been cautious enough that night with him and Oak.

The cover of freshly fallen leaves and recent lack of the beast had made them feel a bit safer than usual. This was where things had started to go wrong. They had always taken to staying close to the nest when they wandered, no one overeager to venture into unknown territory. Fireflies and other small bugs often visited their den, keeping them busy. It kept them from getting too curious. That night there was a distinct shortage of bug, Thimble remembered. The bats might've been on patrol that night. Oak and Sumac decided to examine the corners of their explored territory to see what there was to see. There might've been a new outcropping of moss beneath the furled over grasses, after all. The edges of the grasses met the dirt and began turning into compost. Most other mice their age weren't allowed to roam far from the den either, allowing the siblings a nighttime monopoly over their personal transportation system. Their exploration holes were the perfect size for one small mouse to use at a time. Once the two of them were separated from the group it all happened so fast. There was a hiss, a yowl, a smack, and Sumac came running back to the nest, a nasty gash painting his underbelly red. Oak was nowhere to be seen. Their parents hadn't questioned him though, instead, their mother patched his scratches up with some sticky-leaf wrappings, and they slept. From that night on Thimble noticed a distinct cold spot on her side where Oak use to sleep next to her.

For a while after the incident, Sumac didn't talk much. It was as though he lost his voice and his appetite for caterpillars all in one go. Nowadays he was the one that cradled that speck of moss, but no one questioned it.

One night, when even the crickets were quiet, Sumac caved under the peer-pressure of the siblings and told them what had happened that night. He confirmed that the gash had been the orange monster's doing. The cat had snuck up on them while they were in one of their far tunnels, comforted by the closeness of the tunnel walls. Except the creature knew where they were, it could smell them. It created an opening in their tunnel with one swipe of its massive paw, injuring Sumac in the process. Oak hadn't been hit but stood frozen in fear beneath the beast's shadow. The moon was shining bright that night, and when Oak saw the gleam in the beast's eye, she got so scared she began to run towards the nearest tall tree. The mouser gave chase, but Oak, spurred on by fear,

climbed so fast, faster, faster, past endless numbers of leaves and many branches until she reached the cloud until the beast was left pawing and scratching at the bark beneath her. As soon as her little paws touched the clouds, she found herself able to fly as if she had always known. Once the creature got bored of staring up at her in the sky, it left, but Oak was having so much fun flying you see, she flew up and up and up, and away from them. Oak couldn't stop flying.

After Sumac said his piece and they huddled tightly together, knowing it was all a lie; and together they cried.

I PAY A FORTUNE TELLER ON WALL STREET FIFTY DOLLARS FOR A MARKET PREDICTION

Weston Morrow

The clothes on the clothesline
have gone to rot
in the wind, waving
goodbye like so many tattered families
standing on the dock, fading
far behind. The trees, circled with string,
have stopped reaching
for the sky. One wonders *why*
bother and drops his leaves
in cribriform blankets to cover
his shame, arthritic feet.
And all this decomposing
comes to nothing, no one
left to smell the death,
or anthropomorphize
thoughtless things. Just crumbling
skylines, opened toward heaven,
mouths filled with broken teeth.
This is what I see, the old woman says,
slouching into her Bergère:
The world falls apart and everyone
saying—*See!*
I got out just in time.

CREATION :: OF THE ALPHABET

Weston Morrow

A- space came first
and then we came to *B*-

space and god
you know the rest

did you some good didn't it
make you feel young again

didn't it
make you

see
for the first time

the people and their needs
to speak to make themselves

something lasting
god

if in the beginning
was the word then

before the beginning
was the alphabet

everything we'd need
to break free

it all starts with *H* and *He*
not Prometheus brought fire

into being and then *See*
O the *End* of the world

beginning
in the alphabet soup

that made this whole
mess possible

POT AND KETTLE

Weston Morrow

The Pot's calling the Kettle
back. I didn't think you'd call,
says the Kettle. I didn't, too,
says the Pot, but then I thought,
 What would you do?

WALK IN THE PARK

Chloeanne Erickson

November 12th, 2014 -

The weather is mild, like the calm before the winter storm. It's later in the evening so the park is mostly empty, aside from a few dogs and their owners. Despite the hour, a much older gentleman is sitting on a park bench under a group of yellowing aspen trees. Aspen trees tend to have silvery or white backsides, and very long leaf stems, which makes it apparent when the wind is blowing through them. Under the park bench, hundreds of leaves litter the ground. The older gentleman cocks his head whenever a leaf falls to the ground, his face breaking into a shy smile as each leaf settles. He looks out at the portion of the park meant for dogs. He laughs quietly to himself while the dogs run along the fence line, chasing their tails. He fits right into the scene. The blue sky fading into pink, the yellow leaves at his feet with green grass peeking through. His hands are leathered and folded in his lap. As time passes, the pile of leaves at his feet has grown considerably. He kicks his feet through them, listening to the rustle as they change position. He stands up and faces the tree, reaching out to touch the bark tenderly as if to avoid hurting it. He runs two fingers up and down the trunk, admiring its hardened wrinkles. He squints his eyes as he looks up at the branches and he smiles when the wind picks up and the leaves fall harder. And then, all at once he drops his cane to the ground. Steadying himself by holding onto the trunk, he lowers himself slowly. Until finally, he's lying on the ground. Sprawled out in the leaves, I can hear his hearty laugh from here. Childlike and innocent he crunches a few leaves in his hand, like he's feeling them for the first time. He spends time getting to know the grass beneath the leaves. Plucking earthy tufts from the ground and then throwing them up in the air. Watching him from here, I can't help but feel completely overwhelmed at his wonder. He's looking up at the sky like he's found a place in life where he's ready to settle. It's hard to know people from a distance, but looking at the older gentleman, the view is kind and so is the future.

January 24th, 2014 -

Sunday evening feels a lot like lost time. Under snow, grass is tired of being stepped on and forgotten about. Birds are scrambling to find insulation for nests perched high on veiny branches. Garry oaks begin to wilt in on themselves; drooping with desire and tender want. Garry oaks usually have the oval profile of other oaks when solitary, but they are also known to grow in groves so close to one another that they form canopies. On Sunday evening, however, there are just a few lonely oaks spread out, and their leaves have fallen. Thin branches stretch up and out, decorating the sky. Below a disappearing sun, the pond's water quivers with the wind and ducks laze on the surface. I don't recognize the faces I pass; people look like crude depictions of adulthood. A woman pushing her son in a blue stroller blends into the sidewalk. She doesn't notice the trees, the oxygen they give or the birdsong. She doesn't look up. Most people don't. The longer I watch her, her eyes and her nose begin to merge together, like they don't have enough energy to work on their own. Her gaze is focused down on the stroller's handlebars. Her fingers chip away at the remaining paint. Her lips are chapped from the cold. Under her eyes, dark circles have made a home for themselves rendering them empty, angry. Maybe

at the temperature, at the trees and the sidewalk or the sky. I think that without an enemy, sometimes our anger gets confused. Her son is quiet. Drool bubbles out of his lips, and he reaches out at nothing in particular. It looks like he's trying to grasp the passing trees. Literally reaching for the sky. It makes me wonder if something dies when you get older, do you reach a certain age and then all of the curiosity and wonder that once sustained you just goes? What does it take to make the light come back? I don't want to grow up.

April 5th, 2016 -

Today it's raining. I expected the park to be empty, which was my motivation to return. To swing in the rain or consort with the ducks. Instead I'm hiding under an old gazebo, its white paint is chipping away, revealing a tired wood. The wood has seen some shit; the rain and snow have done serious damage. But it's almost summer, when the wood can catch its breath. I imagine birthday parties held here, barbecues in the sun, trails of ducks and flocks of seagulls abandoning the water to collect leftover hot dogs and cake. Over the bridge, a mother and her son are walking hand in hand. She is dragged by her son in the direction of the swings. They're traveling under blooming cherry blossoms. Cherry blossoms were a gift given by Japan to the United States in 1912 to symbolize and celebrate the two nations' growing friendship. I wonder how many relationships have started under those trees, on that bridge, with all the ducks watching. The mother looks frustrated and the closer they get to the gazebo, the more I recognize her. What gave it away was the dark circles under eyes. I saw her here a few years earlier and I'm surprised I recognize her, but it's the eyes. Blue-green and still tired. Her son, however, is excited by the rain, jumping in puddles and kicking at wet dirt. He stops at a giant Garry Oak. Standing in front of it he looks dwarfed. He looks up at the trunk of the tree and fixes his eyes on the sprawling branches. He stretches his arms upward; they're stuck upright and stiff. In a swift motion he lets his arms hang. I think he wants to be big and tall like the oaks. Maybe he wants to droop the way they do, forgiving. He mimics the squeal of birds. He is a cartoon. Colorful and curious. The feeling of the rain doesn't bother him. His mother's color fades; paled by a stoic demeanor. She looks down at her son and her face softens. She quickly averts her eyes to the sidewalk, like she's scared of remembering a time long ago where all she felt was joy.

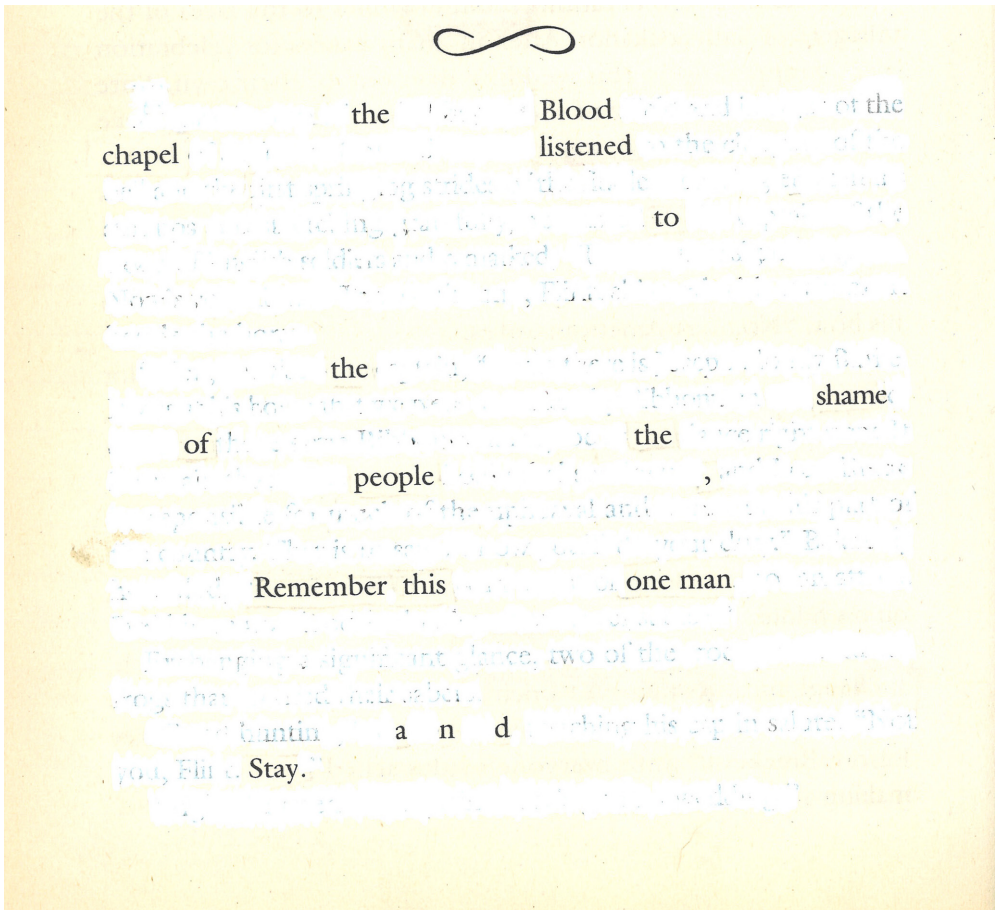
August 11th, 2016 -

Today the sun is harshly unforgiving. The park is full of people; children chasing each other, parents lounging on park benches, ducks bathe in the pond. It's puzzling that I feel so alone surrounded by people. Like I'm here but I'm not here. The air is stale without wind; nothing is making the leaves quake. Everything just sounds like noise. My hands and knees are cold and wet from the grass beneath. Above me, the trees are drooping with the weight of self-deception. Summer was supposed to make life feel free. It was supposed to be liberating but right now it just feels like growing up. Getting older. I'm scared that my own wonder and color is fading. I feel like my days are laid in a row. I feel like a silhouette with its face always turned away in the safety of a pitch-black mind. Time is delicate and brief. What happens when all of this dries up and withers away? The trees will go, the ducks will die, the grass will brown. What will happen to me? Where am I going? What am I doing here? I don't want to live like this, but I don't want to die. I close my eyes, trying hard to focus on listening to the birds, trying to focus on the cold grass

between my fingers. I remember the older man who, a few years earlier lay in the same spot. Plucking a few blades, I throw them up in the air. I watched them fall, settling on my chest and in my hair. His childlike attitude was intoxicating, but right now there are no leaves to kick around. The sun feels like a punishment. I can feel the sweat in my hair drip down, meeting the nape of my neck. I sigh deeply, trying to take everything around me in and then, I open my eyes. I force myself to stare at the sun, and then defiantly refocus my gaze at the sky. The sky that was once blue has been vandalized with black blotches. Everything looks fuzzy and warped. Kind of like looking through a kaleidoscope. I don't know why, but this fuzz relieves me. I'm overcome with a sort of sweaty ambition. I wonder if someone is looking at me lying on my back, so I smile. I laugh. I kick around and tug at blades of grass, throwing them in the air with reckless abandon. I feel like I've found a space in life where I'm ready to grow. The future is young and old. It is unknown.

ERASURE, BODIE & BROCK THOENE, ASHES OF REMEMBRANCE, PG. 10

Mira Cummings



THE MARKET

Casey Marinkovich

It is six thirty when she wakes up.
Pulls on her boots,
Pulls on her attitude,
Pulls on three layers of clothes, but no gloves.

She does last week's dishes this morning,
Loads the car heavy (with salmon),
She is ready for the farmers market.

She gets coffee, a necessary evil.
She figures the market pays for the cost of coffee in the morning.

Fish Girl pulls into the market with her full, white minivan.
Fish Girl unloads her coolers, flyers,
Recipes, gimmicks,
Assorted fish accessories

But first, she must set up tent.

She pulls the tent apart
Twisting and flipping around the mangled mess.

"Do you need help?" says the kind lady next to her.
"Yes, thank you very much!"

Fish Girl can never set the tent by herself.
It is broken, but it works.

Fish Girl has her setup set up,
And her samples are ready to go.

Fish Girl smiles at every passer-by.
Fish Girl is friendly to all.
She breathes hot air on her frozen hands.
She wishes she wore a third pair of socks.

“Would you like to try a sample?”

Fish Girl says with a grin.

“Oh... no thank you,”

Say the ladies in the fur coats.

Fish Girl doesn't mind,

She'll eat their samples later.

“Do you have any halibut?”

“No, we don't, but come back next week”

Fish Girl looks at the fragrant flowers behind her;

Beautiful pinks, yellows, reds and purples

Circling each other in perfect bouquets.

She wonders where they all go.

Maybe She will buy some next week.

The Man comes back for his weekly supply of fish.

Every week, a guaranteed seventy dollars,

a guaranteed three dollars fifty cents commission

for Fish Girl.

How can he afford this?

She thinks but cannot say.

She sighs as he leaves.

She passes out more samples.

“Would you like to try a sample?”

Fish Girl grins at the bundle down below.

The boy smiles with his lips tight.

Blushing, he grabs the salmon-soaked cracker

From her cold hand,

And into his freckled mouth.

“We'll be back later,” the mom winks at me.

Fish Girl sure hopes they will.
She would like to see him again.

“Do you have any halibut?”
“Sorry, we sold out this morning”

Fish Girl almost hands back the lady’s twenty,
“Here’s your change,” She says.
She looks back at her hand and cringes.

Fish Girl laughs her nervous laugh.
The lady smiles.
That wasn’t the first time today.

Fish Girl looks at the happy couple
with their children.
Fish Girl seizes the moment.

“Would you like a free sample?”
They buy fifty dollars worth.

Fish Girl scouts the fish bags.
Under all the black cod, lies the last piece of halibut.

“Do you have any halibut?”

“Yes, we do!”
Fish Girl says,
“One portion left”

“Great! How much?”
“Fourteen dollars”

He looks at the piece of halibut,
“Never mind.”

Fish Girl keeps her smile.

The next customer buys it instantly.

The other vendors take turns basking in the warm sun.
Fish Girl looks at them with envy,
Cold as ever,
As She sees them running to the bathroom.

Sometimes She wishes for another Fish Girl.
She can't hold it for much longer.

Fish Girl swipes the card with ease
And places the fish into the bag,
Her fingers slowly burning from the cold.

The frozen fish clings to her frozen fingerprints;
She kindly scrapes them off
And leaves them with the fish.

“Is that your Dad?”

Says the man looking at the
Fisherman in the pictures.

Fish Girl smiles and on the inside
She sighs.

“No,” She says brightly,
“My dad's still fishing.”

The end of the market grows near.
Fish Girl looks at the remaining consumers
Then looks back down.

The sample plate is still full
And the samples are growing old.

She will have to make
The executive decision

To eat them
one
by
one.

Fish Girl first takes down the sign
Then the (salmon) coolers,
Then the tent.

She packs up her stand
One by one by one.

This was Fish Girl's last farmers market.
She has worked here long enough
To know She wants to come back.

But for now, She just gets back into
Her minivan. It is full of the market
goods that she couldn't sell this time.

But we'll see next year.



Hannah Gunderson, *Florida*

CONTRIBUTORS

SARA ALBIN is currently studying English as an undergraduate at Central Washington University in Ellensburg. Before attending CWU she received her Associate's degree at Edmonds Community College, closer to her hometown of Snohomish.

OLIVER BECK is a junior in the Creative Writing program at Central. His work seeks to explore all things that makes us, us: sexuality, gender, religion, disability, and more. His writing serves as a place of personal reflection in the hope that others might find something of themselves within it. When he's not writing, he enjoys drawing and painting.

TYLER BOLLES is a sophomore at Central. She plans to major in English writing and hopes to work as a screenwriter sometime after graduation. She grew up in Ellensburg, and CWU is a big part of her love for this town.

RACHELL BRANT is from the largest moon of Saturn: Titan. Earth and Titan are the only celestial bodies known in our solar system to have liquid on their surface. In Greek mythology, Titans are a race of deities.

JARED BROOKS is a CWU student.

KALLIE BUSS is an undergraduate student in the English Teaching program at Central Washington University.

GRACIE CAMP is a sophomore English major at CWU with a passion for telling stories. She hails from Peshastin, Washington where she lives (when she's not in school) with her mom, dad, younger sister, and beloved dog, Jack. In addition to being an aspiring writer, Gracie also enjoys baking bread, watching movies, reading fantasy novels, and having all of her friends completely destroy her during Super Smash Brothers tournaments.

LESLEE CAUL is a writer, poet, artist, and human woman in this world. Her poetry has been published in Manastash Literary Journal. After

working a lifetime in marketing and public relations, she is enjoying the sound of her own voice again and hopes you will as well.

GWYN CAULDWELL is working to get a Professional and Creative Writing degree at Central Washington University. They intend to become a full-time technical writer and part-time Science fiction/fantasy writer.

MIRANDA CAYS is a transfer student majoring in Primate Behavior and Ecology at Central Washington University. She loves animals and the outdoors and can most often be found at the climbing wall.

ANDREW CIAMPI is a junior at Central Washington University. He was born in the sunny city of Sacramento and spent his formative years in the considerably less sunny Olympia. At the time of writing, he has never been published. Additionally, he knows that, in British vernacular, spelunking is referred to as "potholing." He's glad that you know that now too.

DANIEL CRAIG is a storyteller and songwriter from Yakima, Washington. He received a B.A. in Professional and Creative Writing from Central Washington University, where he focused on nonfiction and the Latino experience. When not writing, he enjoys making music, camping, and making music while camping.

MIRA CUMMINGS is a proud senior at Central Washington University. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Professional and Creative Writing, specializing in scribbling on other authors' work to bring out new messages.

XANDER DECCIO is an English - Creative/ Professional Writing major who will be graduating this spring. He currently resides in Yakima with my wife and three "fur kids." He also works as a freelance photojournalist on the side for a photo wire/agency. Last year some of his photos were published by Rolling Stone and People Magazine.

KYLE DENNER is a student at Central Washington University. He is a graduate of Yakima Valley College.

SIFO DYAS is a Central Washington University post-baccalaureate scholar and prolific alumni. He graduated with his B.A in public relations in 2017 and is working on his M.Ed through City University of Seattle. Mr. Dyas is currently working to obtain his teaching license and will teach English Language Arts for secondary education. With almost 20 years of perfect attendance and an uncanny passion for education, it's no surprise why this student cannot stay out of school.

CHLOEANNE ERICKSON likes writing about everything, but she can't think of anything special enough to write about herself. Figures. She thinks it's silly that bio's are written in third person. This is her first publication. She hopes it's not her last.

ANDI GRIFFIN is a lifelong writer and sufferer of writer's block. She has been working on a fantasy novel for the last few years and has taken many writing classes to hone her skills. Her default is fantasy and sci-fi, but she has enjoyed the literary fiction and poetry she's written for her classes so far. She aims to write clear stories and poems that are entertaining and straightforward, and aren't muddled by confusing language and unnecessary rhetoric.

AUDRA GUNDERSON is an art student at CWU and is interested in the nature of our existence on planet earth. She is fascinated by the lessons and insights into human nature that can be gained through science fiction, and she reflects this in much of the art she creates.

AUBREY HIGDON is a nineteen-year-old poet and freshman at Central Washington University. She has lived in Ellensburg, Washington all her life and has had a passion for writing poetry since she was twelve years old. Her former work has been published in the Ellensburg High School literary magazine, the Retrospect, and won Best Creative Writing in 2018. She plans to become a Professional and Creative Writing major and hopefully pursue her passion as a career.

BEN JELINEK is an undergraduate pursuing a degree in English Language and Literature.

EMMA JOHNSON is a junior at Central Washington University studying English and focusing specifically on Professional and Creative Writing. Writing has always been something she enjoys, and she is so excited that she gets to turn something that she is so passionate about into a lifestyle and career.

NATALIE LAKE is a junior in credits, but this is her first year at Central and her first time ever submitting something to be published. She struggles with anxiety and depression and uses writing as one of her creative outlets for processing traumatic events. She is sure a lot of students and staff remember February 6th, 2019 very well.

AMY LAW is a senior undergraduate student at Central Washington University, enrolled in the Professional and Creative Writing program. She is a published author in the spring 2018 edition of Manastash and in the winter 2019 online journal Turtle Island Quarterly.

KACIE LITTLE works in higher education as a Director of Donor Relations and received her Master's in English: Creative and Professional Writing at Central in March 2019. She has experience as a journalist and newspaper editor and has won multiple awards in journalism from WNPA. She is currently working on her first novel.

KYLEE MATALA is a psychology major and studio art major at Central Washington University who specializes in photography and drawing. She will graduate in June with a bachelor's degree in art and psychology and plans on taking a year off before pursuing grad school. Photography is her favorite medium because she likes to "capture the moments and details in life that often go unnoticed or that may be unappreciated." When she's not making art, she's usually reading, exercising, or spending time with friends and family.

LAUREN MATNEY is completing her first year of the Online Professional Creative Writing program at Central Washington University. Lauren earned her Associates Degree at Bellevue College, near Seattle, where she lives and works.

CASEY MARINKOVICH is an undergraduate student attending Central Washington University for her

bachelor's degree in professional and creative writing. She spends her Saturdays working at the Ellensburg Farmers Market selling fish and smelling the flowers behind her.

ALICIA MCAFFEE is a sophomore at Central Washington University and is currently studying Public Health. Some of her hobbies include watching cooking shows, trying to recreate what she watched in said cooking shows, and failing terribly at it. When she isn't watching cooking shows, you may find her at a coffee shop reading or writing in her free time. This is the first poem she has ever shared publicly and hopes that you enjoy it!

SEAN MCCABE is a Professional and Creative Writing major at Central Washington University, graduating in June 2019. A working professional and father of two, McCabe is an aspiring teacher and writer, hoping to make a positive impact on children in the way so many have done for him.

AMELIA MCINTOSH is an English Language Arts Education student at Central Washington University. She is passionate about education, kindness, and creativity. Having grown up in Aberdeen, Washington, Amelia finds comfort in rainy days, pine trees, and rock music. Her comic Phobic is her first published work.

(GLADYS LUSITANIA) ANTE MERIDIAN is an Interdisciplinary Studies of the Social Sciences major with an Accessibility Studies minor at Central Washington Univ. Ante writes through the lens of Queerness, as well as that of Psychosis, and attempts to make their world alive with their words, mostly talking about their lived experience as a queer person with psychiatric disabilities.

WESTON MORROW is a writer and graduate student of English literature at Central Washington University. Formerly, he worked as a print journalist in Fairbanks, Alaska. He serves as a poetry reader for Crab Creek Review and the intern for the Bagley Wright Lecture Series. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Pidgeonholes, Ibis House, After the Pause, Boston Accent Lit, and elsewhere. He can be found on Twitter @WMorrow or at www.westonmorrow.com.

RUBY NAMBO grew up in a small town of Sultan,

Washington. She currently is a senior majoring in English Language Arts Teaching with a minor in Bilingual Education. To view more of Ruby's poems, please visit her at: www.nambowrites.com.

KAYLEE NELSON's piece, *Good Dog*, was inspired by the 5-day festival, 'Day of the Dogs, held in Nepal.

NICHOLAS NEWHARD is a sophomore at CWU, a husband and father, and a non-traditional student with a successful career as a video game creator.

NEVE PETERS, originally from Olympia, WA, has been in Ellensburg off and on for four years, calling it her true home because of the family of people she has been adopted into here. She is extremely impulsive and creative. Her biggest joy comes from God, and she loves to use how He has impacted her life in her artistic expressions. Neve loves being around people, so if you see her, do not hesitate to say hello; she will probably nurture you with hospitality, in the form of blankets and cookies.

MICHAELA PHILLIPS is studying PR while working part-time at Central's preschool. She loves Star Trek and Disneyland, but her cats most of all. They are her biggest supporters.

BRITNEY POSTON was born in Chicago, Illinois. She is an English: Professional and Creative Writing undergrad student at Central Washington University, and currently resides in Spokane, Washington with her daughter Karena. Brittney has always had a passion for the Arts since she was a child. She is fairly new to writing poetry but has grown to love it in the short duration that she has engaged in it. Her passion for writing has earned her a spot as an honors student at CWU, and she hopes to land a career that will further nurture her passion in the future.

LOREN POULTER grew up in Seattle, and there he learned how to be a cannabinoid receptor fry-cook. He is interested in the Professional and Creative Writing Major at Central Washington University. It takes him roughly 11 minutes to listen to a 3-minute song in its entirety, and he believes it to be a worthwhile enterprise for him to spend all of his money on pizza delivery and takeout.

ISABEL QUINTON is an undergrad student at Central Washington University pursuing her bachelor's degree in Professional and Creative Writing. She enjoys reading collections of poetry and creative non-fiction work and combining the two. A single poem of hers has been published in Front Porch Review.

QUENTIN RAGAN grew up in a small town outside of Las Vegas, called Boulder City. The town claims ownership of half of the Hoover Dam, which he believes was heavenly influenced by the shape of an egg.

NANCY SANTOS is in the online Professional and Creative Writing program at CWU. She lives in Puyallup with her husband and two sons and is looking forward to moving near Ellensburg after graduating next year.

CORBIN SCHAEFER is in the Professional and Creative Writing major at Central Washington University. Otherwise, Corbin lives in Port Orchard, Washington, and enjoys watching horror movies and spending time with eleven dogs.

BEN SNYDER is currently a junior here at Central majoring in English Language and Literature.

W. JOEY THORNTON holds degrees in Music: Vocal Performance from Central Washington University (BMus & MMus). Since 2017 he has been taking creative writing classes through CWU out of curiosity and (later) necessity. Joey overfills his days with music, comic books, bicycles, skateboards, action figures, hyperbole, talking too loudly, and endless scheming. His coworkers say he is aggressively self-confident. He doesn't disagree with this assertion.

XYLIA TRUVER is a senior majoring in English and Language Arts Teaching.

JESSICA VINCENT graduated from Central Washington in Spring 2018. By day, she hails from Olympia, Washington where she moonlights as a management trainee for Enterprise. She spends her time painting miniatures for tabletop games, working on her literary love children, and talking to herself. If she spots Harry Potter paraphernalia on you, she's apt to ask "which house" and identify herself as a Ravenclaw.

Three of her poems can be found in volume 28 of Manastash.

ASYA WILSON is a transfer student pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in online Professional and Creative Writing. She transferred from South Puget Sound Community College after both completing her Associate in Arts and obtaining her high school diploma as a dual-enrolled student. She was elected valedictorian at her high school and graduated with highest honors from her university. Asya enjoys many areas of writing, particularly writing in the creative and fictional realm. When writing, her biggest inspirations come from her life, including her own fears, afflictions, and desires. For Asya, creative writing has become an enjoyable hobby, a therapeutic process, and a form of confession.

MADLINE WILSON is from Roseville, CA. She is a Social Services major and Non-Profit Organization Management minor and is pursuing a career in child welfare. She enjoys traveling, writing, volunteering, and being involved on campus. Currently, she is an assistant editor for PULSE Magazine, where she spends most of her creative energy. She is also the Sociology club treasurer.

JARRETT ZEIMER is a full-time undergraduate student at Central Washington University enrolled in the online Professional and Creative Writing Program. He is also a full-time steelhead hatchery culturist, working for Pacific Aquaculture, as well as a full-time lover of nature, wildlife, and the unexplored out of doors. His short 30 years alive have taken him from a small farming community in Molalla, Oregon, to the foothills of the North Cascades mountain range. He currently lives in a cabin on the South Fork of the Snoqualmie river, just outside of North Bend, Washington, where his passions have been allowed to meet exploration and creativity.

"EXQUISITE CORPSE" is a collaborative effort by eight members of the Inklings Creative Writing Club, through a game of Exquisite Corpse with the theme, "no theme." Each member wrote a verse to further the poem with only the verse directly before them to go off of. Each poet wrote in their own style, and nobody was allowed to read the whole poem until it was complete.