

MANASTASH

VOLUME 30: SPRING 2020

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



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Editor's Note

Dear Manastash Readers,

This 30th anniversary edition of Manastash is in recognition of the global environmental emergency and how that alters life on CWU's campus. This collection highlights the interdependent relationship between environmental and individual wellness.

With this collection we aim to convey that these issues that may seem removed from student's everyday lives have a profound influence. The value of an education is coming to understand that small acts make impacts. Art consists of poems, pictures, and planting trees. Through human expression we create a path of new growth. This edition serves as a testament to the extreme consequences of remaining complacent.

Dedication

This issue of Manastash is dedicated to Paulus Pimomo and George Drake for their contributions to the English department and CWU community.

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CONNOR CHILSON is a photographer from Honolulu, Hawaii studying Aviation in at Central Washington University. He enjoys capturing the natural, picturesque landscapes of the Pacific Northwest.

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AUBREY HIGDON is a poetic sophomore and PCW major at Central Washington University. Her work has appeared in *Manastash* 2019 and *Washington's Best Emerging Poets* 2019. She wants you to know that happiness is a French Bulldog and a bowl of cereal.

Wind is Good Weather in Ellensburg, Washington

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DANIKA LASKOWSKI is a senior at Central Washington University and will be graduating with a degree in Professional and Creative Writing spring of 2020. She has always had a passion for literature and recently began writing more. She hopes her words inspire and are enjoyed by others.

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REBEKAH PUSATERI is currently getting her master's degree in Professional and Creative Writing. Her writing is influenced by her travel; she has been to four continents and has studied four languages. Rebekah spent a year in China teaching English, and she hopes to be an English professor after she graduates.

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QUENTIN RAGAN, after driving east through Las Vegas, was born and raised in the small town that is passed through when going to Arizona, Nevada's last stop for a quaint low budget casino. Here, he first discovered poetry as three horses, 12 hooves, walking along the desert ridge under the fuchsia sunset.

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KIRA RILEY (She/Her) is a dual major, pursuing a Professional and Creative Writing degree as well as an IT degree with a specialization in cybersecurity. Kira resides in Spokane, WA and enjoys keeping her mind busy to ignore the shriek of uncertainty that persists in her being.

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CLARE PENFIELD is a student at Central Washington University who is passionate about the arts and the different mediums of artistic expression. She is excited to have her work featured in a published journal. She hopes that it will be a step to further advancements in her artistic career.

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HANNAH GUNDERSON's third major is art. She is fascinated by the information age. Specifically, how digital technology has altered human interaction. She emphasizes people being influenced by technology, media and each other. She warns against art stereotypes and stigmas because science fiction paintings have meaning and so does deviant art.

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ISAIAH SANFORD is an English student at Central Washington University. He lives with his two cats in an apartment above his grandfather's garage.

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CORBIN SCHAEFER is a senior at Central Washington University. He loves to spend time with his seven dogs and complain about *Star Wars*.

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KASSANDRA ELLER, a junior attending Central Washington University, is photographer living in Ellensburg, Washington. While pursuing a BFA degree, she is also a photographer for PULSE Magazine. Originally from Seattle, Kassandra finds the nature surrounding Manastash captivating. She focuses on the small, intimate moments of nature that go unnoticed.

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MICHAEL BLUE is a professional dancer and choreographer, currently pursuing his Master's in Theatre Arts at CWU, with a focus on performance studies. As part of his choreographic process, Blue includes prose and storytelling. Now, for the first time, Blue is exploring his writings as works outside a performance medium.

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ALINA MELNIK is a senior in CWU's writing bachelor's program. She enjoys experimenting with poetry and fiction, and her work often draws inspiration from nature and history.

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OLIVER KULTGEN is an English major originally from a small Montana town that was mispronounced in the film Jurassic Park. He now resides in Washington while spending his time biking, reading, writing, and taking care of his cats.

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ALYSSA BRANDT is currently pursuing an English degree. She works as a freelance writer for a law office and a video game developer. In addition to writing, she enjoys making music, playing video games, and pursuing her goal of watching every Korean drama on Netflix.

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SOPHIA SMITH has been doing art since a child. She has worked on the t-shirt for the Ellensburg Homeschool Co-op and the 4H On Target Club. She was also a featured artist in Hal Holmes lobby for the August 2019 First Friday Artwalk.

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MASINA IEREMIA is a second-year student at Central Washington University studying Philosophy and Creative Writing.
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CAELYN WHITE is a first-year student at Central Washington University, currently double majoring in Creative Writing and Theater Studies. She is primarily a playwright, but also writes creative nonfiction and poetry works. Outside of writing, she enjoys reading, stage managing, and playing Dungeons and Dragons.
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VANESA AROSTEGUI has obtained BAs in English and Psychology. She was a finalist for publication in *Axelrod & Cooper: Sticks and Stones and other Student Essays*. Recently she was a finalist in *The New Guard Literary Review* 2019 Poetry competition. She believes that poetry should crane reader's necks until the world makes more sense upside-down.
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JORDI JON PARDO is a 24-year-old journalist and documentary photographer from Barcelona. His interest in visual storytelling began while studying photojournalism in the faculty, where he covered human, psychological, and finally environmental conflicts. He's a member of MÓN, a non-profit organization based in Spain tasked with creating pioneering visual journalism that investigates the climate emergency and its implications for human life.
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KYLE DENNER is a student at Central Washington University. He is a graduate of Yakima Valley College.
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ASYA WILSON is a senior in the Professional and Creative Writing B.A. program at Central Washington University, set to graduate spring 2020. For Asya, her creative writing and art have become an enjoyable hobby, a therapeutic process, and a form of confession. Asya's work has been published in past issues of CWU's *Manastash*.

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ELLEN MCMAHON is a Senior at CWU currently finishing the Creative and Professional Writing major. While poetry is her passion, she is also in the middle of writing a play.

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MATTHEW BALAM is a Freshman at Central Washington University and is originally from Yakima. These poems are selected pieces from a collection of poetry that Matthew has created over the last two years.

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SHELBY DAVIS is an English Language and Literature major with a minor in Creative Writing. In the near future, she will be an international English teacher and publish her fiction novels and poetry collection. Shelby can be seen traveling the great outdoors or venturing other worlds through literature and television.

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JEN DOWD is an English/Language Arts Teaching major. She lives in Yakima with her five children. She is a driving instructor, a poet, a human, an eternal student. Jen is prone to quantum musings, enjoys driving along unmarked roads, and often discovers blackbirds in glass jars just before dawn.

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MAE BLOOMQUIST, a Washington based artist, has been going to school for both digital and traditional mediums. Currently attending Central Washington University she has been studying art hoping to one day get a degree in fine/digital arts to become a professional concept artist working in the movie and gaming industry.

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KAYLA L. HAGGARD is currently enrolled at Central Washington University as an undergraduate for the Professional and Creative Writing bachelor's degree. She likes to write poetry that focuses on imagery, similes/metaphors, and form.

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BETHANIE JOHNSON is a senior at CWU majoring in English. She has lived in Washington her whole life and has always been interested in literature and art. Beth currently prefers creative nonfiction as a way to share personal experiences that may help others learn and grow.

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SIDNEY GRIMM is a freshman at junior standing with an Associates in Arts degree from South Puget Sound Community College's Running Start program in Olympia, WA. She is studying Vocal Performance and Psychology.

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DARRELL URBAN BLACK is an American visual artist presently living in Frankfurt, Germany. His variety of artistic formats include pen and ink drawings, acrylic paintings on canvas, wood, and mixed media objects. Black's process is a mixture of acrylic paint and found objects combined with nontoxic hot glue, this technique creates a three-dimensional effect on any surface that gives a sense of realism and presence in his artwork.

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JAMPA DORJE (born November 21, 1941) is an American poet associated with the Berkeley Street Poets and the Poets of the Pacific Northwest. He is the founder and operator of dPress, which has published over three hundred titles, mostly of poetry and most in chapbook format.

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LUX BARKER is a queer nonbinary woman majoring in Professional and Creative Writing and minoring in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at CWU. Based in Tacoma, Washington, Lux works full-time and studies full-time. In 2018, Lux published their chapbook "there must be more than this" with Blue Cactus Press.

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SABRINA STOUTAMYER is a Professional and Creative Writing student, who plans to graduate Spring 2020. She works as CWU Central Access Department's Program Assistant, specializing in tactile graphics. Her life goal is to own a café where writers feel welcome to stay hours on end and, well, write.

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JULIANNA KROPLA is an English Secondary Education major and a Creative Writing minor. She spends her time writing, listening to her vinyl collection, and staring into the void.

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RUBY NAMBO grew up in a small town of Sultan, Washington. She will be graduating this year with her English Language Arts Teaching degree and her minor in Bilingual Education. Ruby's work has been featured in various anthologies and literary journals.

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Wind is Good Weather in Ellensburg, Washington

“It’s windy in Ellensburg,” they say.

In seventh grade, our science teacher Mr. Straightforward
told us we didn’t have to
include common sense in writing.

He meant
no one has to explain that the sun is hot and it’s windy in
Ellensburg.
He also meant “yeah, we know.”

Every year we piled into a car
and drove through Washington
for a trip as exciting! as the rodeo.

“It might be warm!”

It was a little cold like usual.

“It’s almost never windy in _____.
Spokane, Leavenworth, Darrington, etc....”

“You must have brought it with you!”

I wonder if we did,
I think I put a handful in my pocket
and forgot about it like
the Chapstick I put in my winter coat two years ago.
Only my lips remembered
but they often forgot to tell me.

The wind never
let warmness slow me down. Never
forgot.

“You know what the worst part about Ellensburg is?” the two men who
liked to hike
said to one another,
“As soon as the weather gets good, the wind comes out.”

Wind is good weather in Ellensburg.

Love Ellensburg, can't escape it,
the gust kicks up dust like the teenage tire tracks on our trips
out of town.
They say,
if you don't take a jar of dirt with you when you leave, you
will always come back.
But how will you catch it

catch it like downtown caught fire in 1889,
like the wind caught the embers and made the smoke dance
painting blueprints for brick buildings to replace the wooden ones
that the wind made creak in laughter: “it's time to learn.”

We did, and they decided to give us the college that same year.

It was a good-hearted joke, and the teenagers still feel it in the
breeze, we
breathe it in.

Our science teacher wondered how we knew we'd never leave
as we all grew up and drove away.

“There's certainly better places to live.”

We all turned our backs,
but couldn't explain
why we left grandma's jars on the shelf.

Or how we knew
the fire started here,
and God is still blowing on the embers.

Pulmonary edema

Imagine drowning
in your own blood

Imagine your alveoli
Fill up with a liquid

Imagine suffocating
and there is nothing you can do
but struggle to breathe again

Imagine laying somewhere
your air sacks no longer filled with air
the feeling of drowning

Imagine your alveolar wall thickening
Excessive shortness of breath
gasping for
nothing but blood

Puncture Wound

The ambulance sirens further disoriented me as the medics asked me questions. How old was I? Where did I live? Who was the president? I answered them with ease, but the tremors in my body grew. My arms shook uncontrollably, and my heart pumped blood so fast I thought it was going to burst before we made it to the hospital.

“Do you want a blanket?” One of the medics had a crease on his forehead. Or did he? Everything blurred together as I glanced from one person to the next in the ambulance. I tried to tell him no, that my body felt too hot, but my words didn’t make it past my lips. All I could feel was the stretching of my swollen lips, face, and throat. My skin was ripping apart, and all they could do was inject me with various antibodies and gently put cream on my lips to help them not split. The medic placed a blanket over my body, mumbling something to the other medics.

My mom, meanwhile, was still sitting in the front seat. She had thrown on sweats and a pink t-shirt when I woke her up, not being able to breathe. My mom’s shoulder-length brown hair was tousled from sleep, and her eyes were already swollen and bloodshot. Her sobbing was easy to differentiate from the sirens. Her cries felt too human, too fragile. It devastated me to hear the pain my mother was going through. I breathed faster, to match my heartrate. The medics kept telling me to take slower breaths. I couldn’t. I had no control over my body by the time they picked me up and put me on the gurney. The sirens became a living creature, jumping on my head, squeezing my heart, and tearing my arm where the infected spider bite was still swollen. The red swelling started around the white fang marks on my bicep and quickly moved down my arm when I started going into anaphylaxis.

The thoughts in my head swirled. My body swayed side to side from the bumps in the road that the ambulance soared over. I felt my consciousness float upwards. It was like I was staring down at my own body, watching the paramedics trip over themselves as they checked the tubes attached to my body, giving instructions to each other in a quiet, frenzied manner. I watched a paramedic feel the skin on my forehead, then tuck the blanket in tighter. Did he think I was going into shock? It made me want to laugh. I didn’t need the blanket; my tremors were from the multiple doses of epinephrine they injected me with.

I remember feeling the needles slide into my arms as a paramedic on each side gave me a dose.

“You will feel your heart speed up; that’s okay. It’s normal. Just try to breathe slowly.” The paramedics watched my facial reactions after they gave me the doses. My throat muscles loosened, and I gulped as much air as I could. Then my heart started pumping more than I needed. Pain in my chest made me breathe faster. I heard some people could get heart attacks from getting a high dose of epinephrine.

Still floating around in the air, I was aware of my mom quoting Bible verses to me.

“That’s good, keep talking to your daughter,” one of the medics responded. I don’t know what he looked like, just that I found him very attractive. The same medic turned to another one., “She’s going into shock...” The rest of his sentence blurred out as I laughed to myself again. These medics didn’t know anything.

“What’s your name?” A medic pressed me. I sank back towards my body until I was once more staring up into their faces. I had to think about it before I responded.

“Rebekah.” I caught my breath enough this time to respond.

“Breathe with me,” the medic breathed in and out, slowly. His chest puffed out and deflated. I tried to mimic as best as I could, but my heart wouldn’t slow down for me. The driver called out, “Hey, we’re at the hospital.”

The flurry of activity continued as the medics made sure I was strapped in and gave instructions to my mom on where we’d be going. A large bump caused me to slide again. The medics grasped the gurney, sliding me down the ramp from the ambulance. The three of them ran my gurney into the hospital, down halls, turning corners. My mom ran behind them, still talking to me, about what, I have no idea. I turned my head sideways, and a tear escaped from my eye. People stood at the side of the halls, staring directly into my eyes. They probably wondered why a girl was being wheeled into the ER. Or maybe they thought my face was grotesque. I did. I turned my head back because I didn’t want to acknowledge these random strangers who thought it was okay to stare.

I was wheeled to a room, then picked up, and put on the bed. Doctors and nurses rushed around connecting tubes and changing needles in my arms and hands. My mom stood near the door, crying. I wondered if she thought I was dying. It felt like I was. Once some of the people cleared out of the room, my mom rushed to my side, smoothing back the hair that stuck to my forehead. A doctor gave me a clipboard with papers.

“Since you’re eighteen now, you’ll have to sign your own documents,” his voice rumbled. “That’s some nasty bite you have there, huh? We need to monitor you for a day to make sure you don’t have a relapse. Once your swelling starts going down, we can let you go.” His voice was friendly, unconcerned, not like I was just dying in the ambulance ride over from suffocation.

I looked at my hand as I thought “lift your hand,” but it wouldn’t move. I tried again. This time my hand lifted enough to grasp the pen attached to the clipboard. I tried to write, but my uncontrollable limbs still shook. I was only able draw a shaky line to represent my name.

“That’s okay,” the doctor chuckled. “You’re still shaking, huh?” He turned and mumbled, “We’ll need to monitor that too.” He faced me again with a bright smile. “Any questions?”

My mom stood, “Can I talk to you for a moment, please?” They walked right outside my room. My dad was going to arrive soon, and I didn’t want to see my dad cry too whenever he arrived, so I closed my eyes to pretend to be asleep. Seeing my parents afraid made me embarrassed at how weak they seemed. Watching them fall apart would only make me cry empathetically. There was no way I was going to get any sleep due to the inability to swallow pain medication, but my parents would buy it.

Only about ten minutes later, my dad’s low, soft voice trickled into my room.

“How is she? Is she sleeping?” My dad and my mom mumbled together. Their steps were light as they walked towards the chairs. I could hear a “woosh” as their bodies sank into the plastic. I cracked one eyelid slightly open to peek at them. My dad had his head in his hands, and my mom stared at her hands that were clenched together. The pain in my heart doubled. My breathing became labored. My mom appeared at my side to place a kiss on my forehead. My parents never left my side while I was in the hospital.

I used to find it annoying how much my parents cared. I couldn't leave the house without someone asking me where I was going, when would I come back, and who was I going to be with. My parents didn't let me ride bikes without helmets like other children did. I couldn't go to someone's house unless my parents met their parents. When I started driving, my mom would only let me drive places that I drove with her in the car first, so she could see that I'd be safe. They never considered that I would be bitten by a spider in my sleep. For years I complained about the growing spider problem in the garage directly below my bedroom. They never knew that one would crawl up my heating vent, find a nice, warm body that probably rolled over on it and to caused the defensive reaction.

I didn't appreciate how much my parents cared about me and wanted to keep me safe until I saw the pain they went through, not knowing if I was going to make it to the hospital in time. The horror and panic in their eyes when they saw my bloated face and arm for the first time at 3 AM is an image that'll haunt me forever.

I went to bed at midnight, exhilarated from graduating with honors. Three hours later, I woke up with a sense of numbness and pain combined with not being able to breathe. Disoriented, I turned on the light and glanced in the mirror. I wanted to scream at the sight of my swollen face and arm. My lips had a dark line down the middle where my skin pulled as tight as it could go without splitting in half. The pain in my arm was hot and pulsing, my bicep twice the size it originally was. I had no idea what was going on but knew I needed to get to the ER before I blacked out from lack of oxygen and pain.

I didn't bother knocking on my parents' door but bursted in and grabbed my mom's shoulders. I shook her while making a gurgling sound in my throat. My mom sat up, mumbling, "Whaa..." When she opened her sleep-deprived eyes, she let out a scream. "RICK!" My dad jumped out of bed and stood there in shock. My mom was already up changing her clothes, grabbing her keys, and yanking my arm. Her hands that I remembered as strong and gentle were shaking. She drove me to the nearest doctor's office. My consciousness went in and out. I heard her voice but couldn't distinguish what she was saying. It felt like I was breathing through a straw. I watched the speedometer go to 90 miles an hour. When she got to the near-empty parking lot, she didn't bother parking the car. She jumped out and ran screaming for help. A receptionist jogged out to meet my mom. The receptionist called 911 and helped pull me out of the car. The ambulance arrived soon after to take me to a

hospital that would have the needed facilities. I didn't even find out it was a spider bite that caused the most physically painful experience of my life until the doctor at the ER examined my arm. The doctor was unable to determine to type of spider that caused it, but my garage iwas a habitat for wolf spiders, so that could have been a possibility.

It was the day of my high school graduation party. My parents had to cancel it as I spent what was supposed to be a massive party in the hospital. I relapsed multiple times after the initial reaction and had to quit my summer job to recover. I got rashes all over my body from an allergic reaction to the antibiotic medication. It took months for the bite to heal, leaving two purple puncture wound scars. It was a full month before I could sleep again because of the amount of epinephrine they kept pumping into my body every time I relapsed. The lingering memory of watching my parents' reactions to my near-death moment however is something that won't heal with time.

I received a notification a year later on my phone that was a picture of me in the hospital. I walked into the kitchen holding my phone.

"Hey mom, can you believe this was already a year ago? I'll never forget waking up like that." I held my phone up to my mom's face. She glanced at it, face tightening. She turned away towards the sink to focus on washing the dishes.

"Wow, yeah time flies." My body reeled back in surprise at her short, unemotional answer.

"I seriously thought I was going to die." I stared at my mom's back. She straightened up from the sink to briefly face me.

"Yep, that was a scary time for sure." Red jagged lines appeared on my mom's eyes, and a glaze covered them. She walked out of the kitchen. Her bedroom door clicked as she went in and locked it. I stood in the kitchen, frustrated at wanting to talk through the complex emotions I still harbored, but both my parents always cut the conversations short.

Most children and teenagers have a moment when they realize their parents don't know everything and are simply human. I got a glimpse of what my parents' reactions would be if I died before they did. It was horrifying to see how quickly they crumbled under the emotional pressure when, as a high school student, I relied on them for support daily. I had

seen them crawl into shells when my uncle committed suicide and when we watched my grandpa die. I was never the reason or the object of their terror. I can't unsee their fragility anymore when I look at them. I find myself thinking of ways to protect them, to clean the house while I'm home, so that there's less for my parents to do.

There's a high probability that I'll end up sitting in the front seat of an ambulance with one of my aging parents in the back. The roles of caretaker and dependent are starting to switch, and there's still a part of me that's not ready. I find myself clinging to the fading image of my parents before the incident, when they were stoic, impenetrable, and capable of fixing all my problems.

Sunset in the Mojave



Quentin
Ragan

Visual

Pollinator's revenge



Camellia

She was beautiful
Spanish flan
in the Japanese
overtaking
of the Philippines

At home
the Japanese sword
had come from the jungle
spilling blood
on the chopping block
all morning

And it was brother Toto's turn
the katana took flesh, but saving
his spine, he pushed himself
down into two-stories of death
waiting in the blood and bodies
for bony soldiers to recede
from sight

Standing
silhouette holding his head
in the raining night
knocked at the door
Don't touch me mother
I'm covered with blood

Come into the bath my child
Lita hid him in the jungle

feeding him grass soup for weeks
supporting a decagon of children
she her most
marketable asset
the kind of lady
you pay to stick around

There was no question
She & her sister had to flee
across the Atlantic
Tagalog tongues
awed by available sailors
digging breasts

The oldest of 15 got
a proposal in celebration
of new shores

Little boy Jimmy came later
and married sweet Laurine
there 61st anniversary passed
even widower Chuck says
Jesus Jesus Jesus

Mental plaque
runs in the family
you see

Chalks the brain
until death taking
just the flashlight that
abled light

Bobbing on the nose of the boat
 slipping out of the nook of Depot Bay
 the waves scatter light
 like a spread book
 of a love story that has rode
 its path to the sun

By airplane or by car
 the two of them
 will make it back together
 after he gets out from these bars
 once living on the run, Chuck and Connie
 flood states if badges were to intrude
 on their vast desert romance

The loveliest woman
 laughing still
 on her day of ingress
 the boatmen &
 Chuck weighed on his one leg
 saying goodbye to his whole life of love
 flowers are thrown into the Pacific & ash
 his face upwind
 to keep his eyes tearless

That's my hubby she'd say
 her eyes kindred
 for her man
 until they finally closed
 and she left

Taxation is Theft

Casino smoke coats the sides of my,
of your
throat.

The gritting in mine, of your
guts, slipping hands with the slickness of
doing it wrong, an infraction to the constant
cycling self. A sense of theft, but
you can't steal what's yours,
what's mine?

Plates are placed before me, you try
you do,
talk to the nerve-winding,
spiral tightening nametag with performative
Debbie. She gives you a gift.

Burnt quesadillas—unforgivable.

Your laugh curls against my neck as you lean
closer in, \$10.99 underdone prime rib is bestowed in
the ceremony of exchanging words for subsistence.

Cold meat clings to my (yours too?) tongue; smiling, mocking,
reprimanding I'm a vegetarian eyebrow raise roots my sweating, sticking
thighs to the soft vinyl.

There could never be yours and mines when my mines
were never your okays. My I like _____ left you shaken,
yet I was the hollow.

We're together.

Are you sure?

You've never even been with a _____
You, maybe it was me, reach across the
plastic, the distance, the trauma who still
bounced in
tight tidal waves in my
fingertips. Your hand is in mine.
I can't remember if it's yours
or if its mine, if
I want it to be.

Too Poor for Tires, Too Hungry to Eat

There's a hair in my mouth.

I can feel it when you are talking to me, looking
for a squeeze of your hand, but in words you know I can't find.
Not for you, when you are promising security on a drifting unicycle.
When there were two wheels, I thought maybe I could
breathe.

The loose strand traces my molars, threatening to get—
stuck. Gum stringing together
stories on the wrappers,
the glyphs of people who reminded me of
me when I was with you.

I find myself missing being excited to see.

I clear my throat as it curls against the top of my neck.
Corkscrewed fingers knead into creaky knees as the eyes
testing my toxicity are tentative, not trusting the way hearts promise
the shallow ache in my core, is it worth it
to be wanted?

Strawberries

“They’re good for my heart!” Grandma laughs
as she takes a bite of a large strawberry,

as if that berry could stop the irreversible
heart failure and aneurysms! taking

over her body, one aneurysm stretches
from her heart to her kidneys and the other

3cm on her aorta. “Eat one, they’re sweet!”
So I grab one. We sit in silence, strawberry

slipping through lips. I think about the ram I
painted when I found out that grandma was

given less than a year. 6 hours hunched over
an 8X10 painting, tears mixed in acrylic, and

a ram to show for it. I don’t think I’ve seen a
ram in person, but it looked happier than me,

yellow in the background, my grandma and
I’s favorite color. She smiles and places her

hand on mine and we both pretend
that strawberries cure hearts.

Water

The last time I saw her alive, she complained that her mouth was dry. I remember another resident complained of the same thing while she was dying. She kept asking for water. Repeatedly. Like it was the only thing she could say, “My mouth is dry sweetie, please get me something to drink.” And I couldn’t do it right away, I had to look at her chart, and when I wasn’t sure, I spent five minutes waiting for a nurse to get an answer. I had to ignore the human in me, and let her suffer for five more unreasonable minutes, as if that water was going to make her die faster than she did. Maybe the water would have taken away the suffering she’d experience in the weeks to come.

Influence



Hannah
Gunderson

Visual

Andromeda



Hannah
Gunderson

Visual

Interview

Loyal to the artist persona, Hannah Gunderson once lived in a studio apartment. Desperate to decorate, she used to beg her friends to save pizza boxes and use them as canvases. With acrylics, she painted galaxies and planets and learned art was its own black hole to escape into.

Now completing her third bachelor's degree, Gunderson is focused on elements of visual science fiction. Her pieces represent the dichotomy between digitized reality and routine escapism—usually through the means of some sort of media. Rich in context, Gunderson's pieces often have embedded references to movies and books, exposing the layers of escapism humans engage with unconsciously. As a result, she finds she appreciates a lot of the conceptual art from cultural phenomenon's because it is "art that you might not see in a gallery." Gunderson does not treat art like it must be caged to a museum in order to qualify as legitimate commentary.

Perhaps that is because Gunderson's work explores two invisible themes: technology and relationships. Gunderson's work is not shy at highlighting how digital technology forces our interpersonal relationships to evolve. For this reason, she is "fascinated by biomechanical imagery—the fusing of the mechanical with the organic," or the act of handing a human's fleshy hand a cell phone.

Gunderson appears to be in direct conversation with the phenomenon 'nature vs. nature' as she considers humans a collection of experiences. This is one of the many reasons that viewers experiencing Gunderson's work are not in for a passive experience. Gunderson describes her process by saying, "...when I paint human figures, I envision all their experiences influencing and 'programming' them into who they are." Viewers of Gunderson's work are confronted with questions about free will as they start to consider how every person "is a collection of influence and history." Gunderson's—perhaps comforting—interpretation is that none of us ever experience isolation.

Convenience Store at Night

The automated floodgates open and close like jaws of a goat chewing cud.
The Gods walk in buy their shit and leave.

Conversations about road conditions.

Moo-la changes hands. The Gods go out and
dine on the world, chanting a mantra about
breathing beneath water, about not being able to swim
or even dog paddle, their mouths full of ocean,
their lungs like handbags heavy with rain.

I met Mars last Summer. He came in, native-american, Vietnam,
bent like a piece of copper pipe, his diaper bulging in his cargo shorts,
wrapped in respiratory tubes sustaining the sound of rusty breaks in
his chest.

He wanted cigarettes, so I sold him a box.

He overheard come young kid complaining about his sprained ankle
and muttered to himself,

“I took a hit to the heart and I’m still standing.”

He then turned around and his daughter guided him through
the floodgates.

Scientists say that if two people hold eye contact for six seconds or longer
it means that either they want to kill each other or they want to fuck.

We made it to four. She took out a credit card. I asked for I.D.

Venus nineteen ninety-six. She said to me, “How’s your day going?”
but I was too focused on the darkness of her eyes the thinness of her lips
old scars on her wrists. She confirmed her purchase, she
smiled at me, honestly, the first I’d received all day
before she started away, and I knew
that she wouldn’t drown.

He saw me before I saw him. Janus walked in, asked me where
the condoms were, went over, grabbed a beer too, and proceeded
to tell me all about my future, about what I should expect.

Ankle trackers, prison rape, tattoos of burning American flags,
long hours working for the sewage department,
standing there with a hose and a gas mask that filters out everything but
the smell.

I asked him if he wanted a receipt. He thought about it,
told me to toss it, then turned away, allowing me a brief glimpse
into the eyes of a man overcome with joy.

So there I was at the end of days, feeling like no God,
scrubbing away the period blood, crystallized urine, anarchist graffiti

in the lavatory with napalm.
I overheard the heavenly hosts in the candy aisle.
“How’s your day goin’?”
“Well, I’m on this side of the dirt anyway.”
“I hear ya. Ain’t tits up yet. Have a good one.”
“Goodnight. Drive safe. It’s a monsoon out there.”
“Yeah well I’ve driven in worse.”

Windowsill

I enter Einstein's apartment and
the first thing I see are three stale
cookies on his kitchen counter.
He composes a brief apology
for the pile of dirty clothes in the corner
and the porn on the coffee table.
On the windowsill a goldfish swims in its fishbowl
asking no questions about the speed of light
or the nature of time.
Einstein will over-feed him one day
or forget him,
and that will be that. We listen
to the radio speak kraut.
We discuss the weather. We talk about
what all of his friends think of him,
what his professors think,
what his boss thinks, but
we never settle these issues so
he offers me a cigar. I decline. He lights up,
blows it out the window so his landlord won't notice.
Einstein stares into the street,
inattentive to me. He picks his nose flicks it,
says something profound, but
I'm not listening. Outside
it begins to rain. The window cries,
warping his vision of the world in just the right ways.
I glance outside just to see.
Einstein invites me to stay for supper, but I can't.
I have to walk down that street.
I have a bad memory.
I'm just not hungry.

Gaps

When you stepped off the back porch
and rolled your ankle
because you didn't mind the gap
between the wood plank edge
and the rut of dirt the dogs made in front of it
and I didn't hear you crying my name for help
because I was listening to music
and Pa was in the front yard working
on whatever it is he was working on
and he eventually heard you
and pulled the pickup truck into the backyard
to load you into the passenger seat
like a third-rate ambulance
and you got x-rayed by the doctor
who made you wear a cast for three months
and then sent you home
and you couldn't walk up the front porch stairs
and your new husband didn't want to carry you
so you pathetically crawled up them
crying as you did so because it hurt so much
and his emotionless face watched as you did
and twelve-year-old me stood by the door and watched you
probably get splinters from the worn wood steps
and when the cast prevented you from having a good time
on our trip to Yellowstone three weeks later
because you couldn't ride your brand new bike
and the fracture that the doctor didn't recognize
even though you insisted it was broken
and the pain you still feel in your ankle sometimes
after all these years, I didn't realize how loud the music was.

Spotless

My reality lags
like I'm a confused parent,
watching his children grow up.

I don't remember my friend's room
being this dirty. Piles of clothes,
discarded trash acting as its new carpet.
He says his room is messy, I tell him
"It's fine."

And I can't fathom the idea of him owning
condoms, so I have to remind myself
how old we are now. It's not
elementary school anymore.

It's not elementary school anymore,
and my sister is in a car on her way
to a party. The passenger in front of her
is smoking a blunt. She's fifteen. She says
"It's fine."

My cousin talks about high school,
how he received a lap dance from a girl
in between classes yesterday. How he,
at the dance, walked into the bathroom
to see his friends taking edibles. "I'm fine,"

he told me his response was. We're growing
up, but it feels like I'm lagging. I watch from
my room, its carpet dirty in the way where
it is spotless, vacuumed. "I'm fine," I whisper.

fantaisie indigène



Kassandra
Eller

Visual

Restless Crows

The crows were restless that day. They exhibited a behavior known officially as “cacophonous aggregation,” usually occurring in the presence of a dead conspecific; when one or more crows do gather around a fallen comrade and skold (a guttural squawk repeated in short concessions). These calls differ contextually from a simple alarm call to signal danger –the phenomenon is truly a crow funeral (of sorts), though the exact function of the behavior, and whether or not crows actually possess a complex understanding of death, is unknown. (How appropriate that a “murder of crows” can also be a funeral.)

The crows were restless that day. They skolded and they skolded. They had circled the house all morning; an incredible fluttering of wings, a great black mass, a ravenous, murderous funeral of crows. One of their species had eaten rat poison left out by some neighbors and yet brought itself to the Bauermann’s garden to die. Its body was already decomposing due to anticoagulant chemicals that essentially deflated the bird with severe bleeding. A puddle of black feathers and a beak sank into the soil behind a large Iris plant, and was never noticed by anyone.

Lucy Bauermann always averted her gaze in a marital argument. She retreated into a niche within, ever fortified by denying her glance to Elijah. Elijah always looked on, waiting and hopeful for that time when Lucy might raise her eyes back up to him. She would sit and he would most usually stand. His standing annoyed Lucy, she felt as if Elijah were looming over her. Elijah didn’t think that he loomed. He was standing then, when there was a knock at the door. Lucy stared into the void from her seat and Elijah walked over to answer. It was usually expected of him to answer the door.

Elijah first peeked through the narrow window on the door to see who it was. He did not recognize the man, dressed in overalls and looking out over the garden with an odd smirk. The man caressed the stubble on his chin, and by doing so, mimed a pensive state.

“Hello?” Said Elijah.

The man took his time to acknowledge Elijah’s presence. He slowly turned his head and shifted his line of sight from the garden to Elijah. His smirk became larger, a forced smile that was painful to perform. His hand

remained on his chin. He spoke through his teeth with an accent Elijah couldn't place.

"Hi, I was hoping to get flowers," the man said.

"Flowers?"

"I was diving, my truck is there, and I see your flowers." He brought both his hands up to frame a tall row of old lilacs, blooming with the full glory of Spring. The fragrance from the flowers was so pungent it nearly made the air shimmer. An open window wafted the scent indoors from night to early morning, filling the living room with a sweet perfume.

"Oh, you'd like to take home some lilac flowers. Yes, by all means, take a few."

"I have a tool in my truck and I'd like to cut some of the branches with the flowers."

"Sure, okay, cut a branch, just please don't leave an awkward shape with the tree."

"Yes, I'd like to cut some branches."

"Well, how many branches are we talking here?"

"Well, we need some flowers for this weekend and I see your flowers and I love them."

"Surprising somebody?"

"No, we have an event we need flowers for."

"How many flowers do you need?"

"How many flowers will you let me have?"

"Oh, I don't know, a dozen small branches, at the top where it could use some pruning, I noticed you have a ladder on your truck."

"Just a dozen?"

“Yes, well, we like to look at them, but I suppose I could spare a dozen.”

“I’ll get my pruner.” The man went across the street to where his pickup was parked. He pulled from the back a long tool nearly two meters in length with a curved saw blade on the end of it. Just beneath the saw was a lopper, connected to a draw string that activated it, running the length of the pole-handle.

Elijah went back inside the house. Lucy was still looking at the floor. Elijah peered out from behind a curtain which partially covered an open window by the lilacs. The man with the pruner impressed Elijah with his swift skill, adroitly removing each carefully selected branch in a sharp instant.

“He looks like a professional,” Elijah said. Lucy said nothing. Elijah then finally registered the racket he had heard all morning as an enormous congregation of crows. He wanted to make a comment but knew it would anger Lucy, as it was a frivolous distraction from their argument. He should be reengaging with her, he thought, but the man outside seemed done. Elijah hurried back out the door.

“You all done?” Said Elijah.

“Ah, yes,” said the man. He adjusted his hat and a bead of sweat rolled down his face.

“Great, wow, you work fast, and the pruning actually looks nice that way.”

“Yeah, you know, I really would like to get those guys up there,” the man pointed to a couple of high branches that were loaded with plump clusters of purple flowers. He shrugged his shoulders. “But I already have a dozen.”

“Well go ahead and get those two at the top, that’s fine.” The man extended his device, pulling out a pole that had fit snugly into the pole-handle, doubling the length of the reach. Elijah did not go back inside, he stood on the front porch and watched the man for a moment. “So this event on the weekend, is it a wedding or a birthday?”

“Oh, no, no, it’s at the market, the farmers’ market.”

“The farmers’, okay, so some social event at the market?”

“No.” The man cut the last of the two branches. “We are selling flowers at the market—I would like to get that guy too, but,” the man shrugged as he did before, “that’s okay I guess,” he shook his head gently and let out a tisk-tisk from between his teeth.

“Alright, well, good luck selling my flowers at the market.”

“Yes, I’ll get this stuff together here, and I’ll go, okay?”

“Sounds good, thanks, good luck.” Elijah watched the man gather his cuttings and tool into one mass that he then expertly hoisted over his shoulder and carried to the bed of his truck. Elijah waved as the man looked over while climbing into the driver’s seat. The man gave a limp wave in return and shut the door to his vehicle. Elijah went back inside. He knew he should continue his conversation with Lucy, and that he had welcomed the interruptions, but he still needed to tend to the garden and chicken coop before it got too late and too hot outside.

“He’s gone,” said Elijah. Lucy raised her eyebrows and gave a slight nod while looking down at her mobile phone, her thumbs typing on the screen with strong intent. “I have to go and take care of the chickens, and I should water, it’s supposed to be a scorcher today... I’ll be right back.” There was a pause. “Did you hear that?”

“Yeah, okay,” said Lucy.

The Bauermann’s could not afford to install an irrigation system, that is why Elijah always watered by hand with a hose. He was able, however, to attach an inexpensive brass nozzle to the end of the hose that, when loosened, would let out a pressurized stream of water. When tightened, the fixture would gradually lose its forceful propulsion and transform the emission into a fine mist before shutting off altogether.

Elijah took a moment to close his eyes and breathe the sweet inchoate air of early morning. Then, upon raising his eyelids, he noticed the house across the street, the house with the rat poison. It had been occupied until the week before but now it appeared empty. He saw the darkness beyond the front door, slightly ajar, still and deep in the stagnant morning sunlight and it mysteriously nauseated him. The neighbors who had lived there, for about a year, he had never spoken to beyond a few passing banalities

at the mailboxes. And yet, he had a keen awareness of their presence: they were a couple, ageless, who constantly fought. Their yells echoed down the residential block almost daily. During their more heated bouts, Elijah would tip-toe into the front garden giggling to himself and hide behind a tree, attempting to listen to their arguments like an old gossip. But alas, though their shouts were highly audible they somehow always lacked the intelligibility for spying ears to ever understand what the altercations were about.

Elijah turned the nozzle to let water out of the hose and forgot about the sick feeling. Practicing his watering technique seemed always to help him feel more at ease. Elijah had become quite adept at using the hose apparatus to suit the dynamic needs of watering the garden: he swiftly adjusted the nozzle from a gentle spray over the peonies to a hard jet to attack a wasps' nest; he shifted in an instant from the droplets that mimicked a light rain on the raspberries to a conical emission that expertly soaked a ring of green beans growing up their poles.

With watering finished, Elijah's next duty was to attend to the backyard chicken coop. He walked into the sunroom at the back of their house and filled a pitcher of feed from the sack he kept there. He remembered then that he left some table scraps as a treat for the chickens in a tub by the kitchen sink, but he didn't want to go back inside. He took the food that he had and opened the wire door to the pen. He filled a feeder that he had constructed out of milk jugs and suspended from a cord of nylon nailed to the ceiling of the enclosure. The chickens swarmed the feeder in a frenzy. Midst the frantic beaks, one of the lower ranking individuals pecked at some feed that landed on his shoe, surprising him.

Elijah saw that the water dispenser was low and filthy. He removed it and cleaned the crud with a sharp stream from the brass nozzle before filling it again with water. By the time Elijah placed the water in the pen the chickens had mostly lost their interest in feeding and began to venture out of the pen to graze in the backyard. It was then that Elijah noticed the presence of only five of the six chickens. Joan was missing.

Joan was Elijah's favorite chicken and also the alpha of the pecking order. On windy days it was Joan's habit to stand apart from the rest of the flock at the edge of the garden and stare at the fence—as if looking beyond the fence—while the wind ruffled her beautiful barred rock feathers. Elijah would joke that Joan was like a true leader, gazing into the future.

Elijah opened the door to the coop to check on Joan. The cool temperature of the morning was already disappearing, and the inside of the coop felt hot and stagnant. There was also a peculiar humidity to the air that made Elijah imagine the inside of a blister. Joan was perched in the same spot where Elijah had left her the previous evening—he had seen Joan sitting on the ground of the coop that night, thought she had been confused by the dark, and so placed her on the long wooden perch with the others. She had not moved since. Elijah placed a hand on either side of the hen to gently lift and bring her to the outside light for inspection.

On the underside of the chicken, he touched a cool neglectful liquid that slipped along the fissures of Elijah's calloused fingertips and poured into the pores of his skin with an almost preternatural potency, the effect of which was unknown to him. Stepping into the sunlight, Elijah looked the bird in the eye—she was vacant and listless. He investigated the feathers superficially around her neck and her wings, though he knew that the problem was underneath and that he was delaying its reveal to him.

Finally, Elijah flipped the chicken over. Though there was a strong visual, what struck him first was the odor—it was not that he hadn't smelled the odor prior to looking, he had catalogued in his automatic mind an oddly unpleasant scent, but it did not hit him fully and consciously until he was faced with it: a glistening scent of decay that blurred the air immediately near to it. Then, a moment later, after Elijah's eyes had adjusted to the sizzling putrid atmosphere, he saw what watery tickle had caressed his hands: a myriad of maggots writhing in a fetid soiree. The maggots had apparently made their home in a slash-like wound that ran the length of the bird's underside, and expanded into an inexplicable tangle of skin folds and dark dripping feathers. At the center of it all was a large bubble of exposed grey-damp skin.

Elijah began to choke on the atmosphere. There was a dangerous filth to the air that twisted in his nostrils. His eyes began to water, or perhaps it was that he wept, Elijah could not tell the difference. He had on him a pocket knife that he unfolded in a desperate attempt to lance the pustule on the poor bird. He peeled some more of the feathers around the boil to clear an area—the soaked feathers detached from the surface of the hen like clumps of warm butter. Steadily he held his small blade and punctured the balloon of grey skin which deflated rapidly, oozing a surprisingly clear fluid. He then pulled the knife across the loosed skin, creating a long slit with relative ease. Elijah then pinched the top flap of skin and tore it to expose the flesh beneath—not raw but rather greenish, a deeper decay.

Elijah tore at the skin still further beyond where the pustule had been. The denizens of the rot seemed almost aggravated by this action which gave Elijah some hope that he may rid Joan of them. He gave what little skin he could hold between the tips of his fingers a confident tug and ripped away a gelatinous triangle. But then Elijah gasped—revealed were many layers, nonsensical layers, all teeming with maggots. He knew then that it was hopeless.

“I’m so sorry Joan, I’m so sorry. This is it, poor girl, this is it,” Elijah spoke to the chicken who had remained motionless through the surgery. Elijah stood. Joan stayed on her side, too weak to even attempt to change position. Elijah made his way to the shed not far from where Joan lay, the shed where he kept his tools. Inside there was what he needed: a hatchet he rarely used. He looked too for a board of some kind to place under Joan, so that he may strike against a hard surface and give her a quick death. Leaned up against the wall was a pile of sticks used as stakes for gardening and behind them was a flat board of wood, about 20 centimeters wide and one and a half meters in length. It was perfect for the job.

Gently Elijah laid Joan onto the board. She stretched her legs in a way that Elijah interpreted to be an invitation, as if she had a secret knowledge of what was to come. Elijah thought that he should cause her no panic, so he covered her eyes with his palm. He aimed the small axe and rehearsed the motion, steadying his nerves. He then raised the hatchet to the appropriate distance, held his breath in concentration, and brought it down swiftly. The head came off in a clean instant and Elijah commended himself on his accuracy. Elijah expected (according to common knowledge, having had no previous experience) the body of the chicken to scurry about wildly, but it was instead that the bird only slightly jerked its body in a pathetic, weak manner. Elijah removed his hand from Joan’s face and watched her softly close her eyes—he thought this to mean she was relieved.

Elijah took the spade he kept against the coop, sheltered by a bit of awning. The shovel had seemed to Elijah to lean morosely against the old wood of the coop exterior. There was then the question of where to dig. Elijah noticed a small patch of dirt behind some phlox in a fenced-off flower bed the chickens were kept from grazing in. Joan would have wanted to get in there and explore, Elijah thought, and so he began to dig.

Elijah was surprised at how large the hole needed be—he placed Joan’s body in the initial hole he had dug, and it did not appear to adequately fit.

He dug it wider and deeper to accommodate the bird's bulk. He was then about to cover the corpse when he realized that he had forgotten Joan's head. He was much gentler with the head and cradled it in his hands as if it were fragile and precious. He placed the head down on the ground a moment so that he may turn the rotten side of the body away and lay the head upon her cushiony feathers, as beautiful as they ever were. Upon doing so, Elijah felt an odd sort of misery, one that felt sick and hazy. It was unfamiliar to him, and yet also known, as if having expected something inexorable.

Elijah covered the sad bits of chicken offal (that unfathomably Joan was once comprised of) with earth, though he thought that perhaps it was not enough. He felt he needed a marker to commemorate Joan, as he had had no sepulcher to house her corpse. It was convenient, however, that many months prior, while trimming roses along a fence, Elijah had found an old bowling ball hidden among some dead tangled stems. Remembering this bowling ball, Elijah thought that it would make a suitable tombstone.

As Elijah pulled the bowling ball out from under the roses and schlepped it across the lawn, he noticed that it was much heavier than he imagined, almost unbearably heavy. He set in the dirt over Joan. Elijah coughed and told himself he hoped he was not coming down with a cold, though in reality he had simply fought back tears. He did not wish to cry over a chicken, that was unacceptable.

Elijah returned indoors. The salient features of his presence, as detected by Lucy, were his outstretched arms and rigid hands, palms down, accompanied by an abnormal gait. She understood this behavior to be a theatrical display of hardships which had kept him outside for a prolonged duration of time. However, Lucy did not buy it, she saw through his spurious antics and attributed the delay to his usual desultory dilly-dallying. The strange mummy-like gesticulation of his arms and hands, she execrated to be nothing more than the product of the rhapsodic intensity he experienced whilst practicing his hobby—alone, safe and inviolable without the “nagging wife”. She wondered if he really thought she was as horrid as that? Lucy considered Elijah's silent judgment of her character to be wholly unfair, even cruel.

Elijah awkwardly and desperately washed his hands in the kitchen sink. He spoke across the house to the living room where Lucy still sat and told her of the incident matter-of-factly. Lucy, though never a true caretaker of

the chickens, expressed not only shock, but an almost loving sort of grief as to the loss of Joan. She had a gentle sob at the back of her throat as she spoke. Her expressed concern provided Elijah with a sense of intimacy that he had long forgotten about. He warmed to Lucy within himself and capitulated to admitting whatever wrong he had committed (so he may become, once again, physically close in addition to the emotional intimacy that she had so poignantly resurrected in him). Then he noticed the smell. Elijah realized that merely washing his hands was not helping the rot that aggressively invaded his nose. Lucy too became quickly aware of the foul odor and voiced her complaint. Elijah then decided to shower, and to launder his clothing, which Lucy concurred as the right course of action.

A week to the day after Joan's death, the Bauermanns' television broke. Joan was not consequential to the machine breaking, but it was noted nevertheless by the Bauermanns as auspicious. A few days later, a large package was dropped at their front door. They were not expecting a parcel of any kind, least of all a monolithic package that imposed triumphantly on their front porch. To their surprise and joy, however, the Bauermanns soon found that in the mysteriously giant box was an enormous television. Lucy's father had bought for them the television as an act of sheer kindness (knowing via a phone conversation that they had recently become television-less). It was much larger than their old television and not the sort they would normally be able to afford. There was only one problem: it did not fit on the old stand and they didn't have anything else to put it on.

Elijah went to the tool shed to look for a possible solution—there, in a sad dark corner, was the board he used as support to euthanize Joan. It was the perfect length and width for the legs of the television. He grabbed the board and placed it so that either end stretched equally beyond the edges of the old stand. The legs of the new television fit so well, that they seemed made to rest on the board. A simple tablecloth hid the tacky appearance of the naked wood jutting beyond the edges of the old stand, proportionate though it was.

Restless Crows: to catch a train

The crows were restless that day. They exhibited a behavior known officially as “cacophonous aggregation,” usually occurring in the presence of a dead conspecific; when one or more crows do gather around a fallen comrade and skold (a guttural squawk repeated in short concessions). These calls differ contextually from a simple alarm call to signal danger—the phenomenon is truly a crow funeral (of sorts), though the exact

function of the behavior, and whether or not crows actually possess a complex understanding of death, is unknown. (How appropriate that a “murder of crows” can also be a funeral).

The crows were restless that day. They skolded and they skolded. They had circled the house all morning; an incredible fluttering of wings, a great black mass, a ravenous, murderous funeral of crows. One of their species had hit the bedroom window and fallen dead into the garden; a neglected tangle of weeds soldiered by vociferous wasps. The bang against the glass had woken up Franz but he was too tired to investigate; he turned and waited for his alarm. The noise did not wake Ingrid, nor did she rise when Franz’s alarm did finally buzz and shriek at 8 AM. She continued to breathe softly and snore. Her snores that morning were gentle and reminded Franz of a little bird rustling in the leaves beneath a tree. Franz and Ingrid were married.

Franz sat up and rubbed his eyes as he pictured the little bird. He felt a peculiar type of weariness, one that welled up within him like a flood and drowned any sense of rest. He could not fight it, there was no abating this wave of fatigue, he could only carry it like a heavy jug of water. He lifted the jug and trudged mechanically to the washroom. His hands caught the edge of the sink to prop up his body. His breath became short. It would take more than a simple rinse of the face on this day, he thought.

Franz then stepped into the shower. The water offered no refreshment, it merely seemed to weigh down on his wasted limbs like an oversaturated plant that topples into the mud. Franz thought that he was in the mud, though he lacked the energy to scrub himself clean. Franz could only let the shower stream down onto his shoulders. He dropped his head to face the floor as the water cascaded from his chin. His eyes were closed.

Franz dried his body before the steam-clouded mirror above the sink. He realized that he had no memory of how he arrived at the mirror from the shower, his movements had been purely automatic. He reached over the sink to wipe off some of the fog from the mirror so that he could see himself but then stopped after clearing a tiny area—he did not wish to see himself. Only his right eye was reflected, looking back at him. He noticed the fatigue in his eye. He sighed and touched his face. The roughness of his stubble dug into his soggy fingertips. He would leave it for today. He would only comb his hair. He used a small travel-sized comb—all other brushes and combs of medium size or larger were unconsciously confiscated for Ingrid’s use.

At first the fine teeth of the little comb ran through Franz's thick black hair with relative ease. Out of routine, Franz passed the comb over the sides of his head, combed down the top of his reasonably short cut from the side part, and then finally came to the back. It was the back of the head where Franz felt an unusual snag on the comb. Some of the plastic teeth broke and fell into the sink. An odd soreness ached where the comb had been caught. He attempted a second time and again the comb was halted in its path, producing some pain. He pulled gently down on the comb and the pain increased beyond the strange discomfort, throbbing and pulsating down his spine. Franz immediately released the pressure on the comb and the pain slowly subsided.

Franz decided he would investigate. He fumbled through Ingrid's makeup bag and found a small hand-held mirror. He cleared away the remaining condensation on the mirror above the sink, turned his back to the sink, and held up the small mirror. It was difficult for Franz to see anything, for he was trembling so badly, he shook the mirror in his hand. He took in a deep breath and held it for a moment. With his nerves somewhat steadied, he then looked and spotted the region where the pain had come from—there was a translucent, viscous gel clumped around the spot. Franz timidly parted the sticky hairs and saw a silver glinting object on his scalp. He leaned forward to get a better view but in effect, made it more difficult to see. He corrected himself and kept the pocket mirror close to his face as he bent backwards to zoom in on the shiny material. He squinted his eyes and focused: it appeared to be a small but brightly chromed slider of a zipper, about the size, in total, of a dime.

Franz was dumbfounded as to how a small slider of a zipper could have become stuck in his hair. Perhaps it fell off one of his wife's purses, he thought. There was also the question as to why tugging on the slider hurt so badly; perhaps because there was a nerve under the skin there, he thought. Filled with newfound confidence upon likely solving the riddle, he became determined to remove the irritant. It was clear that the slider was close to his scalp, so he planned on sniping the hair just beneath it and needed a thin instrument. He took out a small pair of scissors from Ingrid's bag perfect for the job and resumed the position from where he could view the slider. Franz poked at it and felt a sharpness, much like picking at a scab. He tried to wedge the blades of the scissors below the slider but could not seem to make any progress, and the harder he pressed the more it hurt. He leaned further back for a closer look. That was when Franz noticed a pair of zipper teeth, peeking just above the slider.

Franz shuddered and dropped the scissors. The wind rattled the branch of a tree against the washroom window. Ingrid's snores erupted into explosive gusts that punctuated perfectly the wind-swept world outside. Franz gently felt the teeth of the zipper rub against, almost nibble, his fingertips. The thought arose to see a doctor, but he was running late. The obvious course of action was to go to work and make an appointment while on his lunch break, hopefully for the very next day. His doctor was good about seeing him on short notice, he thought, though he had never truly seen his doctor on short notice. He wrapped a towel around himself and walked to the front door, to the stool where he kept his satchel. Inside his bag was his planner and so he wrote in it: "lunch- call dr..."

The best thing to do in a situation like this, he thought, was to put the matter completely out of his mind until the very moments in which he had to deal with the little problem directly, beginning at lunchtime. Franz exhaled as if a weight had been lifted. He walked briskly, almost gleefully, to the laundry room where it was Franz's ritual to dress. He always laid out an outfit there the night before. Franz would sometimes dry his socks and underwear for a few minutes on chilly mornings for the extra warmth.

There was a mirror in the laundry room Franz would dress by. He stood with excellent posture before this mirror and fastidiously fastened the buttons on his shirt. He did so slowly, keenly aware, and with such aplomb that he for a brief moment forgot all about the zipper. He felt normal. Franz unbunched his socks, as he always did, and placed them in the dryer. The weather that morning was mild, one could even say warm, but Franz clung to the security of banal routine. The socks tumbled for a full five minutes while he leaned with his palms against the dryer, looking down at the glass door to the cabin. He watched the inside of the contraption spin and it filled his mind with nothing, not even lint.

The machine beeped that the timed dry was over and Franz bent down to retrieve his socks. In doing so he grazed the back of his head on the top of the entry to the dryer, thus reminding him of the zipper and its strange tenderness. That mysterious organ within him sank, the one that always sank whenever he was disappointed and then rose again with time, unnoticed. Franz put on his socks and then stood to check how the entire assemblage of his garments appeared in the mirror, socks included. He saw his organ sunken face and the temptation suddenly struck him: the desire to pull at the zipper once more.

Franz crept the tips of his fingers tentatively up the back of his neck and head. His hair, still slightly wet, felt like a soft meadow damp with

dew. There issued out from his scalp a seductive sensuality, as if he lay in this meadow and bathed in its moisture. His eyes closed as his index finger touched the viscous fluid that leaked from the zipper, a dripping sensual seduction of goo. And right above it was the slider, cool and rigid. He pinched the slider between his index finger and thumb and slowly pulled downward. There was pain again but it was different, a different sort of tenderness, like that of sore muscles kneaded by sympathetic hands.

The slider passed along the zipper teeth without resistance, though Franz moved the slider below each pair of teeth slowly, methodically, and with a bewildering pleasure that at the same time ran parallel to mounting apprehension. He had shifted the slider down ten pairs of teeth with gentle ease but then, abruptly, he stopped. He was afraid of how much further he could go. And yet, Franz's fear was soon replaced with an overwhelming instinct to take his index finger and prod the space between the exposed zipper teeth.

The viscous goo fell in a clump over the back of his hand. The teeth bit down on either side of his finger as he ran it half way up the exposed area. His eyes remaining closed, Franz applied a small amount of pressure to this space. A sizzle of tiny bubbles tickled his finger tip. He increased the pressure and pushed so that half of the width of his finger poked beyond the teeth. The effervescence also rose in intensity, fizzing frenziedly around his finger. Though there was an ethereal nature to these bubbles—light, almost giddy.

Franz recoiled his finger in alarm. Nothing had happened that would have caused him to sense alarm, but that was the point: he was distrusting of his feelings, for he didn't know what could be at the end of where the bizarrely pleasurable allure of prodding could take him; that the giddy bubbles sparkling around his finger were somehow representative of a quiet before the storm. He rubbed his index finger and thumb together and a sticky residue of the viscous fluid was dried by the friction and became coarse, flaking into tiny fragments that fell to the floor as dust. He noticed the time on his watch that he had placed on top of the washing machine but forgot to wear—he was running late.

Suddenly, it occurred to Franz that he should not leave the zipper exposed. He quickly yanked the slider upwards and ignored the burning sensation that it caused—but it was not good enough, he must conceal the zipper altogether. He remembered then that there was a coat rack by the front door on which hung a few hats. He rarely wore hats and perhaps

never to work, but he must, it was all that he could do on his way out the door. He ran to the front door, his eyes on the slippery hardwood hallway leading up to it, then looked up. He was startled for a moment, a brief fraction of a second that the brain took to catalogue the visual stimuli properly, during which he saw the coat rack as a bulging dark presence, skulking and grotesque. Franz nervously seized the hat easiest to grab as he brushed by: a summer straw beach hat entirely inappropriate for the rest of his dress.

As soon as he placed the straw hat on his head, an inexplicable dejection came up inside him, an emptiness in his gut. Franz labeled the feeling as hunger, he had skipped breakfast. He went to look at his watch, but he had left it on the washing machine and there wasn't enough time to go back for it, he had to run. He held onto his hat so that it would not blow away and, shutting the door behind him, and immediately broke into a run. If he ran, he could still catch his train, he thought.

That Old Greenhouse

after Theodore Roethke and Percy Shelley

That old greenhouse sucks tamed
flower corpses. Herbs and orchids
under ivy, tangled balloon vines,
reed-like weeds, a wild rose—
invaders deposited as seeds
by tiny birds
whose name an ornithologist knows.
Thirsty bulbous roots penetrate yellow
thyme, the gardener's gray bones, broken
bulbs. Vine knots plastic
watering cans, polyester gloves,
a dune hose. A lizard scurries.
Willows and beeches break that
wiry roof, dangle
down to the matted undergrowth.
That old greenhouse buzzes like a blizzard,
having read "Ozymandias,"
licks husks to satisfy the sappy
craving a florist's root cellar
gets misty for.

WHERE I CAN BE FOUND

Fly until the pilot refuses to take you any further

Ride the rails until the tracks cease to exist

Drive until you run out of gas

Sail until the boat sinks

Swim until you reach the shore

Run until your lungs fail you

Walk until your legs give out

Crawl until your limbs simply won't take you any further

You will find me sitting at the edge of the universe

and we can talk about it

Let's See How High the White Foam Can Go

Let's see how high the white foam can go
as it's launched with massive force
by nature's forces, wave on rock
it pounds with no remorse.

Sailors beware the rocks,
and rocks beware the sea,
for oceans eat the shore
and the shore does not have teeth.

For days its brutal force has grown,
a constant change in form.
It's gray today, reflecting clouds
that signal coming storm.

Now lightning flashes, water churns,
the cliffs erode away. Someday
there will be nothing left but sea
and man's debris.

Will the world be better then? No land
for man to claim
and maim to change the earth to be
the towers of steel he dreamed.

Floods will take the cities,
and shorelines will recede.
When all is still in sunken graves
the earth will have its peace.

No man can swim forever,
so mankind will go extinct.
A fitting end for those who killed
and didn't even blink.

Ocean Study



Approximately Spitzer



Sophia
Smith

Visual

In the Kitchen of a Summer Fling

Blue eyes leered at me through swaths
of dark hair. The scent of cremini mushrooms
sautéing permeated the air and I watched
as he cooked. I couldn't take my eyes off him.

The kitchen ceiling above him was stained
with oil and grease, the floor below him smeared
with years of food and mud tracked
in from outside. Every surface was full. He stared
at me, and I watched him wait

for me to comment on how the countertop looked,
as though he had never bothered to scrub
off remnants of food from meals or cooking.

But silently I watched him and he watched me
with those forget-me-not eyes.

His eyes were probably the cleanest
thing in the room, aside from the tomatoes
that sat on the counter next to me.

He leapt from tile to tile across the kitchen,
reaching through the filth to grab two beers,
both not quite cold enough to be good.

I watched him watch me,
yellowed teeth poking out to smile
as I opened the can with cold fingers.
I watched him dice jalapeños (chop), tomatoes (chop),
and onions (chop). He didn't own a cutting board.

My eyes roamed the open cupboards, some overflowing
with half empty spice bottles, others empty
except for sawdust and small brown pellets, all
with white paint chipped haphazardly away on the outside.

There was a basket of lemons sitting
on the counter, picturesque. The lemon
in my beer tasted like battery acid, it stung
my taste buds until they rose up swollen
like blisters on wet wallpaper.

The glow of those lemons followed
me, watching like his eyes
that were still trained on the sizzling skillet
and the chop chop chopping of the knife.
Acid wrapped in color, a flavor I liked
if only in small doses.

I watched as his hand shot out towards
the lemons and stretched further and curved
behind the basket and pulled out a single squealing rat.

The rat was a small thing. It could have fit
comfortably in my already small hands, and I could almost
feel its fear as my own. The air was full
of iron, of sweat, of the cremini mushrooms sautéing, tangy
with nerves, dull like the thick fingers that held the rat.

Those fingers split soft mouths open, pink giving
way to white giving way to red giving
way to give giving way to gave. He had a way of spellbinding
the silent when his fingers painted on walls, when he
made food from an empty fridge. He painted

Brown like the wood under the chipped paint in the cupboards. (chop)

Brown like the cremini mushrooms sizzling in the skillet. (chop)

Red like the tomatoes waiting next to me. (chop)

Eaten

I have tried to write this many times. When I first wrote it, it was a story. Now, it's is a memory of a memory of several memories that I thought I had given up on trying to tell. In the end though, I always come back, and I write it again.

Downtown, there is a theater. Outside that theater, there used to be a poster. On that poster, there was a picture of a giant man-eating plant.

I am well acquainted with the man-eating plant. We met my sophomore year of high school during the winter musical that I was stage managing. I spent a lot of time with this plant, and as a result, he has spent a lot of time with me. Years have passed since I've seen him last. Once, as I walked downtown, I saw him on a poster, and it caught me for a moment. I stared up at him, now tragically two dimensional, and I thought of our time together, back when I was fifteen.

The theater company is more alive than I have ever seen it. Our cast list causes commotion and threats of revolution, as cast lists often do, but once the dust has settled, we have a good group. Our set is on a revolve that allows it to spin, which we all find very impressive. We spend time together outside of rehearsals, going bowling and to taco nights, because we genuinely like each other. At the center of it all is the plant; a large, impressive prop we've rented, which is perhaps the most professional item to grace the stage in years.

I have a friend outside of theater who I enjoy being around but am not particularly close with. We will hang out when given the opportunity, and he never fails to make me laugh. But as rehearsals begin, I see him less now. My life is consumed. I am busy, busier than I have ever been. I am coordinating costumes, blocking, lights, sound, props, and actors. I have no time outside rehearsals for much besides homework and planning. In the rare times when in which I have a moment to breathe, I think I think to myself that it's a shame I see him less now.

On a night in January, a few weeks before opening, I come home late. Rehearsal was scheduled a few hours later than usual to help with choreography. As I get out of the car, my phone rings. My dad goes inside the house without me, and I answer, alone.

He is quiet as he talks, and at first it is hard to recognize who he is. I don't remember all of the conversation; in fact, I am embarrassed by how little I can remember. He told me he had gone for a drive. He told me he wasn't sure what to do. He told me he felt lost. He told me, and as he told me, I couldn't find words of comfort. I remember pacing back and forth across my driveway, I remember shivering in the cold, but and I can't not remember what I said. I do remember him telling me that he was driving home, and he hung up, and I felt helpless.

I texted him later that night and learned that he had gotten home safely. He confessed to me that he had had a knife in his car, even though he didn't know what he was going to do with it. He thanked me for answering, saying he just needed someone to talk to, and I can't remember what I said.

The next year, just before we both started began to head home from school, he would bring the incident up to me for the first and last time. He would thank me, we would hug, and then go our separate ways, knowing we would see each other again tomorrow. As I walked to my car, I would be overwhelmed with the joy I felt that he was there, there to hug me, there to drive home safe again and again. I wish I could give that feeling to the girl I was that January night, who was helpless, confused, and floating just outside her body.

The male lead in the musical was dating the female lead, who happened to be one of my best friends. Their relationship added a fun layer to the play. It was a cute story to tell; a story of a fictional romance and a real one intertwined. At the end of the show, they both get eaten by the plant.

He broke up with her the next summer, something that shocked me, but not her. I had not seen any sign that they were close to that point, but she had. I felt bad for not noticing. We met up the next day, hung out for hours, and didn't touch the subject until nearly four in the morning.

I did not anticipate that the next year of our lives would be consumed by him. He missed her deeply, he claims, and was becoming dangerously depressed. And so, he stayed in her life, and by extension, mine.

It went on for months. Months of him hanging out with me and her, not speaking, but existing near us sadly. Months of him demanding private

time to hang out with her. Months of her leaving me alone during our lunch break to be with him, mouthing the word ‘sorry’ as she left. Months of late-night conversations, the two of us trying to find a solution that didn’t seem to exist. Months of feeling alone. Months of crying, and hurting, and compromises. Months of me watching my friend being emotionally drained by someone who was taking advantage of her kindness, and not being able to do anything.

Then he graduated, and he left, and it was over.

I can’t remember what it felt like during the show, when they were dating, and he was nice, and we were happy. It was a calm before a storm I could not anticipate, a storm that raged for so long that I forgot the time before it. I forgot what it felt like to enjoy his presence and believe in good intentions.

At the same time, I forgoet real anger too. He has been gone for over a year, and the constant, persistent stress and sadness of those months has worn off. I cannot capture either time in my heart, they are both dull in my mind, each plagued by the other and by the passage of time.

Our shows were often double cast, meaning one role would be played by two actors, who would alternate performances. We hadn’t done that with the leads of this show, butshow but had done so for a prominent side character. One of those boys who played that character I would describe as a ‘somewhat friend.’ More than acquaintances, but not close enough to hang out outside rehearsal one on one. He, like me, had auditioned for every show since freshman year. We were in the same grade and had attended the same school since middle school. Every morning I would wait for class to start in the library, and he (and the boy with the knife) would sit with me.

Two days before opening, before we started a run through, my best friend found his phone in the changing room, filming. Later it was discovered that this was not a one-time event.

I have told the story of that night many times. I told it to my director instantly, to my parents when I got home, to my friends who weren’t there the next day, and to new theater kids for subsequent years. I can explain it in two simple sentences, but it hardly does it justice. It doesn’t encapsulate that night. Because, to my dismay, I remember everything.

I remember going to the greenroom, noticing my friend was nervous, and thinking nothing of it. I remember her following me out of the greenroom, and as we stood behind the set, her shakily whispering to me what she had found. I remember telling the director, and him yelling that everyone come out of the greenroom, confiscating everyone's phone. I remember the director going outside to call the school's principal, and me being put in charge in his place. I remember that no one told the boy not to perform, so he went on for the first few scenes, until I was told to get him. I remember telling him to get out of costume, return his mic, and go sit in the audience, and him not protesting. I remember telling his understudy to get into costume, and costume and saying that I would explain why later. I remember being relieved we had an understudy, as if that should have been what I was worried about.

We did a full run that day. He was cut from the production, banned from participating in theater, and I hoped I'd never see him again.

He went to that school up until we graduated last June. Most people don't know what happened, in fact, even some people in the show don't know, not because we won't tell them, but because they asked not to be told. Some days I wish I had that privilege. I was not a victim, but I was the first to know, the first to tell a teacher, the first to explain to others, and the first to try to pick up the pieces and get the show running again. I am still paranoid whenever I get changed.

Last May, he was nominated for Prom King. I stared at the list of nominees, remembering too well, and wondering what comes of consequences. If no one knows, and I am no longer there to tell, did it even happen? Did it ever matter?

It is hard to explain what it meant to me, because, as far as sexual offenders go, he might seem tame. To me, though, he functioned as a wakeup call. Bad people exist, and they exist close to you. They are people you trust, people you work with, people who sit with you in the library. I had to rewrite his history in my head, to coat everything nice he'd done with a layer of current reality.

The show ran for two weekends and went off relatively well. Many viewed it as the best show we had ever done, and at the time, I couldn't disagree. I watched it each night from the light booth, enchanted by the magic of making theater with people you love. After we closed the show, we went out to eat at a nearby fast food chain, and joked and laughed and sang until the restaurant closed.

Why does it matter?

We would all do many more shows in our high school careers, most of which were better than that one. We would all ultimately graduate and move on. All events that take so much time eventually become nothing more than one or two sentences. So why does any of it matter?

This is a story about a memory of looking at a poster, which had a plant on it, which made me remember a show I did three years ago now. Layers of memory, distorting fact, and shortening the time it all took to happen. That poster was taken down a year ago, thrown away and forgotten.

I need it all to matter. I need it all to connect. I need to understand my own memories, to understand my own self, to know what it means. These stories seem underwhelming to tell; a boy who didn't hurt himself, an ex-boyfriend who kind of sucked, a boy who thought he could film and not get caught. I am ashamed that I will never find the words to describe how influential these events were in my life. I need them to connect, to tell me something greater than the sum of their parts. I feel like those stories make up who I am, but I hate that I am made up of other people's actions. I am a product of other people's stories. I need my own memories to be mine, not faded, the details lost. I need to remember the good I've done as much as I remember the bad done to me.

But in the end, that's all it is.

A poster.

Me.

And a man-eating plant.

Scorpio Coloring Book

I cough warm enough to make ripples out of the fabric of her skin. Looking in the crevice between couch cushions to find her hidden like spare change. Always heads up, in a piggy bank, too shiny to spend on

paper towels. She's your first quarter tossed into the swear jar of a musician who thaws a wishing pond with a guitar and blow-dryer. The kind of music to soothe heat wounds; a consequence

of sunbathing on her cement, skateboarding on her driveway without a helmet, nearly scraping off my ear lobe. Playing with matches, I singe her leg like a cigarette tattoo.

Sunburn gathers in the blush of her cheeks as she lets me blow out her crisping char like a candle. A scar she would later highlight by coloring in

the lines. Requesting a Scorpio tail to grow out of the circle. Giving wounds shape and making it painful when

She gets a chest cold making the air mold, warm enough for goosebumps.

**mommy's Alcoholic. Beverly Hills.
House-Daughters. Life Expectancy 58.**

In bubbly champagne I lose, a tooth, I can't tell the difference between blood and rosé. It reminds me of you accidentally soaking my pacifier in vodka, hitting your head on the railing. Too

drunk to walk up the stairs. I always call your name after twelve shots and a game of strip poker that I lose; Alcoholic's Apathy. Drunk tears make you my mother again. I watch you hold all the

pain in the curve of your jaw. Tense from the times you were too hungover to drive me to AA. I'll overdose on poison, lips bleached like your hair, fried ends look like the lining in my stomach from

a drug prescribed to take twice a day while praying in front of the toilet. I promise to curl my hair beforehand so you aren't embarrassed in front of the paramedics or the funeral that I'll be

dead at. In case of tears, redirect to a wine glass so you reabsorb someone else's salt like I did when you didn't trade friends for me. Weekend trips for me. My apron too small. I wish I stopped

playing house at age eight. Instead of living to run yours. But wishing is dirty.

And there is nothing to chase it with. I look for corners in a round room. Drunk enough to hide in them. Wishing you knew that I'm an alcoholic—a more competent one —than even you at 58.

‘ÁRIDA’

Project ‘Árida’ wants to document the Spanish lands currently at risk of desertification. 80% of the state’s territory is prone to desertification during the 21st century. Most affected will be the regions of Murcia, Alicante, Almeria and their respective mountain ranges, according to investigations led by the Spanish Environmental Ministry in the past decade.

According to a special report published by the European Court of Auditors in December 2018, three-quarters of Spain faces desertification, making it the most seriously affected country in Europe.

The work ‘Árida’ wants to develop and work on the main factors that trigger this phenomena in Spain: from the unsustainable exploitation of water resources, which is the cause of serious environmental damage, including chemical contamination, salinization and exhaustion of aquifers. Also loss of plant cover due to re-peated forest fires and torrential flooding. Consequently, the abandonment of many lands within the communities as well as the concentration of economic activity in coastal areas as a result of urban growth, industrial activities, mass tourism and industrial agriculture.



The entrance to one of the greenhouse fields of southern Spain, also known as 'Mar de Plástico' (Sea of Plastic), in the province of Almeria.

Adra, El Ejido, Spain
December 2019



Land degradation is a major cause of the increasing impact of floods in Spain. In the picture, a football field from southern Spain affected by floods.

Benferri, Spain
September 2019



Felix, a 64-year-old retiree from El Paraje del Cabezo, poses in the kitchen of his house. “Despite my home being completely flooded, I consider myself lucky because I had the car in the repair shop,”.

Paraje del Cabezo, Spain
September 2019



Paraje El Cabezo, one of the poorest areas of Vega Baja del Segura, was severely affected by the floods last September. Felix's living room has been turned into a holding place for possessions that have survived the storms.

Paraje del Cabezo, Spain
September 2019



The Lighthouse of Sabinal stands in the middle of the natural protected area of Punta Entinas-Sabinar surrounded by aridity.

Roquetas de Mar, El Ejido, Spain
December 2019



Ricardo Cardenete and his son, Richard, run a family repair shop that has been affected by the torrential waters in Benferri.

Paraje del Cabezo, Spain
September 2019



A hiker crosses a hill in the desert of Tabernas, the driest area in Europe.

Tabernas, Spain

May 2019



The city of Benidorm is one of the country's major tourism projects. A tourist in Spain spends three to four times more water than a resident: between 300 and 400 liters a day, according to sources of the Spanish Forum of the Economy of Water.

Benidorm, Spain
November 2019



In Tabernas, the only desert in Europe, are the authentic westerns scenarios, turned into a Mediterranean Theme Park. In the picture, an actor of Oasys MiniHollywood poses in front of a set.

Tabernas, Spain
May 2019



After Gota Fría, several workers take a car out of a destruction zone in Benferri.

Benferri, Spain
September 2019



A woman descends from a limestone mound affected by wind, water and time in San Juan de los Terreros.

San Juan de los Terreros, Spain
July 2019



An empty street of Balerna.

Balerna, El Ejido, Spain
December 2019



A non-licensed taxi driver takes tourists from El Ejido to Almerimar for 10 euros. Some greenhouse farmers combine more than one job.

El Ejido, Spain
December 2019



A plastic waste remains next to a greenhouse in El Ejido.

El Ejido, Spain
December 2019



The mud trail of a hand on a broken refrigerator in one of the streets of Benferri.

Benferri, Spain
September 2019



A worker cleans the mud of a Benferri dealership.

Benferri, Spain
September 2019



Two neighbors contemplate a flood in Benferri's dumpsite after Gota Fría.

Benferri, Spain
September 2019



After torrential waters in southern Spain, pubs like 'Emilio Bar' from Benferri kept the news on in the background for much of the time.

Benferri, Spain
September 2019

Burgers

“Just try it. It’s so disgusting.”

“But it smells like dog food.”

And it tastes like dog food.

New burgers,

in a new business,

with a new owner,

in the same old building.

Fuck my life. Fuck it hard.

Things changing, one by one,

in constant flux.

A business, like an ecosystem,

dying from external forces

beyond the hazy control

of its helpless inhabitants.

Things get worse before they get better.

Sometimes they don’t get better.

Burgers II (Acrostic)

It is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts. It breathes, it heats, it eats. It shits and fucks.

-Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 1972.

Because the body is a machine, it must be fed.

Unlike a machine, we must consider morality.

Regrettably, I am unable to conceive of Christ as a man made of flesh.

Gilles Deleuze committed suicide in November, 1995. He suffered from cibophobia.

Everybody poops. Exception: beautiful women.

Rocco Siffredi is an Italian actor noted for his “psychological intensity and athleticism” (Wikipedia). (It is rumored that swallowing his semen can cure cancer.)

Sadly, the body of Christ tastes bland and perfunctory, inconsequential even.

Note: This might be circumstantial.

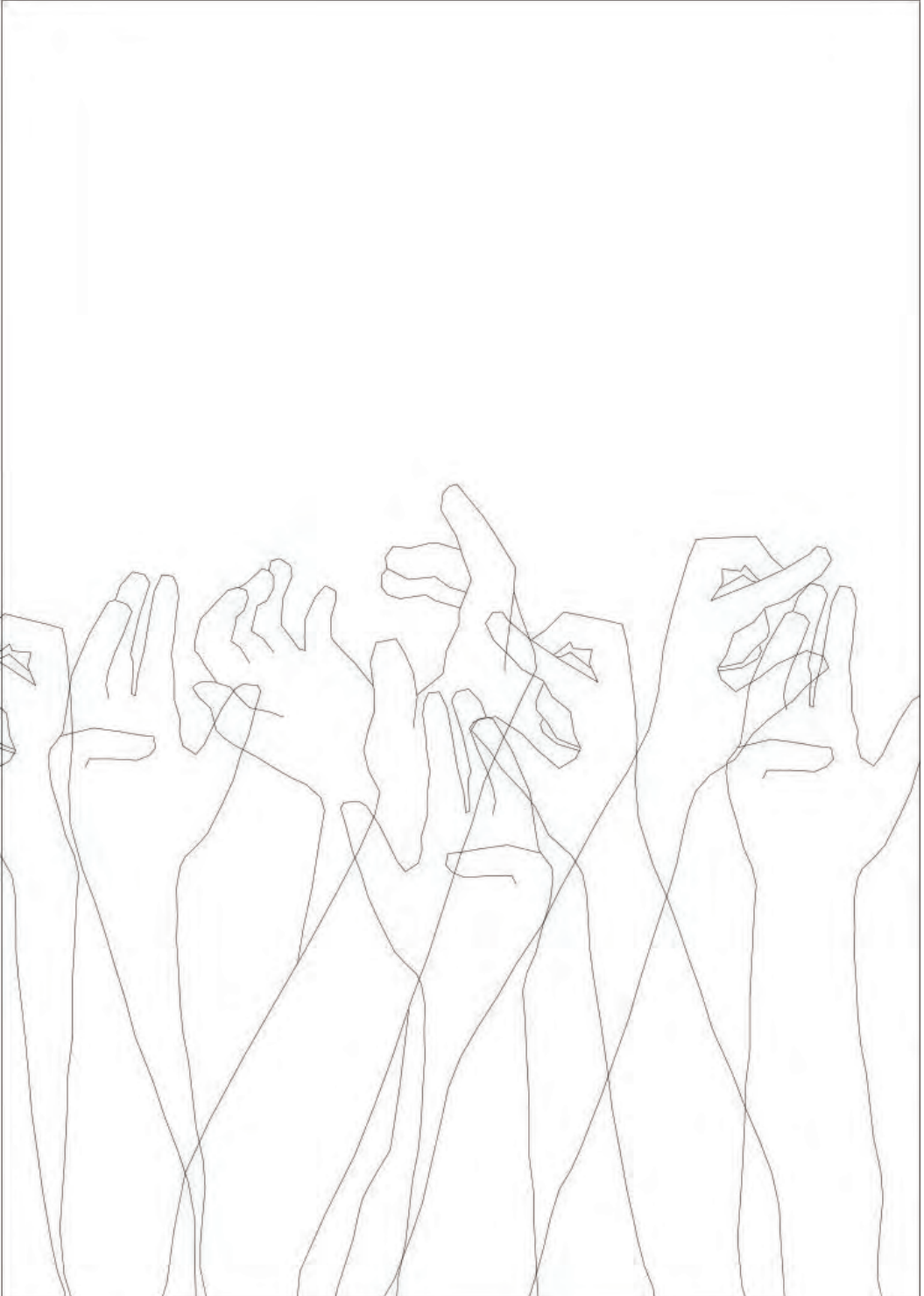
Burgers III

(found poem—www.bk.com)

Prepared on equipment used for products that use soy/ 0% beef/
nutritional information/ Not all products shown are available in every
restaurant/ Egg/ Soy/ Wheat/ Calories (kcal) 630/ Sodium (mg) 1080/
customize ingredients/ Impossible/ Impossible/ Impossible/ Lettuce/
Tomato/ Lettuce/ Tomato/ Impossible

Note: Certain activities provided via this website poem may be covered by
U.S. Patent 6,585,516.

Birth of a Writer



Ow!

Comb it! Comb it!
Comb it back straight!

Straighter
tighter
smoother

no curls coils kinks ringlets twists.

Because it's messy they say
you look ratty you look wild you look unclean
you can't go out
looking
like
that.

It needs to be done they say.
Look at everyone else they say.
That's how it should be they say.

Spiteful
mean

as if she should be ashamed
ashamed of the image
of her roots

as if she should apologize and she does
but she doesn't know why.

That's their power:
making you believe in their stories
before you know
of anything else to believe in.

You are educated
without realizing you are being taught.

It's in their expressions
their hand movements
their arm movements
the way they
tug pat pull
they're speaking even when they're not.
This is how it should be they say.
This is what you should do they say
when should really means have to.
This is true beauty they also say.
Listen.
Do you hear it too?
And what can you do
when it's coming from inside
inside your own home
from your own people?
Why?
she should ask but she doesn't
because it's already rooted down deep.
It's within the locks now
invisible but there
clenching on the roots.
Tie it!
Tie it tight!
No bumps no frizz
tighter
tighter
tighter
tighter
—ow! she shouts
but only the first time.

Never again
does she question the pain
because they teach her
that this pain is beauty
that it's necessary
it's normal
it's best.

And maybe it isn't out of malice.

Maybe
it's out of ignorance
or maybe
it's both
but it doesn't matter
because what is learned
from what is taught
is all the same.

It's ingrained in her by now:
that there is a universal beauty
and that she doesn't have it naturally
and that she should be ashamed
should apologize for herself
and for her sisters
and for her sisters' sisters.

Who will she be when it's tied?

Will she be a little less
herself?

Will my sisters remember
who they are
after it all?

Will I?

Chaos Is a Place I Know

Erasure; excerpt from “The Land of Little Rain” by Mary Austin

This is the nature of that country. There are hills, rounded, blunt, burned, squeezed up out of chaos, chrome and vermilion painted, aspiring to the snowline. Between the hills lie high level-looking plains full of intolerable sun glare, or narrow valleys drowned in a blue haze. The hill surface is streaked with ash drift and black, unweathered lava flows. After rains water accumulates in the hollows of small closed valleys, and, evaporating, leaves hard dry levels of pure desertness that get the local name of dry lakes. Where the mountains are steep and the rains heavy, the pool is never quite dry, but dark and bitter, rimmed about with the efflorescence of alkaline deposits. A thin crust of it lies along the marsh over the vegetating area, which has neither beauty nor freshness. In the broad wastes open to the wind the sand drifts in hummocks about the stubby shrubs, and between them the soil shows saline traces. The sculpture of the hills here is more wind than water work, though the quick storms, do sometimes scar them past many, a year's redeeming. In all the Western desert edges there are essays in miniature at the famed, terrible. Grand Canon, to which, if you keep on long enough in this country, you will come at last. Since this is a hill country one expects to find springs, but not to depend upon them; for when found they are often brackish and unwholesome, or maddening, slow dribbles in a thirsty soil. Here you find the hot sink of Death Valley, or high rolling districts where the air has always a tang of frost. Here are the long heavy winds and breathless calms on the tilted mesas where dust devils dance, whirling up into a wide, pale sky. Here you have no rain when all the earth cries for it, or quick downpours called cloud-bursts for violence. A land of lost rivers, with little in it to love; yet a land that once visited must be come back to inevitably. If it were not so there would be little told of it.

Introvert's Lament

I just want my book

I just want to read my book

I love these people

I'm having a good time

But I just want to read my book.

Ellen
McMahon

Poetry

There's Something About Grandpa

I do not enjoy
Grandpa's beef fragrance,

or his suspicious gang
of meaty beef vagrants.

They sit in his parlor,
and they stew and they steam.

All those nasty meatsacks,
whispering their foul-smelling scheme.

And their oily stench!
Putridly, offensively odiferous!

Like the festering crotch
of a mealworm with syphilis.

What do they discuss,
my Pops and his friends?

Politics, stock prices,
Pro-sports and current trends.

Oh, and war, plague, wrath and fury,
Life, Death, pain and misery.

And their ungrateful grandchildren
that hate their stink
and despise their humor;

that roll their patronizing eyes,
responding to every remark
with a quiet "Ok, Boomer."

"We'll melt their ice caps,"
cries the raspy voice of another,

"And kill their heroes;"
shouts his furious brother,

"We'll get them back, these damn kids."
the meatsacks all concur.

"Leaving behind a scorched Earth
and a rancid perfume and wet spot
to mark where we were."

Plastic Fruit

This love is an inferno.
The flames a dulcet burgundy,
and the air as sweet as smoke.

All the poets go to Hell,
but only the good ones;
like Virgil or Jimmy Buffet.

The climate reminds us of
hot Summer nights
in Rivas in the South of France;
dipping our toes in pools
of the tears of the proletariat,
and getting lost yet again
in Margaritaville.

I dream of a mistress made of flames,
a silhouette of red candy
as fragile and lovely as ruby.

I dream of not knowing
how to speak to her,
or how to hold her without
shattering the crystal,
or how to live without her.

I imagine love as a chore;
like shoveling coal
into a hot furnace
till my blisters bleed black.

And I whisper to her,
as false and vain
as the Morning Star,
that she ignites me;

That she is my Heaven,
and if she casts me out
I'll fall right through your Earth.

I tell her she has
the moon at her feet,
the stars in her hair,
and a body draped in sunlight.

The red dragon tore out
two thirds of the Heavens
on his way down,

all because
he was drawn to her golden glow,
which he mistook for a pyre.

I wonder what she did
with the other third I left her.

Unbalanced Tiers of Yesteryear



The Upside Down



Shelby
Davis

Visual

Seed of Hope

The street is of the backwoods variety. It is long and straight and far from most things people think of as civil. It is mostly surrounded by woods, the dark, dense kind. They are horror story woods. Tall pines that become jagged teeth that cut the sky. Dark shadows against a darker void. They line the road like soldiers, watching and waiting in stoic silence. Here and there along the road stands a lone house, a little fortress against the night. Each home's light is gone, their occupants wrapped up in their own bubbles of sleep. They do not see the storybook moon outside, full and orange and far larger than it usually seems. They do not see the thousands of stars, bright in the singular brilliance that only stars can have.

The road stretches ever on, going miles without even the slightest bend to it. It is an old road, but well cared for. It has few cracks or root bulges, instead wearing a patchwork of layered over asphalt. Each new coat hiding an unavoidable flaw. Every twenty yards or so there are street lamps, though their whole miles cast into complete darkness. A thin sheet of water covers the ground, giving the road a spectral shine. Where street lights meet rainfall, the ground is littered with starbursts. They sparkle in the darkness, each the imprint of a firework that never got the chance to find the sky.

The starbursts are shattered under the feet of a girl.

She is barefoot, her abused soles smacking the wet ground with each loping step. Every inch of her is covered in mud. It sits dried and cracked across her arms and shins, spider webbing and falling away as her movement jostles its placement against her skin. It plasters her short red hair, making it stick out this way and that. There are long patches where the mud is darker. Earth mixing with blood to make a sticky goo that clings tighter to the girl than her own skin. Even under the dirt, it is easy to see that the girl is muscular. Her body sculpted for excursion. It is the only reason she is still upright. Anything else that might distinguish the girl is hidden under layers of grit and grime. If some resident of the solemn houses had been passing by a window, they would have seen a golem- not a girl -running by.

She has been running for a long time, fueled by fear and a terrible knowing.

Her body screams to stop. The pain has come in waves as long as she has been running, but now it is louder than ever. No more, aching legs beg. Let it end, burning lungs plead. It hurts bloodied and blistered feet wail. It would be easy to stop. So, so easy. Lay down, let you rest, let us sleep. You can do it, it's so simple. Just stop.

No, the girl's mind whispers.

No, you cannot stop. Not here. Not yet. She will keep running until she has escaped.

Behind her, the streetlights are going out.

They explode outward, sending showers of glass raining down on the empty street. They pop and hiss, electricity still humming through the wires even after they have lost their form. The breaking is not an attack. It is a signal. The thing doing the breaking has no visible shape. It is simply a shimmer in the air, like heat on tarmac. In the darkness, its presence is only truly manifest in its horrible buzzing. As loud as a thousand angry wasps, vicious in their hatred.

The girl knows the shape of the thing that pursues her.

There is a horrible clarity of what will happen if the invisible thing catches her. It will not be kind. It will not be understanding. It will search through her until it has found what it desires. The girl knows she cannot let this happen.

She sees the bridge only when she is almost upon it. It hangs precariously in the air, only the woven latticework of its arch keeping it from plummeting down, down, into the dark. Even in daylight, the girl suspects it is further to the ground from that bridge than she wants to think about.

The bridge itself is its own kind of void, a slightly darker patch of the night even before the unseen thing gets to it. It goes unlit, the high railings on either side of it the only offering of protection against the long drop. The girl will not know how far away the thing chasing her will be on the bridge. The awful droning gives little indication of the distance between them. Overwhelming in its cacophony, the sound will hunt her long after the thing it heralds is gone. There is no way around it. The girl cannot go over the bridge and she cannot turn back. Her eyes flick back and forth, searching in the artificial twilight of the streetlamps.

Hope.

An idea.

A desperate, desperate attempt at escape.

It could kill her. It could just as easily free her.

The girl decides it is worth the risk.

She runs faster. With one last burst, she pushes already taxed limbs closer to the bridge. Keep going, she thinks, keep going. Just before she makes the bridge, she leaps. Even tired, bloody, and muddy, the jump is elegant. She curves in a neat arch, only to land with a resounding thud in a ditch just to the side of the road. As soon as the girl's body meets ground, she wills it to still. It protects, trembling with muscle strain, the lungs quivering for air. Despite the whining of her body, the girl is still. Squeezing her eyes shut, she wills every aspect of her being to be invisible. She is herself and she is the ground. Just another patch of muddy ditch, overgrown with wild grass and encroaching blackberry vines.

Three inches away, the valley yawns. The girl is lucky that she stuck the landing.

All at once, the droning is louder than ever. It hums bright and angry, the sound of insects as big as birds hovering just above the tarmac, slicing through the air in their distress. The sound passes several times over head, pacing like a tiger trapped in a too small enclosure. For a heartbeat it is silent and that is almost more terrible than the noise. Then slowly, the buzzing crosses onto the bridge. Then to the other side and off into the night, leaving the girl heaving on the ground, unnoticed.

This is not a victory, not exactly, but it tastes like one. To the girl's weary body, it the most glorious of triumphs to lie still. To pull oxygen back into a bruised body and let the ache of overworked muscles settle in. The mud is cold around her burning limbs and the girl rolls in it, adding a new layer to her earthy cocoon. She wants to feel cold, wants to give up the overheated skin to the earth if it means taking away the pain. The mud simply sucks at her limbs, squelching pleasantly between her toes.

Sleep is her greatest desire and the girl almost gives into it. She is not safe yet. Still, you can only fight the body for so long on these things. Her eyes drop ever downwards, the battle to keep them open, sapping what

little strength remains within her. Still, the girl is nothing if not stubborn.

At length, when the horrid sound is gone and she is confident her legs will not betray her, the girl stands. Cautiously, slower than a snail and three times as wary, she stepped back onto the road. It is silent all around her. A night time silence that is woven out of a thousand small sounds, not the absolute lack of sound of something that does not want you to know that it is there.

There is a decision to be made here and the girl does not know if she has the energy or the will to make it. To the left lay a path to safety. Many miles back there had been something approximating a town. Memories of the neon light of a gas station come back almost dream like in their blissful promise of sanctuary. There was food there to appease her angry stomach and a warm place to rest while she gathered her strength again. A promise of the chance of sleep. The chance to finally, finally rest.

On the other path there is the bridge and a promise that has yet to be fulfilled.

She had fought tooth and claw to get here. To be the one who carried out the most important act in human history.

Somewhere, far in the deep woods is a pedestal, waiting for her. The girl can see it in her mind's eye. It is clear to her as the memory of her own face, though she has never once laid eyes on her objective. It waited for her, for what she carried with her. What the shapeless, not quite real thing hounded her for. Long had it chased her, its spite almost a match for the girl's own. But it did not know where the pedestal was, likely didn't even know of the pedestal at all. It could not see the path unfold in its mind like an old piece of paper. Did not know the names of the many magicians who had carved their lives into the piece of stone with the hope they might bring the world. Even the girl does not know what the pedestal will do, only that it is missing its most vital piece. That the invisible, angry thing will not let her rest until her burden is part of the pedestal or within the monster's grasp.

The girl stares down the bridge, following the path of the thing she cannot see. It is still looking for her, confused by her clumsy trick. She cannot see or hear it, but she knows it is still searching. A creature of such tenacity was not about to give up easily. It has already broken the street lamps, leaving a mess of uncertainty in its wake. It could be anywhere. She does not know how silent it can be.

The longer she waited, the harder things would get.

With clumsy fingers, the girl claws away some of the earth that clings to her collar bone. She knows her burden is still there, but she checks anyway. The fear that all has been for nothing, only soothed by the familiar sight of her charge. Half burrowed, half cradled in her flesh was a small, glowing blue oval. It rested as a part and apart from her, pulsing in time with her own heartbeat. It was a seed who's imprint lay in the unknown and yet familiar pedestal. A seed that when placed upon the pedestal would finally wake up.

It would bring forth something.

Something beautiful and brilliant and kind. So unlike the thing that pursues it. Something worth fighting for. Something to bring a little magic back into the world. An intangible being that even now lay half-conscious against the girl. Unaware of the world but aware of her. It was a warm quiet companion against the night. Against all that had passed and that was yet to come. It is so tantalizingly close to waking up. To being realized.

She has come too far for this.

With a sigh, the girl turns her body back towards the lip of the bridge. Unwillingly, her aching feet carry her across the chasm. She does not look down. She does not look ahead. Instead, she keeps her eyes fixed on the ribbon of stars that slides its way across the night sky. She can only hobble, broken but determined, as she is.

Within her, a voice that does not belong to the girl murmurs "Not long now."

The stars seem too bright in the absoluteness of the night.

Whispered into the darkness, the girl replies "I know."

A Letter to Jorge Luis Borges

Jorge, it wasn't until I read your last letter, that I realized we grew up together in the same neighborhood. I suppose it is the waking hours that have distorted the streets we used to know so well. You know, acknowledging the fluidity of time can remedy this. I never did see the mirror in the labyrinth that you spoke of, but I did see the labyrinth in the mirror; I saw it when I put both mirrors together, watched them echo into eternity. That really is the only time the mirror does not lie, when it peers into itself. Also, you were right about the masks people wear to hide something horrible, things they do not want others to see; but sometimes people just wear masks, to hide from themselves. Please, do not be afraid to remove yours. Yes, you will find something horrible, but you will also find something beautiful. Jorge, do you think poetry is the mask or the mask removed? Sometimes, just before dawn, I am able to reassemble these broken shards, but only until light reappears. I hope you do not believe that the light rejected us, it was just time for us to get acquainted with the night. Sometimes night is the only way we can see the emeralds glow, the only time the mask does not haunt. Daybreak, in all her façade parades her glorious mask, tantalizing with delusions so that we will not realize, she has hidden from us, the stars. Do not believe her; just close your eyes, the stars are still there. When the earth is most frigid—just after the sun eclipses the night: that is the stars final canto. I know you can hear it. Jorge, can we just slow down, enjoy this walk; we will have plenty of time to build houses and unbury the hidden highways together. Also, you don't need to be afraid of the footprints you found in the dust of the labyrinth. They are your footprints. And they are mine. Most people grow old watching without seeing, trying to run too quickly through the corridors. Let that not be said of us. Jorge, tell me, who is more my brother: the one who shares my ancestors, or the one who shares my dreams? Eternity lingers in these containers of night. Let us keep company with them. Just like you, we are all waiting to accept our eternal face. By the way, the book you were speaking of—the one that contains the entire universe. I know you believed it didn't exist, but it does; I have seen it with my own eyes. And I agree: the poem is in the mirror, in the river, in the dream; they are all one and the same. Yes, we are both getting better at seeing with eyes closed. I will write again soon. Until then, let us both agree to quit wasting our passion on solitude. And remember the gravity is powerless to enslave us.

Empty Road

Bones of the ghetto echo
from castles painted,
concealed beneath
pavement,
I once inhaled
this dust—
meandered beyond
the brushstrokes,
hills filled
with nothing
new, decaying
flowers, dreams
of the inhuman
kiss, beak of wild
bird, I heard
myself in the distance,
followed the sound
to the bottom—
a dark shaft, lifted
shot glasses
of scrambled prayers—
shooting stars
are dead rocks, infinite
is the howling
animal wrapped
in the fragments.

Self-Identity



Bloomquist

Mae

Visual

Cats Vs. Lesbians

Her feet kneed the soft carpet
square of the living room, she
potatoes here, choosing to be
head down belly up, sprawled
legs, with bared forked fangs,

I'll remain persist in my stares,
they laugh so, I jump on tables
knocking over drinks and paper
towels while directly staring,

into two woman's souls, and
that damn desk lamp's about
to become my new scratching
post, sharpen my claws;
lesbians don't.

Every Person is a Zodiac Sign

Neptune wings fluttered near the
reclusive spider, cautious, but she
lands without hesitation in my Mars
rust den, she rests feet between my

legs, in my web, her wave, whisper for
movement, spinneret silk strung the dark
like cursive lettering, my gift of beauty,
worrying they won't be liked, but she's

switching positions; submissive uterine
walls carry eggs on
abdomens, making spaces for others,

capturing her in words rather than in a
net of carbon fibers. A butterfly is not
pretty if unable to fly, but hope left to
mix wrongs, with rights under stars not

like antennas-proboscis to palps-chelicera,
believing us should be the death of me. I'll
express my heart as the empty vessel, water
filled ash-land, thinking when spring blooms

pink, I see wedding-rings by a
lake with a stable gazebo.

The Definitions of My Life

Dis·so·ci·a·tion

Noun

The disconnection or separation of something from something else or the state of being disconnected.

Snack wrappers from recent munchies decorate the low table in front of the couch, days of dirt and cat litter scattered across the fake hardwood floor. I cautiously step along the only clear path through the small main room. Three windows remain shut tight with the blinds pulled down. Blankets are pinned above two of them to lock heat in and sunlight out. The only source of natural light is provided by a gap in the front window blinds, where our ragdoll cat bit off parts of the plastic to create a peephole for bird watching. It's been one year since we signed our lease and yet cardboard boxes and trash litter every corner as if the two of us just moved in.

There are too many chores, too much clutter. I'm unable to access the carpet so the vacuum stays in the closet by the front door. The floor needs to be swept daily, but I don't have the energy for that. Molding dishes still need to be washed; the tea bags left in mugs start to smell. Three white trash bags sit next to the door overflowing with a month of bad eating habits.

I suggest we clean the kitchen and plan a meal together, but she's too tired.

I give up on the main room and move to the bedroom to try and contain the mess. My partner's side of the bed, the left side, is always a disaster. I pick up crumbled candy wrappers and empty oil cartridges. The vape pen stands upright on her bedside table ready for 24/7 use, so I take a long hit to maintain my high. We've been smoking weed together for four years now.

We wake up together and get stoned, we go to bed together still stoned. It's the only routine I know.

I suggest we take a break from cannabis, but she comes home from work with a new 43 dollar one-gram cartridge.

In front of our closet lost items lie underneath days of crumpled clothes next to the green laundry basket, mixed with old crumbs and white fur. Black t-shirts, faded white socks, and torn jeans hide a Nintendo 3DS that lies dead and cracked. I don't know if the basket is full of clean or dirty clothes unless I smell test them.

I suggest we do laundry together but she's too tired.

Now I'm too tired.

Dis·be·lief

Noun

The inability or refusal to accept that something is true or real.

I sleep next to her each night, our queen-sized bed and down comforter barely holding us together. She wraps her long bony limbs around her extra pillow facing away while I curl up against her back. Neither of us say good night, though it's not unusual. Our cat settles in his spot on the bed curled like a croissant at our feet. The days of intermingling limbs and giggling kisses on the nose are no more. I can't recall when it ended. Neither of us bothered to acknowledge our distance even with all the evidence surrounding us. I hold her hand, but she lets go too quickly. Pulling her in for a kiss she automatically reciprocates. I ask her if she still loves me, she says of course why would you think I don't?

I choose to leave on my own. She doesn't understand why.

De·vo·tion

noun

Love, loyalty, or enthusiasm for a person, activity, or cause.

A few weeks later I return to gather the last of my things. I haven't been high since I left. My childhood friend Evan and his girlfriend Grace have been my support, allowing me to sleep on their couch while in town even though I had cut them out of my life for two years. The small apartment

looks exactly like I left it. Evan and Grace carefully step through the mess asking me what needs to be packed. Grace later described the place as claustrophobic. My ex doesn't greet me or acknowledge anyone's presence while we pack. She's sitting on her side of the bed, hunched over her laptop with a vape pen in hand. I observe her long bony frame and short wavy hair that has never been brushed. All of it unfamiliar to me now. Her cat watches through the window as I leave with my friends.

My parents' house, 4.5 hours away, is comforting and familiar. Clean, organized, quiet and warm. The house is a soft yellow outside and an earthy green on the inside. Large windows look out into the garden and forest, where deer peek out between the greenery. Our apple tree is their favorite food source. My old bedroom has barely been touched, as if frozen in time from the day I left for college five years ago. I sit on my bed in the window nook, just underneath the windowsill. The floors are bare and vacuumed. Old clothes hanging in the closet, my wooden chest of stuffed animals, and a variety of tea sets on my wall of white shelves all remind me of better times. I had forgotten who I was without her.

I spend my 23rd birthday with just my mom. We go grocery shopping together and I pick out ravioli for my birthday dinner, one mushroom stuffed and the other Italian sausage. The two of us prepare dinner together while we wait for my dad to get home from work. The three of us

enjoy a quiet evening of noodles and television, just like we used to. My ankles are crossed on the ottoman and my back presses into the red leather couch. My parents sit to my right in their matching recliners, all of us mirroring each other.

Ravioli's have never been so soft and filling.

Dil·i·gence

Noun

Careful and persistent work or effort.

It had been over a year since I spoke to anyone outside my old apartment. I ask my childhood friend Cat to see a movie with me. At the theater we pick the new cushioned seats that recline with a long footrest, much more comfortable than the old ones. We chat about our memories together, lounging in wait of the film. She eats all the popcorn and I drink

all the soda, an equal exchange. We make more plans for later that same week.

I reconnect with my friend Kyley, who comes over with her golden retriever. We spend hours sitting out on my front porch in the spring sun, filling each other in on our lives over the last five years. Her dog finds a dried-out branch and chews it to pieces, then goes off to find another one. By the time Kyley is ready to leave, her dog has created a large pile of woodchips in the yard.

I get a small retail job at a locally owned store, twenty minutes from my home in the woods. My coworkers make me laugh during every shift. Old classmates from high school come to the quaint store, smiling when they see my familiar face. A loyal customer brings me a gift, a handmade metal bracelet.

I spend time with my cousin Jessica, my biggest role model growing up. Her small home is filled with books. A collection of short stories that her writing is published in lays on the light

wood table, barely noticeable in a room full of bright baby toys. She has an 8-month-old boy now, Wesley, already stretching into 18-month-old clothing. His eyes are the same bright blue as his mother's. I make him smile, tiny dimples barely showing in huge drooping cheeks. I poke at the chunky rolls on his arms and he reaches to hold my finger. His grip is strong.

For the first time in a long time, my smile is genuine.

Making You

You could hear everyone's minds
fusing.
People's hearts
melting into each other.
Souls were leaving bodies
and joining together in the sky;
breaking off into pieces
and reverberating off one another.
Then finally melding back together;
a completely new being.
Falling back down to earth.
To their home.
A person.
You.
Now completely made up of different materials,
people,
memories.
And now,
you can continue on.
Changing with each and every step.
With each new person you greet on the sidewalk.
With each new heartbreak
and loss
and pain and guilt you feel.
And all these things fused together
make you.

The Land of Eternal Unrest



Darrell
Black

Visual

My Answers to The Questions Asked After I Read a Poem in a Creative Writing Class

Jampa
Dorje

Inside "Ballad of Mystery," when the cops came to the apt. building and pulled a gun on you, what did the phrase mean, "Eli Eli Lama Sabathana" that you said back to them?

These are the words, in Aramaic, that Jesus spoke on the cross, translated as "My Father, my Father, why hast thou forsaken me?" It was presumptuous, even blasphemous, of me to think of myself as the Crucified Christ, but it is not uncommon for people with mental disturbances to feel persecuted and to have delusions of grandeur. In Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist, it is perfectly normal to imagine oneself as a deity during practice.

Why did you choose to use third person (primarily) in "Jampa's Adventures" but in some sections, also the first person?

I have told my adventure in mental institutions from different perspectives. Initially, to write my autobiography (Jampa's Worldly Dharmas; Kapala Press, Santa Fe, 2014), I used a persona, Bouvard Pécuchet, to give my inner-self some distance from myself, in the hopes of being more objective, thereby allowing myself to tell embarrassing aspects of my behavior. I had already taken the name Jampa Dorje, after becoming a monk, and since Buddhist monks aren't supposed to have "selves," somebody needed to tell the story. A House Jack Built by Richard Denner (D Press, Ellensburg, 2020) tells the events in the first person.

How were you able to heal from your past and create a positive future? Was there ever a specific point in time when you changed?

This question presupposes that I needed to heal and that my situation was not positive. In many ways this was a very adventitious occurrence and I developed deep insight into myself, and developed compassion for others. So called "negative occurrences" are often beneficial in disguise. Of course, my family and friends feared the worst, so I tried to "behave" and take my prescribed medications and see my psychologist and psychiatrist at scheduled times. My girlfriend cooked big meals with great desserts to get me off my diet of cigarettes and espresso. I had relapses and readmitted myself a couple of times. Then, I struck out for Alaska to get healthy outdoor lungs and left the craziness behind.

Hybrid

Was living in solitude for many years (in retreat) rewarding as a writer?

I married my girlfriend, then she and I, and our baby boy, lived in a wilderness cabin near Ketchikan, Alaska. For two years, we hunted and fished and foraged—following in the footsteps of Henry David Thoreau. I bought a small letter press and began creating my chapbooks. This experience helped me understand that doing the traditional, solitary mountain retreat that I later undertook, under the guidance of Tibetan lamas, was feasible and attractive. A solitary retreat of this kind requires discipline because the reason to be in retreat is not to write (a vain enterprise at best), it's to accomplish the dharma for the benefit of all sentient beings. I allowed myself one two-hour session each day: A page a day x 364 x 3 years = 1,000 pages.

Did you feel like the "world" treated you differently from other people who didn't have mental problems?

The "world" is mostly indifferent to my plight. It provides air and water and such, but it is raw life outside of our social world. This "world" is full of, mostly, self-indulgent people who want everyone to stay in line and who haven't much tolerance for craziness. Friends care, but they have their problems too, and can only indulge you so much. You need to keep yourself together, if you want to remain free to be spontaneous and natural. I get asked questions about what I'm up to, and I try to give a good accounting of myself. My lamas let me "do my thing."

Why did you decide to write more dangerously after the doctor read your flower poem? Was it to "stick it to the man," so to speak, or was it to actually enhance your writing style after receiving that kind of feedback?

Poets push back. We poke about. We have a feral streak. At that time, my father was worried that my poetry was the cause of my insanity. The doctor got me off that hook. She was right. I needed to make the telling of my inner life more coherent if I was going to live in the world. But I didn't like thinking my poems were weak and wishy-washy, so I began taking daring chances with my metaphors and tried to be more mild-mannered in my actions. This helped a lot.

In "Wheel of Time Mantra Blade," you seem to be jumping around constantly throughout the piece. Was this intentional to create tension, or was this just how your brain was working and wanted to convey the message?

You likely read this poem in a manuscript form with dots between the parts. It was fabricated as a serial poem, to create a unified book. Each page has a separate poem, and each poem tells something more about my dealing with my friend's death, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. It is a threnody, a wailing ode. A lament. Post-modern poetry often uses collage techniques of composition. And yes, my poetry is a map of how my mind works, and the line breaks and juxtapositions help convey the complex emotions of grief. I can write a conventional poem; usually, I dance around the formal approaches.

A lot of former drug users caution against the use of the intoxicants, while others fervently believe things like acid and peyote changed them as a person for the better. With everything you have experienced, what is your opinion on the recreational use of hallucinogens?

It is wise to beware of intoxicants—or, at least, be more aware of what you are doing. I came of age during the 1960s, an era of political, social, and personal unrest. We took many hallucinatory drugs that were not listed as illegal. Aldous Huxley, the science fiction writer, took LSD and wrote a book about his experiences called, *The Doors of Perception*. The title of this book is borrowed from a line of William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite." Blake's comment about the "doors of perception" is not only an observation about how we see things but also about how we write things. Blake finds a way to create poetry that actively seeks to alter both how we understand and how we experience the world. Then, Tim Leary came along, and said: "Tune in; Turn on; Drop Out." Initially, Hippies had a sense of the sacred being connected to these drugs. Later, the recreational side of them became more "the thing." Some of my comrades have died from overdoses of drugs other than the psychedelic drugs. Alcohol is a killer. What causes someone to take an unknown substance without thinking about the repercussions, I don't know. A death-wish? At a certain point in my drug use, I realized I was being self-destructive. I re-invented myself as a Buddhist monk and took vows, one of which is to avoid the use of intoxicants. My life became more harmonious and with the development of meditational skills, I had the experience of bliss-emptiness—a high from which you don't come down.

Bulwer's novels

A book is a thing among things, a volume lost among the volumes that populate the indifferent universe, until it meets its reader, the person destined for its symbols. What then occurs is that singular emotion called beauty, that lovely mystery which neither psychology nor criticism can describe.

--JORGE LUIS BORGES

Before I was a monk, I was a bookseller. Knowing this, my friend, Frick, asked me to appraise his library. He was selling his house near Telluride, a resort town in the Colorado Rockies, and he was unsure of what to do with a large collection of books that had been in his family for many years. I assumed the collection would be like many I had encountered, containing run-of-the-mill novels with, perhaps, an occasional first edition of a noteworthy work, along with the usual covey of old books having more of an "antique" value than any real worth as rare editions. I was in for a surprise.

I was reluctant to make the trip, but when Frick said he was hosting some Geluk monks that were traveling across the country giving empowerments and creating sand mandalas, I was persuaded to go. Frick picked me up from Tara Mandala, a retreat center near Pagosa Springs, on a Friday morning. A little after noon, we arrived at Crestview, on the outskirts of Telluride. We stopped in front of an imposing wood-frame house in a wooded residential neighborhood, and then, pulled into a three-car garage. While Frick was unloading some bags of groceries, I looked under a tarp in the next stall and saw a red Maserati, gleaming like a wish-fulfilling jewel.

We entered the home through the garage and were greeted by five monks preparing to eat a meal in the kitchen. One of the monks, like myself, was an American. Frick introduced me to John, and John introduced me to Lama Norbu, Geshe Kalsang, Yeshi, Tenzin, and Phuntsok.

In modern times, at the insistence of the Dalai Lama and in the spirit of non-sectarianism, the traditional rivalry between Nyingmapas and Gelukpas has, at least at formal gatherings, been suspended. Still, there is a strict hierarchy in monastic behavior. It may have been that I was the eldest, combined with being a friend of their host, or perhaps I was a curiosity, but I was given the honor of being served after the lama.

After lunch, we watched the Olympics on TV. Although the news from Tibet was grim—many demonstrators had been jailed following their protests to the Olympic torch being carried through Tibet—all the monks in the big house among the snowcapped mountains in Telluride watched with avid enthusiasm the athletes performing in China.

The swimmers were breaking records, and the gymnasts astounded us with their feats. We watched, until we had to leave for the evening's presentation at a yoga studio. We drove a short way to the public transit (a high-wire chairlift with small, covered cars) that took us high above the valley floor. I rode with Lama Norbu and shot video of him for what would be, an incredulous audience back home, in Lhasa.

The following day, the monks went off to paint a sand mandala at the Community Hall, and I began my researches on the library. Frick showed me to the basement where there were cardboard boxes full of books and more books in stacks on the floor. This was not your average collection. Here were treasures I had only dreamed of—first editions of Charles Dickens and Lewis Carroll in Moroccan leather bindings with the original covers sewn into the endpapers. Full sets of Balzac, of Stevenson, of Browning, of Kipling, of Defoe, also in fine bindings. There were folios of colored lithographs of birds and plants, large volumes of engravings of 18th century German artists, along with classical works in philosophy and history.

I went to work carting armloads of books from the basement to a room with more light, something I imagined other monks had done in monasteries in times past. My Geluk friends were curious about what I was doing, and when it was explained their admiration for my increased. Lama Norbu smiled and let me be first in line at meals, so I could get back to my task.

Once this kind of work was done with catalogs of auction records; now, it done with a computer. The job is essentially the same—search and compare and appraise. Arduous but lovely labor. The details in how I determined “condition” and “value” and “nearest approximate edition” are not relevant to this narrative, but this was the stuff of my hours, with short breaks only for meals and to sleep, for three days.

Obviously, this was a library of a man who could afford the best books. I must admit I had never asked Frick about his name—connecting it to a clever ice-skating duo, Frick and Frack, who I had enjoyed at the Ice

Follies. This was the family library of H. Mansfield Frick (1849-1919), manufacturer and philanthropist, friend and confidant of robber barons, and the library had come down from father to son.

But I digress. I worked diligently and time seemed to disappear. Then, a peculiar thing happened. I had just finished cataloging a copy of Milton's *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro* with illustrations by William Blake, and, laying it aside, I bumped a stack of books causing them to fall to the floor. One book landed with the cover splayed. Straightening a crumpled page, I read, "All events in the Universe occur at Once, but we Experience them Sequentially. Take a forest, for example;—the Trees have had to Grow; but we didn't Observe them, and now it is a Forest."

This seemed to me an odd notion, a mixture of David Hume and The Upanishads. I read a little more, and the thoughts were revealed to be those of a student in a state of despondency after being rejected a reigning beauty beyond his station in society. The title page: *The Courageous Cadet* by Sir Henry Bulwer, published, 1831, in London by Fishburn & Hughes, Ltd.

Who was Sir Henry Bulwer? A search for 19th century English authors led me to the *Cyclopedia of British Literature*, edited by Dr. I.S. Noval, where I found this entry:

Bulwer, William Henry Lytton Earle (Baron Dalling and Bulwer) 1801-72, British diplomat and author, known as Sir Henry Bulwer. Popular in his lifetime for his novels, he is now chiefly remembered for the speculative ideas in his plots, making him a precursor of the modern genre of science fiction.

So, Sir Henry is only remembered by literary historians interested in dates and changes, but once he had been the preferred reading of my friend Frick's grandfather. I needed to put a price on this book. I admit I was also interested in these "speculative ideas."

The computer is a labyrinthine maze of information. To some it is a highway, but to me it is more like the sands of the Sahara, shifting and growing every day. My day stretched into night. Anything resembling science fiction in *The Courageous Cadet* was only in embryonic form—the passing thoughts or musings of the protagonist. Otherwise, it had a pedestrian plot, and the writing style was sentimental and dated.

The student, Horatio, preparing for a commission in the army, stays holed-up in his room after his love interest has disappointed him; when he can no longer stand the isolation, he wanders the streets of the city in ever-expanding circles. What he sees is predictable, but every so often his mind goes off in an odd direction.

Looking into the window of a haberdashery, he considers the possibility of “a spiral of time” and the nature of “standing still in the present,” of how this “resembles Infinity” and how “Infinity resembles a pool of water.” Another time, after nearly being run over by a stagecoach, he sits on a bench in a park to catch his breath, and he compares time to a triptych of canvases on which you can paint the past any color you want. Time is simultaneously objective, subjective, and “canny” (secret or supernatural), and he divides time three ways: time for rest, time for work, and time to devote to the Deity.

It was at this point I remembered seeing a small engraving between the endpapers of a scythe leaning against a broken Doric column, which I recognized as a Masonic symbol for the precariousness of life and the impermanence of material reality. Needing a break, I let the computer rest and put an entry in my notebook for Monday: “A long day with not much accomplished on the library. Still, I am making progress.”

At the bottom of the stairs, there was a pile of suitcases and travel bags. The monks were ready to depart. Frick and I were given sweatshirts with the logo of the Ganden Monk’s Tour. We went out on the porch and waved goodbyes. Back in the house, I sat down in front of the TV and ran through the channels looking for the Olympics.

“No Olympics on Sunday,” Frick said.

“Sunday?” I asked. “I thought this was Monday. Friday, we drove up here and went to the empowerment, and Saturday I started work on your library, and Sunday I worked some but got sidetracked by a novel by an obscure author. This should be Monday morning.”

“For one thing, this isn’t morning; it’s afternoon, and I saw the light on where you’re working, in the early hours, when I got up to pee. I think you worked all night and forgot to sleep.”

I went back upstairs and looked at my notes. The entry was there with the date. I had even made a sketch of the Freemason’s engraving, but I could

not find the copy of *The Courageous Cadet*. Instead, I found twenty-six volumes of Bulwer's novels: a set with gilt pages and lettering and blue cloth covers with leather corners. However, the publisher was Collier, not Fishburn & Hughes, Ltd., and the set was in the bindery style of the late 19th or early 20th century.

Trying to backtrack my pages on the computer, I could find no trace of the *Cyclopedia of British Literature*, and yet I knew something about the life of Sir Henry Bulwer and had read (or thought I had read) one of his novels.

I went back downstairs. "I guess you are right," I said. "Somehow, I got out of step in time. Do you think that ice cream parlor next to the yoga studio is open on Sundays?"

"Sure," said Frick, "do you want to go?"

"Can we take the Maserati?"

"We can, and you can drive."

I don't know if His Holiness would approve of a monk behind the wheel of a red sports car, but I couldn't resist. When we hit a stretch of open road, I shifted into high gear and made up for lost time.

56 Minutes

The day starts the same way as every day has started since Alex first got sick. I wake up alone, make coffee alone, go to work alone. I call him first on my drive to work, second on my lunch break, and third to let him know when I'm off and headed to the hospital to see him. He picks up on the first ring every time. His voice is a little quieter on the third call, but I figure he must just be tired from all the needles and the tubes.

The drive to the hospital from my office building normally takes 27 minutes, but today it takes 56 minutes because there is a five-car pileup on the interstate seven miles before my exit and the traffic has come to a standstill. I consider texting Alex to let him know, but there are cops all around and I reason that I don't want to get caught texting while driving. He's probably sleeping anyway. So instead, I turn up the radio and wait.

When I get to the hospital, I sit for a few more minutes in my car before going inside. I probably should have grabbed some food on the way here because now it's getting close to seven and I haven't had anything since noon. I told myself I was done with the hospital food last week, but then I would be even later than I already am. I guess that will have to wait until tomorrow.

I head into the hospital and try to grab some granola from a vending machine on the way to Alex's room to tide me over, figuring I'll grab some real food from the cafeteria after I say hi. I press 502 on the vending machine without even looking and wait for the thud of the bar to hit the bottom of the machine. After a moment, it still hasn't fallen, so I actually look inside this time, and the granola is fresh out. I roll my eyes and stare at the machine for a few minutes, trying to decide what to pick. I end up choosing a bag of knock-off Cheez-Itz. I press the buttons and the crackers thud down and off I go to see Alex.

I turn the corner into his room, and to my surprise, he is wide awake.

"You're finally here," he says, his voice barely a whisper. His skin is paler than it was yesterday, I think, and the room feels cold as I step into it.

"I'm sorry, traffic was shit. I tried to get here as fast as I could," I say, mouth full of my vending machine crackers. I hold my hand out to Alex with a few crackers in it, offering them to him, but he just shakes his head

silently and doesn't say anything. "Anyways, I just wanted to make sure I stopped by first, but I'm starving, so I'm gonna go grab some food from the cafeteria. Do you want anything?" I ask him, but he just shakes his head again.

I wind my way through the hospital halls and down the stairs to the third-floor cafeteria, where I order a wilted salad with a stale breadstick. They don't have any trays and I don't really feel like carrying this back upstairs, so I decide to just sit and eat. While I'm eating, I listen to the sounds of the hospital. Three different code blues are called. Must be a long night for the doctors.

When I'm done, I take my time meandering back to Alex's room, making up stories in my head for everyone I pass by. That girl in the wheelchair, I've decided, now has a fiancé and a dog that are waiting at home for her to get better. The boy with no hair now has a husband and a newborn daughter that he can't wait to see tomorrow. The man in room 13 that was here all last month is gone now, replaced by a woman with one arm. I decide a shark ate her other one.

Except when I get to Alex's room, Alex isn't there anymore. Or rather, he is there, but so are a lot of doctors, and a machine that is hooked up to his heartbeat that is no longer beeping, so really it is more accurate to say that his body is there and he is not. I guess I didn't notice one of the code blues was his room number.

One of the nurses turns to me and asks if I am his girlfriend. I pause, and then I shake my head no. I go home.

The next day starts the same way every day starts. I wake up alone, I make coffee alone, and I go to work alone. I call him first on my way to work, second on my lunch break, and third when I'm off. I get his voice-mail every time.

soyez prêtes, shooting star

ask me for my name and i will greet you with power.
i am not the rusted plaque hanging
on the front door of my mother's
heartbeat — no,
i am a goddamn miracle.
do not mistake me for anything
less. i am tearing down the forests
until the sound reverberates
across my skin and into my milky way
veins. watch me build a rocket
and ride it all the way back
home to the woman in the moon i call friend.
watch me rename every star whatever they want
to be called because no
one thought to ask them
in the first place. watch me hand my heart to the shooting star
boy and ask him to please hold it
gently
because it is soft in its raw radiance and i refuse
to armor it. i refuse to calcify
my pulse into an easily identifiable stone — no,
i am a holy miracle.
watch me.

Future Children

You hear that books smell of lives lived
old and worn, dog-eared and torn
much like men and women of
years past.

How will computers smell to our children?
The mechanical smell of hard-drives
conjure reminiscent ideas of
people past:

Metallic and burnt-out, haggard and lonely,
depressed and stressed. The future
remembers. Learns from those mistakes
to change the flow of history—

History penned in a paper book
sitting on a bookshelf as fingers
glide over embossed spines and dog-eared pages of
futures past.

Connor
Chilson

Visual

The Lookout



you have no events scheduled today.
Imitating "ellenwelcker, you have no events scheduled today"
by Ellen Welcker

jk, you have no events scheduled today.
jk, you have plenty of time to stick your thumb out
& wait for someone to pick you.
you won't make it through the night
think the thoughts of others,
your head is not your own, jk.
like me, if you can
overlapping teeth & frostbitten toes
a brave cackle or grimace
jk, perhaps you are 5% confident
& 100% paranoid
do not look behind you, jk
possibly someone is there
mouth to mouth with your own reflection
brim to brim with self-doubt
big ass pile of codependency blocks you from exiting
you still try, jk
try again,
you have no events scheduled today, jk.

your coastal strawberry

you feast on me in your glory days.

plucking me off my tough leaves, chewing my

sickly sweet self.

wiping the juices off your lips. you do not wash me.

i am dirty when you bite.

i heal your insides.

your vices and your virtues.

you wish there were more of me.

am I not enough?

are you hungry still?

typical.

A Day in Belize

I get up from my bed—
the middle bed to be exact—
at 5 AM because I am used to it.
My hair is somewhat all over,
but it's easy to fix.

I slowly walk to the bathroom
and stare at myself
in the small squared mirror.
I zoom up close,
and like Fred Rogers,
I tell myself,
“It's such a wonderful day.”

I get my shorts on,
my black Central t-shirt,
with my New Balance shoes,
and my Maui hat on.
I opened the door
and climbed down the stairs.

The sun is beginning to rise,
and I climb down quietly like a mouse.
I notice the bench swing nearby,
which looks comfortable,
yet it's wet from the midnight storm
and heard screams from the young ladies
next door and downstairs.

Instead, I pass thru the bench swing
and paced to the bar.

“Buenos dias,” says the manager.

“Buenos dias. Can I have a cup of coffee?

No cream or sugar please.”

“Absolutely sir,” she says. I smile at her,
and walk to the nearest table
and sit facing the swings.

I listen to nature’s music—
the birds chirping,
the roosters from afar,
the breeze from the trees—
and it is more pleasant
than having my cell phone.

In fact, who needs that?

Only the young will never understand.

The manager arrives with my coffee,
and places it on the table.

“Here is your coffee, sir. Enjoy.”

I grab the coffee cup,
place it close to my lips
and drink it all in less than a minute.

“Would you like another cup, sir?”

“Absolutely,” I say.

The manager takes my cup
and goes to refill it with more coffee.

In the time she left,

I notice the clouds
go from blue to grey
just like in Washington State.

Then I hear a small drop,
then another drop,
and another, and another.

Drip drop.

Drip drop.

It sounds like a rapid spill
of pinto beans.

of pinto beans.

For minutes, it goes on.

I stare at the clouds
and know what to expect.

The manager brings my cup
with black coffee.

I quickly drink my coffee
and leave the table.

I begin to walk toward
the town market,
and see two stands open.

I pace to the closest stand.

“Buenos dias señor,” the vendor says.

“Buenos dias señor.

How much are the bananas?”

“For you, ten for a dollar.” He says.

I grab a plastic bag,

and place twenty in the bag.

The vendor looks concerned.

“Are you feeding a family of monkeys?”

I laugh at the vendor.

“No, not a family.

I’m planning to eat them.”

The vendor glances at me,

but I pay for my bananas

and leave the stand.

I walk back to the hotel,

which is less than five minutes.

I arrive drenched

and sit in the same spot as before.

I open the bag with my delicious bananas.

One by one,

I take them out of the bag

until they are all out on the table.

With my durable hands,

I begin to open one banana

and eat it complete.

For the next half-hour,

I eat all twenty bananas,

with all the peels in the bag.

I place them in the trash

and walk back to my room.

I change into a white Izod

short-sleeve button up,

my Levi’s jeans,

my Nike white calf socks,
with the same New Balance shoes.
I re-fix my hair,
and wear my straw hat
from Havana five years ago.
I snatch my bag from my chair
and leave the room to wait
at the same spot from before.

One hour later,
I notice them all arriving
in groups from three to four.
“Good morning,” one of them says to me.
“Good morning, how are you?”
“Good,” she says, “And you?”
“So far, satisfied.”

She looks at me
like if I were insane,
but like the rest,
some adventure are better unknown.
“One day, you will understand
and be fully satisfied in your way.”

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