Great Lake Review

Spring 2015

The Great Lake Review
SUNY Oswego's Literary Magazine
Spring 2015

The Great Lake Review is open to submissions throughout the year.

Please send your fiction, nonfiction,drama, poetry and visual art as an attachment to:

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Located at 19 W. Bridge Street in downtown Oswego, the river's end bookstore is *GLR*'s off-campus home. Every year the river's end holds the release events for our fall and spring issues.

All of us at *GLR* would like to extend a special thank-you to everyone at our favorite independent bookstore, especially Bill and Mindy.

THANK YOU, RIVER'S END

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Abandoned Sugar Mill, Vieques, PR

Zachary Donofrio

Wanderlust

Rachel Bullock

I have a paper map taped above my headboard
The sides are ripped,
And there is a water stain border enclosing Canada with Denmark

The cities are plagued with thumbtacks
Green for where I want to go
Red for where I've been
A few undetermined blues and purples
(From when I ran out of reds and greens)

Sometimes I kiss the frail paper with a felt tip marker;
Outline the borders I really want to cross into
I walk my fingertips across oceans
Press my palms to the world's edges

At night when I dream
I dream of paper trails
And printed mountains
Baby blue oceans
And multicolored landmasses

When I wake up sullen against my pillows
Trapped under my blankets

I reach up and touch the frayed edge of the world
And revel in its beauty

TITLE CARD : At least 457 immigrants were proclaimed missing in New York City during the early 20's and 30's. They've never been found.

INT. UNDERGROUND FIGHTING RING - DAY - JULY 1928

NEF (22), a big, German man punches an out of shape IRISHMAN. He falls to the floor.

NEF
C'mon! C'mon!

The Irishman, beaten, gets up and throws a punch. Nef dodges it, causing the Irishman to fall against the wooden wall. OTTO (52), a chunky, greedy man, sits in the audience.

INT. FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Men in dirty dress shirts sit at a desk collecting bets.

INT. WOODEN FIGHTING RING - DAY

Nef kicks the Irishman down. The crowd laughs and loudens. Nef bangs his hand on the wall, making a **THUMPING BEAT.**

INT. FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Men are yelling and holding out money. The crowd cheers "kill him" in the background, along with the **THUMPING BEAT.**

INT. WOODEN FIGHTING RING - DAY

The Irishman tries to get up. The **THUMPING BEAT** gets loud.

NEF
Kill the bastard?

The crowd roars. The Irishman finally stands but is hurt.

NEF
Should've stayed down Irishman.

IRISHMAN
Please, no. I give.

The **THUMPING BEAT** stops. The Irishman hesitates and cries.

CONTINUED:

NEF
C'mon. Don't want me t'strike, boy.

The Irishman hesitantly throws a punch. Nef dodges, uppercutting his nose. His inert body drops. He's dead. There's an uproar of cheers. Nef hops out of the ring.

INT. FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Nef grabs some money from the desk.

NEF
I'll collect the rest later.

MEN
Where are you going?

Otto holds a gun to Nef's head. Nef stops.

OTTO
Don't get crazy now. Get back in your cell. I still own you.

NEF
Y'don't own a damn thing.

He turns around slowly and stares at Otto. Nef grins and walks away. Two guards take him down a hallway to his cell.

INT. TENEMENT - FRONT DOOR - QUEENS

DAMIAN (20), a Russian immigrant adjusts his tie in the mirror with excitement.

DAMIAN
Mrs. Lubov, there's food in the cold box for you and Francis.

Damian puts his fedora on. His son, FRANCIS (5), grabs at his pant leg. MRS. LUBOV (40's) is in the kitchen.

FRANCIS
Daddy where are you going?

Damian is preoccupied with getting ready.

DAMIAN
Yeah.

Francis tugs harder. Damian looks at him.

FRANCIS
Where are you going?

DAMIAN
I'm seeing my friends tonight.

FRANCIS
Can't you stay in?

Damian kneels down.

FRANCIS
You didn't stay in last night.

DAMIAN
(laughing)
You fell asleep on me buddy.

Francis is saddened. Damian kisses him on the forehead.

DAMIAN
Tomorrow night I promise.

Damian starts heading out of the door.

MRS. LUBOV
You should stay in for him.

Damian closes the door. Francis stands there, sad.

MRS. LUBOV (O.S.)
He needs you.

INT. SPEAKEASY - EVENING

Damian is sitting with a flapper named JESSI (21).

JESSI
I've been eying you all night.

DAMIAN
Have you now?

There's a brief silence.

JESSI
You think it's a bit unorthodox for a woman to approach a man?

Damian smiles and drinks the rest of his drink.

CONTINUED:

DAMIAN
Only if the bank's closed.

Damian signals the bartender for two drinks.

JESSI
Not necessarily.

She kisses Damian's cheek and slips a pill in his drink.

INT. SPEAKEASY - NIGHT

Jessi caresses Damian's arm. He's dazed. The bar's dead.

JESSI
How 'bout we get out of here?

DAMIAN
Yes, ma'am.

They walk towards the exit. Damian waves to his friends.

DAMIAN
I'll see you guys at work.

His friends wave back. Damian stumbles a bit.

EXT. SPEAKEASY ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Damian walks against the wall. Jessi walks beside.

JESSI
You alright, kid?

He slurs his words, stumbling even more. She pulls him up.

JESSI
Hey, get up now.

He falls down. She kneels down beside him and shakes him.

JESSI
Hey, hey. C'mon you're good.

Damian passes out.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Two Guards drag Damian down the hallway of cells. MEN whistle and yell. Damian, dazed, looks up.

The two Guards drag Damian to one of the cells and throw him in. They lock it behind him. Damian slides to the wall.

Otto looks into the cell. Next to him is Jessi. He hands her some money. RUDI (43), an odd looking Englishman, sits in the corner staring at Damian.

OTTO
He's my guy, don't fuckin touch em.

Otto leaves. Damian starts to come to his senses.

RUDI
Fish.

Damian looks in confusion.

RUDI
Aye, Fish. Still on a toot?

DAMIAN
Wh-who are you? Where am I?

RUDI
I'm Rudi. And this is the closest thing to hell, boy.

Damian presses his face against the cell bars.

DAMIAN
I need to get out of here.

Rudi chuckles.

DAMIAN
How do you get out of here?

RUDI
You ain't going nowhere Fish.

Damian slides down and sits. Men fight in the cell across from them. Nef is in that cell, sitting by the bars. Rudi holds his hand up, rubbing his fingers together.

RUDI
Money. That's why you're here. It captivates anyone's eye. But what I don't get is the complete disregard for human life.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rudi walks over to Damian, examining him. Damian backs up.

RUDI
Relax, I ain't goin' to woo ya. But I can't say the same for the other gents here.

DAMIAN
How many are in here?

RUDI
About five hundred. Just about. And it's all for the entertainment of gamblers.

NEF
What's up with him?

RUDI
Still half seas over is all.

Rudi chuckles. Guards drag a man down the hallway. He's a wreck and yelling in fear. Rudi turns Damian's head.

RUDI
Don't worry, Fish. Let your adrenaline keep you alive.

INT. CELL

Damian sleeps in his cell. A Guard enters and slaps him. Otto comes to the cell.

OTTO
Aye, boy. Get up you're fighting for me now.

Guards come to the cell and grab Damian. He's resistant.

OTTO
Save it for the ring.

INT. WOODEN FIGHTING RING - DAY

The guards throw Damian into the ring. There's a hefty crowd, ready to see blood shed and battle. An Albanian, slim but muscular, stands opposite of him.

Damian stands frozen and confused. Otto, sitting in the crowd, pulls him in and whispers in his ear.

(CONTINUED)

OTTO
You're here t'survive and win bets.

He pushes Damian out in the ring.

OTTO
At all cost!

The crowd roars with excitement. The man hits him. Damian falls back. The Albanian follows up with a series of punches. Damian blocks every other punch in defense.

A punch gets through, knocking Damian down. The man stomps on him repeatedly. The crowd goes crazy.

OTTO
Get up god damn it, get up!

Damian tries to get up but is stomped down. He gets up but the man punches him down. The crowd chants to kill him.

Damian is bloodied up and exhausted. There's fear in his eyes as the Albanian comes back to finish him off. He throws another punch but Damian grabs it and headbutts him.

His adrenaline causes him to strike the man repeatedly. Damian doesn't stop and he keeps attacking. Damian quickly dodges a punch and jabs him in the head.

The Albanian falls to the floor, bringing the crowd to a silence. Someone in the crowd asks, "Did he kill em'?"

There's an uproar of boos and faint cheers, along with Otto's cheering. Damian stands there, shocked. He just KILLED a man. He grows with excitement and much relief.

OTTO
Get him to his cell!

Guards grab Damian and drag him out.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The guards throw Damian in his cell. Rudi looks up, surprised. Damian sits down against the wall.

RUDI
Ha, Fish made it. Now we can rest.
(into the hallway)
Don't worry everyone, Fish is okay!

CONTINUED:

Rudi kisses him on the fore head. Damian brushes him off. Otto appears.

OTTO
Nef.

He turns to Nef, who is in his cell.

OTTO
You washed up son of a bitch...Nef!

He bangs on the cell bars.

OTTO
Next match is for your comp.

This catches Nef's attention. Otto leaves.

RUDI
Congratulations big guy.

Nef is speechless.

DAMIAN
What happened? What's a comp?

NEF
It's a ticket out of here.

DAMIAN
How are you getting out?

Nef retreats to his corner.

RUDI
(sotto voce)
Nef has been here for a while.

DAMIAN
So he's guaranteed a way out.

RUDI
Well that's if he wins-

Nef appears from the shadows of his cell.

NEF
-I will win.

RUDI
Easy there, you don't even know who you're fighting yet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

All the men in their cells down the hallway yell, "I want to fight him." "Nef, fight me."

DAMIAN
Couldn't someone in the crowd tell the police and they can clean sweep this place up. We'd be free.

RUDI
Snitch? Who'd want to snitch on this gold mine. We're in a depression and people need money. Even the police. Let them bet their change away.

DAMIAN
Why is everyone interested in fighting him?

RUDI
Who ever can defeat him on his-

NEF
The person I fight can win my comp.

RUDI
However, darling here won't lose-

DAMIAN
I'll fight you.

RUDI
(mutters)
I keep getting cut off.

DAMIAN
Did you hear what I said Nef, I'm fighting you. I need that comp.

NEF
No.

DAMIAN
What do you mean no I have a son. I need to get back god damn it. I'm the only one the kid's got!

NEF
I said no.

Damian presses against the cell bars forcefully.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAMIAN
Listen to me. I'm fighting you.

He falls to the ground, teary eyed.

NEF
You said the reason for fighting is for your boy? I was taken like you, but at a young age. I was sixteen living in Queens. My father was away at war so my mother wanted to take me out to see 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea in Manhattan. It was late but we walked through Central Park. My mother went to go look at a pond so I walked ahead. Men were waiting ahead of us and I ran into them.

Rudi looks up.

NEF
They grabbed me and covered my mouth. My mother didn't notice. I fought them off. She came running over. It surprised them so they shot her. One shot and she fell. They just took me away and I woke up here. One of them was Otto.

They look over at Otto.

NEF
They shot once but I think she's still alive today. I haven't seen her or daylight since. I'm winning my next fight. Even if I have to kill my opponent, to be sure of it.

DAMIAN
Well, one of us is dying then.

Nef studies him.

NEF
Otto!

OTTO
What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

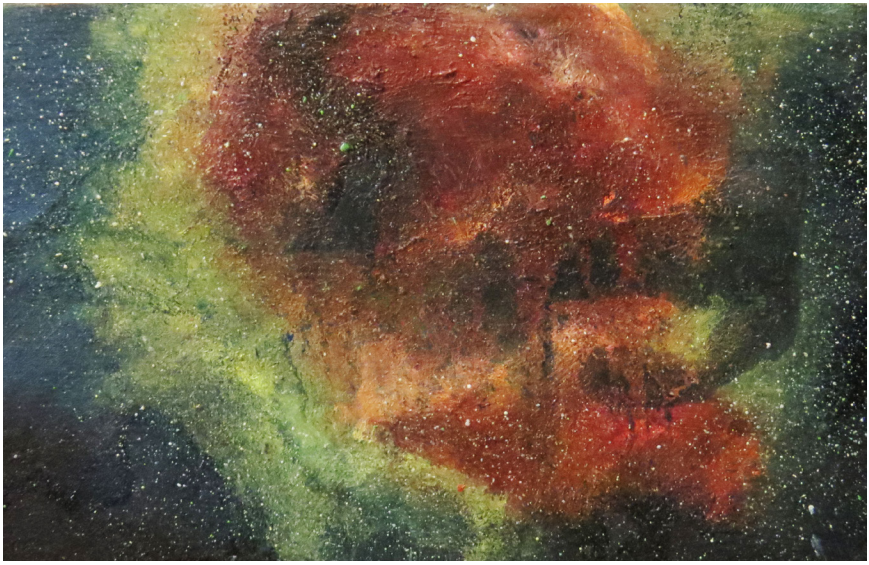
NEF
I'm fighting the new guy tomorrow.

The men in their cells yell in disappointment. Damian gets up and begins to practice his fighting stance.

RUDI
(smiling)
Best to be ready Fish.

DAMIAN
Why do you call me Fish?

RUDI
You're new, you're the fresh meat.



Great Gig in the Sky II

Morgann Smith

The Drop-Off

Brendan Tymon

The man gazed down into the gorge, wondering how long it would take for him to hit the rapidly moving waters if he were to take a flying leap. Was it two hundred feet? Three hundred? At what speed would a 195 pound man fall through the air, and what would happen to his body, inside and out, when he hit that water? He took a pack of cigarettes out of his back pocket, removed one and stuck it in his mouth before replacing the pack in his pocket and raising a lighter to his lips. Smoke filled his lungs with painful, soothing heat, and he exhaled through his nostrils, the smoke flowing out of his nose, and for a moment he resembled an enraged bull, snorting, ready to charge. Late afternoon sun beat down on the back of his neck, the water roared below and, in the distance, a hawk screeched as it took to the sky.

After another long drag, the man flicked his cigarette into the gorge and turned away. He walked slowly toward the silver 1994 Chrysler Sebring that was parked about fifty yards from the edge of the gorge, his hands deep in his pockets. The phone in his pocket began to ring a jolly, high pitched jingle. He pulled it out, read the name on the screen, and sighed. His eyes closed, and he silenced the phone, turned about face, paused for a moment, and violently flung the phone. It spun through the air, ringing once again before disappearing over the edge of the gorge. The man walked briskly to the car, opened the passenger side door and grabbed a duffel bag out of the back seat. He moved over to the driver's side, pulled the door open, leaned over the lifeless occupant of the driver's seat, and turned the keys in the ignition. With a dull growl the old car came to life, the steering wheel vibrating softly in the man's hand. He reached down and moved the driver's leaden foot onto the accelerator. The engine revved and the man reached for the

gear shift, looking briefly into the face of the driver before throwing the car into drive and extricating himself nimbly.

The Sebring shot forward, its front door still open, headed straight for the gorge. He watched the car pick up speed and list slightly to the left, a trail of dust flowing behind it. Within ten seconds the car had hit the edge of the gorge and pitched itself over, the rear bumper disappearing in the blink of an eye. The man counted, one...two...three... four seconds before the sound of three thousand pounds of metal slamming into the swiftly moving waters of the gorge reached his ears. He stood for a moment, gazing at the place where the car had disappeared. The man sighed, grabbed his duffel bag and slowly walked the hundred yards back to the road. She was waiting for him there at the edge of the road, her arms crossed and her foot tapping incessantly, a duffel bag of her own on the ground behind her. And as he drew closer to her, he couldn't help but smile at the prospects that his new life might hold.

From the Grey

Nick Brown

I don't know if I should go. Lauren told me to come whenever I got out of work; her graduation party would still be going on. It is almost 11 at night, and her house is 20 minutes away. I don't even have a card to give her. My phone vibrates in my pocket. I open it and see a text from Paige asking if I'm coming to the party. Paige is there. There is not a doubt in my mind now. Hell yes, I'm going.

I get in my Ford Focus with the cracked windshield and sound of a pissed off lawnmower and speed towards Lauren's house. I'm always mesmerized that I went to the same high school as Lauren and Paige. My town Poughkeepsie is full of busy roads, traffic lights, 24/7 diners, and apartment buildings. If I could describe Poughkeepsie in one word, it would be "grey." Yet all it takes is a 20-minute drive to get to Poughquag. My friends and I call Poughquag "Cow Town." There are countless farms. And with every farm comes a family of rednecks who wear camouflage jackets and dirty Budweiser baseball hats. Then there's the wealthy part of Poughquag—the families that reap the benefits of the quiet rural town created by the farmers while maintaining high paying corporate jobs. They have massive, beautifully maintained yards. If I could describe Poughquag in one word, it would be "green." Lauren lives in the wealthy part of Poughquag, along with her neighbor Paige.

Before I get to Lauren's house I stop at a Price Chopper to get a card that I can throw some money in. I figure it's rude to just hand someone a 20 dollar bill and say, "Congrats on graduating." It's just going to be a quick hello and then leave. The party has to be coming to an end, right? I'll see Paige for a few minutes, if I'm lucky. There's nothing to be worked up about.

I pull up to Lauren's house and see about 30 people

dancing on the front lawn. As I get out of my car and start approaching the party, I can tell everyone is clearly intoxicated. Lauren runs up to me and gives me a hug.

"Didn't your parents throw this thing?" I ask her.

"They went to bed. Everyone brought some stuff. Do you want anything?" Lauren asks.

I deny Lauren's generous offer of free alcohol. Most of the people here are girls who can stay the night, no problem. I've never met Lauren's parents, and an unknown boy waking up in their house could be awkward for everyone. I'm going to have to drive home tonight, and I'm not really in the mood to drink anyway.

I start to get anxious as I worry that a neighbor might call the police if they hear all the noise. Most of us are barely 18. Then I realize how lucky these Poughquag folks really are. Lauren's closest neighbor is almost a mile away. They aren't going to hear anything.

Someone pushes me in the back, and I turn around to see Paige with a long, closed-mouth smile and her arms out. I go to give her a casual hug, and she embraces me tighter than she ever has. I've known the girl for three years, and she has never shown this much affection towards me before.

She whispers in my ear, "Can you take me to Cumbies?"

Cumbies is what Poughquag residents call the 24/7 gas station Cumberland Farms. I always found it funny that a gas station is the go-to nighttime place. If you're up past 11 in Poughkeepsie, you have tons of options of places to go to. Not in Poughquag. They have a gas station. I'm fond of Cumbie's, though. Down the road from the station is a park where my friends and I play street hockey during the summer. Whenever we get parched we go to Cumbie's, where we can get a ridiculously oversized beverage for just 79 cents. I can also get a sandwich, a pizza, a wrap, or chicken fingers for less than two dollars. I'm still not sure how Cumbie's manages to make a profit. It's just a gas station, but even a kid from the other side of the district can admit Cumbie's is pretty awesome.

Paige and I leave the party together to be on our way to Cumbie's. I know her favorite artist is Billy Joel, so I blare a playlist of his through the stereo.

"You're so nice," Paige says.

"Why's that?" I ask.

"You drive me places, and you play the music I like."

She begins to tear up as she says this. I find it comical. It's not that serious, but for some reason she's

noticeably touched by me performing these insignificant gestures for her.

I don't know how to respond. I'm internally giddy that she seems to appreciate me so much. She's never been like this before. She's also really drunk.

"Am I the nicest person you know?"

"Yes."

She puts her head on my shoulder, and we sit in silence for the remainder of the car ride.

We get to the gas station, and she immediately runs to the bathroom. I want to follow her. If she's getting sick, I could try to help. We're also at a public establishment, though. A boy and a girl can't just walk into the same restroom together.

I go to the Chill Zone station and start filling a cup up with Paige's favorite flavors: strawberry and banana. Chill Zones are just glorified Slurpees. The people in Poughquag swear by Chill Zones. The first time I went to a friend's house in Poughquaq he told me I absolutely had to try a Chill Zone. He was really excited to show me. In a way, I'm grateful I don't live here. Poughkeepsie may be where the poorer kids live, but hell, at least we don't pride ourselves on a frozen gas station beverage.

I'm putting the top on Paige's drink when she comes up from behind and latches onto me.

"This is the kind you like, right?"

I hold the straw over my shoulder, and she sips it without letting go of me. My hand is trembling. Not because the drink is too cold to hold on to, but because this is the most intimate moment I've ever had with her.

We sit down at a table near the window. I look out and see a large red pickup truck surrounded by boys that look the same age as me in ripped jeans and camouflage jackets. Paige and I look at them, then look at each other and laugh. It's Friday night, and people in this town are having a social gathering in the parking lot of a gas station.

Paige is just looking down and mumbling Billy Joel lyrics to herself. I don't even want to say anything. I enjoy watching her. I'm at a free concert of my favorite singer. She keeps briefly looking up at me and smiling. I pretend to bite my nails to hide the stupid grin that's stuck on my face.

"We should get back to Lauren's," Paige says as she jolts up.

As we walk out I look back at the flickering neon "Open" sign and the woman in pajama pants buying milk at the register and the acne faced college dropout ringing her

up. We should get one of these in Poughkeepsie.

Nothing is said on the car ride back until we pull into the driveway at Lauren's house. No one is on the lawn anymore. There's no lights visibly on from any of the windows.

"Looks like the party's over," I say. "Let me help you get in."

Before we get out of the car, Paige asks, "What do I deserve?"

What does that mean? I think she deserves to have someone think of her the way I do. But I don't deserve her. What am I supposed to say?

"You deserve anything you want," I end up saying.

That's what I came up with. The most cliché thing I could have possibly said. I could've done better than that.

"Do you mean that? I don't deserve that much."

She looks down and smiles again.

I raise my eyebrows and look back at her.

"Let's get you back inside."

I put both my hands on Paige's shoulders to guide her up the dark driveway. She stops walking, becomes parallel to me, and interlocks our hands. I don't say anything. I start walking slower to cherish the moment. I wish this was a longer driveway.

We go into Lauren's house, where she and her friends are gathered in the living room. About five or six girls are passed out on the floor. Paige runs to the floor and joins them. Lauren is sitting in an armchair watching TV.

"Jesus, you should have told me she was with you. I thought she drove home," Lauren says as she gives me a glaring look. "And don't bring a fucking Chill Zone into the living room."

"All right, I'm gonna go then."

I give a lazy wave towards Lauren's direction.

"Paige, I'll see ya."

Paige pops up from the floor and runs over to me. She hugs me one more time, puts her nose into my neck, and says, "I love you."

I pull away from her. Not because I didn't want to stay like that forever, but because I could feel myself start to profusely sweat and this has the potential to turn into a humiliating situation. I walk out to my car, but I don't get in. I stand at the driver's side door and stare at the window of Lauren's living room for 10 minutes. They're probably talking about what just happened. Paige is probably blushing as they call her out on liking me. We're gonna talk tomorrow. I

get in my car and drive away.

I'm eating lunch with my friend at the Poughkeepsie mall. Paige still hasn't texted or called today. We held hands, I fed her a drink, she told me she loved me. She hasn't said a word today. My phone vibrates on the table, and I rapidly snatch it so my friend sitting across doesn't see. It's from her. This is it. This is where she's going to ask to see me. Where she's going to tell me she meant everything that happened last night. Where what I've waited years for finally comes to fruition.

"Hey I wasn't annoying yesterday was I?" the text reads.

That's it.

"No hahahaha you were so nice," I answer.

I finish lunch without receiving another text from her. That's all that would be said of that night. No acknowledgement of anything else. Maybe she really doesn't remember anything she did. Maybe she does and didn't mean any of it. I excuse myself from the table, walk outside, and stare out. It's a dark, sweaty, dry day. I look at the thick clouds above, the arterial with cars zooming rapidly by, the tall buildings of miscellaneous businesses, the sidewalk below, my shitty car parked at the end of the lot.

Everything's grey.

Splash of Color

Kristen Burke

To the Future Husband

Ryann Crofoot

My name is not “sweetie.”
Sugar is sweet, I don’t dissolve so easily.
Instead, you should call me “Stormborn,”
not just because I love Game of Thrones,
but because I was born of rain and snow
with storm clouds for eyes, thunder in my ribcage,
and power outages in my head.
Sometimes, you’ll have to remind me
to go to sleep at night, to finish the laundry,
to wash the shampoo from my hair
because I’ll get so entangled in
the plot that manifested in the shower,
keep swearing that this will be my last chapter,
and hold imaginary conversations with characters I just met,
that I’ll forget the things I need.

Sometimes, you’ll wonder what the hell I’m thinking,
but you’ll never wonder if I need you.
I will rattle your windows and flood your basement
until you pray a tree falls through the roof,
but I know you’ll always have an umbrella ready.
Just remember that every storm brings it’s calm
and every hurricane needs the sea,
and I will always return to my sea.

I’m sorry, but I’ve already got favors to ask;
that every once in a while you peek under the bed
for the nightmares I hid there,
dust them off and show me that not all dreams
have monsters waiting in the shadows.
Sometimes, the sword is only there for decoration,
the dragon to speed up travel time,
and the giant slime Godzilla to remind you
that you’re just a background character in most stories,
but even background characters have goals,
and I know you’ll always help me make mine.

And I’m sorry, but I’ve already got apologies to make.
My head is hard enough to beat a ram in a fight,
but I won’t disagree with you as much as it seems;
I like arguing for the sake of the debate.
I apologize for all the times I’ll
tell you exactly what I think,
and all the times I’ll expect you to figure it out.
I’m sorry I’ll need you to spell. Everything. Out.
Expecting me to identify emotions is like
asking a wolf to become a vegetarian.

But for you, I could eat a few more carrots

Patients is a Virtue

Jordan Dedrick

(LIGHTS UP. A therapist's office, circa 1950. DR. ALLEN at a desk, CAROL lounges on a chaise.)

DR. ALLEN

…As I have said a plethora of times, I cannot control the thoughts of random people.

CAROL

But you have to admit, that would be a brilliant super power. Especially for a therapist. It's a tad cliché, but I bet someone could make it into a picture. My mom always tells me that she is going to take me to see one of them, but every time I ask her, she just yells at me.

DR. ALLEN

Carol, you need to open up to me about your time in the hospital. About what happened there.

CAROL

I cannot say I know exactly what you are talking about. I don't remember being in any old hospital. I think there is a special name for the place I was in. Mickey always told me I was special. Especially when Momma wasn't around. But if she caught us, oh boy, you know I was in for a world of hurt. I never saw Mickey much after my tenth birthday,though. I wondered what happened to him.

DR. ALLEN

When you were at the hospital…sanitarium…did you notice anything that was peculiar? Anything strange?

CAROL

Strange? I don't believe so. Unless you count the fact that everyone - well almost everyone, not the crazy people at least – got some sort of visitor every now and again. But I didn't. Momma never came once. I thought it was a bit strange. Why wouldn't you want to come and visit your own daughter?

DR. ALLEN

Carol, your mom is –

CAROL

Dead? I know that, silly. She still could have come to visit me. Just like all the other people there. They had visits with their relatives. Some girls said that their fathers would come to them in the middle of the night so that no one would get in trouble. They just wanted to see their baby girls.

DR. ALLEN

And you were never visited?

CAROL

Not once. Can you believe that? But I guess I can't blame Momma for not wanting to come see me.

DR. ALLEN

Why?

(CAROL props herself up on the chaise to look at the doctor.)

CAROL

Because I stabbed her seventeen times the night before I left. She was real mad. I bet she still is.

(CAROL returns to her original position. Lights out.)

Things That Happen When I Get Too Drunk

Kaili Morris

It starts with “I like your smile,”
ends with a late night walk home without shoes.
It goes from “I’d like to get to know you better”
to you drunkenly mapping my curves.

The beer in my hand plus
the three you buy me plus
the salt-shot-lime equals
you shoving me into a wall
and me letting you.

My grandfather takes bourbon,
my father takes vodka,
I take

half a bottle of wine plus
a vodka tonic plus
the random
glass of whiskey unattended
on the washing machine plus
salt-shot-lime

equals a bruise the size of my fist
that did not
go unnoticed every time I sat down.

The Rubbermaid tub full
of sangria, sliced oranges and regret,
minus my ability to stand up straight
left a stain on my dress.

I taste like cheap beer

and cigarettes
you smell like cannabis
and dandruff shampoo

Your sweatshirt
smells like old spice
and vodka
just like my pillow case

It keeps me warm
while I am pressed against
cold porcelain

One glass of water
while you dry heave into my garbage
two doses of ibuprofen
and you asking
why do you do this
equals
me saying I love you
and you saying
I know but...

Selcouth

Maggie Faller

That Clown Incident

Collin Henderson

Jem stood in front of me dressed in a suit. Blue jacket and pants, black shoes and a red tie. It made me chuckle to picture him getting up in the morning, looking at his wardrobe, considering where exactly in the country he was, and thinking, Yes, I will dress myself in a fine ass suit. Gotta impress the locals and woo the ladies, after all.

The kid didn't look a day over nineteen. His hair was finely combed, face shaved impeccably, shoes shined so much that I think I could go blind by looking in them. Not only that, but his nails were clearly treated. This guy got a manicure.

A manicure.

All of this was opposed to me, standing there in clothing that I had borrowed (more like stole) from the Salvation Army. A natty old basketball jersey with the number "44" in big red letters and jeans with a hole big enough so my left shin was showing. I'm pretty sure my left ass pocket had a hole in it, too. My hair was a mess, a bird's nest of light brown. I hadn't shaved in…I'm gonna go with two weeks, but in all reality I still never remember shaving. It's anyone's guess. My face was more follicles than skin, is the point. My nails? Ha. GREEN. They were GREEN. Don't ask me how. I have no clue. And I don't even want to talk about my shoes.

"Okay, kid. You got your piece?" I asked this in a stern voice. Already, I didn't like him very much.

His eyes widened ever so slightly, and I'm pretty sure he thought, GODDAMNIT MY DOG ATE IT, I SWEAR, MISTER. He patted the left side of his jacket, and his eyes went back to normal. "Yes, I do." His voice had an ever so slight southern twang to it. "Ready and loaded."

I walked up to him so we were standing face to face, inches apart. I looked in his blue eyes and, presumably, he

looked into my brown ones, although he was doing his best to avoid contact--I was close enough to smell the cheap cologne he used that morning. I squinted a bit.

A drop of sweat ran down from his brow and along the rim of his left eye. That's what I wanted to see.

"Good. Ready for your first day on the job?"

He swallowed. "Uh, yes, I think so."

"When you are talking to me, you will address me as sir!" I think some of my spit flew onto his lip when I yelled this at him.

"Yes, sir!" I swear to God, this guy actually snapped his heels together like he was in the military.

I gave him a steely glare a few seconds more, then laughed and patted his shoulder. "Don't be so serious, kid. I'm only fucking with you."

"Uh, okay s-…" He paused. "Okay." His eyes still looked like those of a kid about to ask a girl out for the first time in his life.

I walked out of the police station and out into the sunlit street. The summer air was nice, not too hot but definitely not chilly. The breeze fluttered my hair a bit.

"See all of this, kid?" I kept calling him that, but in reality, I was only twenty nine. The thing was that doing police work in this town has a way of making a person age beyond his years. I looked more like thirty five.

Jem nodded. A few cars drove by, and we both breathed in the fumes. There were some pedestrians out and about; kids with their mothers, old men with their equally old dogs. Even one of our famous daytime hookers trying to turn tricks down on the corner.

I started walking to our vehicle. He followed me and got in the passenger seat when I got in the driver's. Sinking into the chair was kind of like pouring salt over a cut you got on your nuts from shaving them. Not exactly comfortable, but you know it's for the best in the long run.

I buckled up and said, "Now, kid, before we go anywhere, I have to ask you something." It smelled vaguely of oysters in there. Not enough to be nauseating, but enough to notice. "Why in the name of all that is holy and sanitized would you willingly apply to be a police officer in this town? You do know about this place, right? You have heard the stories? There's a reason that it's called Bumfuck, Nowhere, USA. We are literally in Nowhere. I can't even tell you where that falls on the map. All I know is that it's somewhere between the east coast and west coast of our country.

It's the fifty-first state that everyone, including me, forgets about."

Jem stared at me, dumbfounded. "Wait…Wait. Where am I?"

Goddamnit. Another poor, lost bastard that wandered a bit too far off the Yellow Brick Road without knowing it.

"Son, you are in the town of Bumfuck, Nowhere, USA." I held out my hand for him to shake. "My name is Jack Mahogoff. Welcome." It's not my real name, but it's been so long since I used the real one that I've forgotten it.

More sweat started to form on his forehead. "This isn't Austin, Texas?"

"'Fraid not. Come on, let's go get some grub."

I peeled off down the road, burning rubber as I did. The town has a way of doing things like this. It somehow reaches out to folks and draws them here, but they don't know it. In the case of this young guy, Jem, he clearly thought he took up work in Texas. Instead, he found himself splat in the middle of this long forgotten place that somehow managed to stay afloat in the chaos of its inhabitants. I would have felt pity if I wasn't so goddamn hungry and he didn't look so goddamn ridiculous in that suit.

"Well, here's a tip for you. People go missing here. Like, a lot. And weird shit happens all the time. I once saw a car driving down the road upside down. Like, it was using its roof as its wheels. I still can't figure out exactly what happened. If you ever, and I mean ever, get the sudden and overwhelming urge to walk down a dark alley, especially at night, I recommend doing so with maybe five guns on your person and some C4 strapped to your chest. We haven't found everyone that's gone missing, and the ones we do find are never in one piece. And I'd be willing to bet at least half of the ones that do get lost felt something in them telling them to go down some dark alley. Wherever they go, I can almost guarantee that you would rather be dead than get taken."

He gave me a blank look. He must have still been processing the fact that he somehow wound up in this town. Fate basically slipped him a roofie and left him in the gutter. Probably called him a filthy slut, too.

"Basically, keep your eyes open and ears alert. And don't be afraid to run like a terrified little squirrel from anything weird you see. Now, you hungry?"

"Um. Yes. Very. But I have…" He swallowed.

"Yes?" I took another turn and saw a man in a trench

coat blowing up a balloon and turning it into an octopus. There were no people standing around him.

"I have a question. You said people around here are getting taken. What…What does that mean, exactly?"

Inside my head, a brain cell jumped off a cliff to its death. If there was one thing I hated, it was having to explain simple things to people. "Truth be told, we aren't entirely sure. People just walk into a dark alley, or they go for a late night walk, or they start watching too much Prostitution Idol, and the next thing we know, we have a missing person's report on our hands. There've been ten missing people so far, and we've only found five. Like I said, none of them were in one piece. One guy we found had his own head shoved up his-"

"Okay, I need to get out of here." He tried to open the door. For a moment, I pictured him flopping out onto the concrete of the road like some kind of action hero, but I stopped him by grabbing his suit jacket.

"What's the last thing you remember about arriving here? Hm?"

He gave me a look that said, Let go of me, you damn dirty Jack. But he obliged and answered my question as best as he could. "I had gotten a job as a police officer in Austin, Texas. I was driving on some back road and…" A puzzled look crossed his face. "I don't know. I must have taken some kind of wrong turn."

"Boom. That's how this place got you. As I can remember, when I first came here, I was driving in the rain. I don't know where I thought I was going, but I hit something and the next thing I know, I'm being dragged into town by some old shit with a double barrel. Oh, and your name? You're going to forget it."

"Excuse me?"

I nodded. "It happened to me, it happened to that guy--" I pointed out the window at a very old man dressed in a rainbow leotard doing the disco as he walked down the sidewalk, "--and it will happen to you. There's something in the air here. It'll make you forget most of your past life. No one is quite sure how or why, but it'll happen. And when that starts to happen, you'll start getting letters. They'll have your new name."

He turned away, looking decidedly green around the gills.

The traffic light turned green and I took a left, even though I was in a right turn only lane. A symphony of honks echoed through the streets. I grinned. "You'll be fine," I said,

but it could very well be a lie. “I’m taking you to my special place for breakfast.”

I kept driving, squinting my eyes against the bright sun.

“And…” Jem’s voice was dry, like it’d been scrubbed out with sandpaper. “Where, exactly, is that?”

“It’s A Gas. The town’s only gas station. There is nothing like gas-station pizza to wake you up in the morning.” Jem continued staring straight ahead. “By the way, you’re probably going to regret wearing that monkey suit by the end of the day. I once tried to dress formally, but…Well, I guess we’ll wait and see.” Whether he liked it or not, Jem was stuck here, and in my experience, showing is better than telling. He’d have to learn the ropes without too much help.

No response from him. He just looked down at the blue suit he was wearing. I think I heard his already low spirits dropping even lower. The day had already screwed with him enough; he began in a dumpster, and now he’d reached the all-time low: inside a porto potty at an Ozzy concert. Trust me, I’ve been there. It was probably the most effective form of torture ever unintentionally designed by man.

“And here. We. Are.” I pulled into the station, with its big blue and green sign reading “IT’S A GAS! HERE FOR ALL YOUR GAS RELATED NEEDS!” And, in smaller letters below those, “Whoever is defiling our air pump, please keep it in your pants.”

“Get ready for an all-new taste buds related experience.” I opened the door and stepped out of the car. Somehow, for the few minutes we were driving, the temperature had risen at least twenty degrees. I already felt the sweat forming on my forehead and in my pits. I could only imagine how Jem felt.

He stood next to the car, eyeing the entrance with that blank look. “Let’s go, shall we?” I passed through the doorway and into the refreshingly cool air of the interior. The attendant shot me a look. I still can’t tell if it was anger or constipation.

“Johnny, my man. Got a new recruit to Bumfuck’s finest.”

“My name’s Jared,” the attendant said.

“Whatever. I’ll take two slices of your finest pizza.” I started to dig into my wallet and pull out some cash.

“Lookit, Jack, I keep telling you, we DO NOT sell pizza until after twelve. Get it? AFTER. TWELVE.”

"Well yeah, what time is it?"

"It's seven, ass clown."

"Oh, really? That's funny, because my phone says…" I pulled it out of my pocket and glanced at it. Instead of numbers, there were only flashing smiley faces. "My phone says it's smiley o' clock."

"Jack?" Jem asked me.

"Shut up for a second. God. The adults are talking. Look, Tommy-"

"Jared," he corrected me.

"Sheldon, I am starving." His constipated/angry look intensified. "And this guy with me, Jem, well, he hasn't exactly been having the greatest day. He really, really, really needs some nutrition. Some good, old fashioned, greasy nutrition." By this point, I was leaning over the counter, propped up on my elbows, staring at whatever the attendant's name was.

"Jack, I swear to God…How many times do you need to come in here and--"

"Jack?" Jem again.

"Jem, can't you see that--" I turned to face him and saw him pointing to the entrance.

Standing there was a man of about six feet. He was thin, thin enough to see his rib cage against the skin. Both his arms and legs were like sticks. In one hand he held a jar of Jiffy Peanut Butter. In the other was a snub-nose revolver. But arguably the worst part was that he was wearing nothing except sparkling pink cowgirl boots and a grotesque clown mask that smiled wide enough to show its sharp looking, but ultimately rubber, teeth. The eye holes were large enough so I could see the man's eyes. They were purple, completely purple. No irises, no white, just solid purple.

My mouth was agape for a solid three seconds before I said, "Oh."

The nude figure at the entrance raised the gun arm and pointed it at…Goddamnit, I can never remember the attendant's name. The nude clown pointed the gun at the kid and screamed, "His skin soft as leather!"

Bang. The gunshot rang through the otherwise empty store and ripped through the air, burrowing the bullet into the wall near the attendant. I saw it happen in slow motion; the small flames erupting from the barrel, the bullet flying out, traveling in a straight line, the clown's Johnson jiggling a bit from the recoil.

"I'm the weatherman!" He finished.

The attendant immediately fell to the ground, but was

unharmed. I tackled Jem so we both fell into the candy aisle. I heard the wind rush out of his lungs when we hit the tiles. To his credit, he didn't yell or make a fuss or anything. I lay on top of him and said, "Naked clown, get the fuck down!"

I got up into a crouch and reached into the waistband of my jeans. From it, I produced my .50 caliber Magnum. Oversized as hell, recoil that could detach your arm and send it flying across a room, and a bullet big enough to liquidate any schmuck unfortunate enough to get in the way. And sweet baby Jesus, I wouldn't have it any other way.

I traveled down the aisle, dragging Jem with a free hand. "Something you might want to know about me. I rhyme all the time if a stranger puts me in danger," I told him. I heard him groan in pain. I held the heavy gun out in front of me, trying to listen to the clown's movements. Even though the guy was as light as a feather, his steps were heavy.

"Addicted to the love of ourselves!" The clown screamed. That meant--

Bang. Another gunshot. By now I'd worked my way around the end of the aisle and Jem was sitting up on his elbows. But he screamed after this shot.

"I'm the weatherman!"

I looked at Jem's legs and saw they were sticking out into the view of the clown. There was a huge bloody hole in his left knee, and he was clutching it. I dragged him a few feet more so he was out of view. Then I scurried down the aisle and back around the other end. I saw the clown now. He'd turned to Jem, gun raised and aimed.

"I sing for the melody and I sing for the reason!" This chuckle nut had to go.

I stood up to my full height and raised my own cannon. I drew in a breath, took aim and said,

"No more clownin' around, bitch. Jack Mahogoff's in town." The clown turned his mask to face me with those purple eyes, and I pulled the trigger.

The enormous bullet hit its target, and the clown's arm flew off in a weirdly small bloody spray. The clown looked at me, looked at his stump, then back at me again. Apparently the pain of losing a limb couldn't deter this guy. He began walking slowly over to me, brandishing the Jiffy peanut butter, pink cowgirl boots twinkling with each step.

The guy was no longer a threat. I lowered my gun, ran towards him, and shoved him to the ground. "Stay down, gooch goblin." He stared up at me, still trying to harm me with the peanut butter. If I'd had an allergy, I probably would've been on my knees, gasping for breath and

screaming for forgiveness. Thank God I didn't.

I went to Jem and knelt down. "How's it feel?" He was crying, and speaking incoherently. "That bad, huh?"

"No. No, who in the ever loving Sunday morning fuck says something like 'No more clowning around, Jack Mahogoff's in town?' Seriously, who the dick does that?" He said it through the tears.

I considered this, and patted his knee. He screamed a bit louder when I did and I said, "You'll be fine. Come here, we need to question this guy." I helped him up to his feet, supporting him on his bad side. We hobbled over to the clown, who had taken a sitting position against the glass of the beer section.

"Okay, Pennywise, what're you taking?" I placed Jem against one of the shelves so he could stand on his own.

The guy just stared at us through the eye holes. He looked at me, then Jem, then back at me. I walked over to his disembodied arm and picked it up, bringing it back to him and smacking him across the face with it a few times.

"You feel that? Feel it. Feel the shame." I smacked him a few times more. Each one came packaged with the satisfying sound of meat being tenderized. "Let that stew for a second." Then I noticed that the ragged stump of his gun arm wasn't bleeding.

That was never a good sign.

The guy's head started shaking. He began chuckling and waving the peanut butter around in the air. Large lumps under his chest began to move around his torso and down to his nude legs.

This all happened in the span of about two seconds and, almost as soon as it began, it was over.

The finale for this complete and utter nut job festival occurred before either of us had time to react.

His chest exploded outward, tearing open his rib cage and sending his heart and stomach and lungs and intestines splattering outward and right onto us. I was immediately covered in meat and blood, as was Jem. It stained our faces, our bodies, our clothes. The wet tearing sound rang through my eardrums. It sounded like the world's worst gas passing, amplified by a million and a half.

I looked at Jem. It was like someone had dumped a one ton bucket of chunky spaghetti sauce onto his head. That reminded me of Carrie, and I suddenly pictured him in a prom dress, standing in front of a crowd of people. I laughed.

Jem said nothing, instead opting to limp his way outside. I followed him, leaving gory footprints in my wake.

On my way out, I said, “Better call the janitors, Clem.” I could feel the attendant’s constipated gaze follow me outside.

“And that, that, right there, shit like that is why you don’t dress nicely as long as you’re a cop in Bumfuck, kid.” I pulled out my phone and dialed for the police station. It rang a few times and then someone picked up.

“Yeah, we got a body over at It’s a Gas. Send some backup.”

The secretary on the other end asked me, “So what happened, exactly?”

“Well, naked guy came in and started shouting and he was all, blat blat powwy wowwy and I was all like Not today, son! And I pulled out my gun and aimed and went BOOM and his arm flew off. We started interrogating him, asking him what he was on, when he was like, WHOAWHOAWHOA and then he went SPLOOSH! And now we’re covered in his chunky bits.”

I’m a poet, I swear.

“We’ll send backup shortly.” The secretary hung up.

Jem was limping away down the street, gun in hand. I started jogging to catch up. As I moved, I saw a little kid point at me. His mother’s jaw dropped open and she covered the kid’s eyes. They promptly started walking away.

When I caught up to Jem, I grabbed his shoulder. He screamed and turned on me, gun raised. “What do you want, man? Huh? What?”

I raised my hands as a sign of good faith. “Hey, man, where you going?” A chunk of lung slid out of my hair and landed to the ground with a plop.

“Jack. I woke up this morning with every intention of making a name for myself in Austin, Texas. Now, I have a bullet in my knee, and I am covered in the organs of a nudist dressed in a clown mask and pink boots. My superior is dressed like a homeless man, speaks in rhymes when there’s some kind of shit storm going on and Jesus Christ, I had to yank out a piece of intestine from between my teeth. My mouth was open when that fucker exploded!”

I couldn’t say I blamed the guy for freaking out a bit. Behind me a car honked since we were in the middle of the road. “Yeah, about the guy exploding…I’m pretty sure this is connected somehow to the missing persons case. These people going missing, and all of a sudden, something like that happens? Too much of a coincidence.”

Jem finally lowered the gun and started to back up. “I don’t give a rat’s ass about your case. I need to get out of--” He tripped and fell to the ground, clutching his knee

and crying out in pain. I sighed. I couldn't say I liked this guy when I first met him, but he looked so pathetic lying there, practically crying from the pain and covered in gore that was no doubt making him hotter than it already was outside.

I remembered coming here, lost in the rain and confused, on the verge of tears as I looked at the thing that I had run over. And I remembered the man with the double barrel that led me into town and gave me a place to stay for the night as I tried to adjust to the "situation" that I'd been placed in. He even gave me a shot of bourbon that cleared my head a bit and helped me sleep.

The cars continued honking behind me. I walked over to the pavement. My shadow covered Jem. I reached my hand out to him.

"If you're gonna leave town, you'll need to be patched up first. May as well get back to the station before you duck out."

Jem looked at me. His sweat was making the blood on his face run like the mascara on a chronically depressed super model. A second passed between us. Then he reached his hand out and I helped him up and threw his arm around my shoulder. We walked back down the street, ignoring the honks the people in the cars were giving us. We received more than a few dirty looks and more than enough disgusted ones.

Backup had arrived back at It's a Gas and I brought Jem to one of the emergency vehicles. But there was one last thing to take care of.

I ducked under the yellow tape blocking the doorway that read "Enter and be shot, bitch" and found the attendant, who was being questioned by one of the officers. I put my crimson covered hand on the officer's shoulder and said, "I got this." He walked away and I looked at the attendant.

"What the shit do you want, Jack?"

"Well, Cletus…How about that pizza?"

Pensive Pup

Zachary Donofrio

Sink

Kaitlyn Wachter

The lake sure is pretty, but it smells like death.
Deep seeping slick, all over stink.
Two bodies found in my lifetime
Bloated, I'm sure
And if their eyes hadn't been eaten up by fish, I bet they stared like marbles.
You don't dare let the kids take a dip
They may come up, dripping algae and unease
Not to mention motor oil, and sleaze of faulty sewage tanks.
Everything flows down
The whole town gets sucked in
And drowns in the sick of it

When it's dredged, we all come up bloated.

Changed

Jessie Hambel

When I was 7, I met a boy
with black finger-nailed hands,
a silver spiked bracelet on each.
Bleached hair tied erect
with thin rubber bands.
Insulated headphones
around his neck blared
loud bass drums,
high pitched howling.
His fingers turned
orange at the tips,
I watched as he rolled
amber butts between them,
flicked their ashes with
no regard for their landing.
His expression obtuse.

Years later I heard
hushed whispers of a man
with a large duffel bag.
His departure on
an immense defense vessel.
Dressed in matching attire.
They shaved away
his unkempt hair
and bad attitude.
A rifle, the same size as me
when I first met him,
cradled in patched arms.
The same fingers he used
to slowly kill himself
were placed on the trigger.
His expression acute.

Woman

Abigail Allen

I electrify.
My flesh of lightning
my bones of metal:
I smolder, singe, soot
and char—
everything my fingers touch—
like ash crumbling,
the deadly Midas touch
on fire.
They smell my storm
my smoke, my powder,
before the hiss, pop and bang
screeches through the air like
an atomic pistol.
Take a deep breath—
that's my burning blood.

1st & Bridge

Zachary Donofrio

Daisy

Morgan Altland *New Voices 2015 Winner*

ACT I

Daisy is laying in a hospital bed. There is a heart monitor on one side of her and a she is covered with tubes. On the other side of the bed there is a small table with a vase full of daises and a picture of Michelle and her. The heart monitor is going on quietly. Michelle enters with flower trimmers and a sling on her arm.

MICHELLE
How are you doing?

Pause. She starts singing along to the tone of the heart monitor. Walks towards the bed and begins to trim the flowers.

Daisy, Daisy give me your answer do. I'm half crazy all for the love of you. It won't be a stylish marriage, I can't afford a carriage. But you'll look sweet, upon the seat of a bicycle built fo...

She looks down at Daisy and stops singing. She drops the trimmers

Oh my... Dyl... Dr. Brunson, get in here!

DYLAN
(Rushes in)
What is it? Do you need some more of your medication?

MICHELLE
Here eyes just moved.

DYLAN
Michelle.

MICHELLE
I was trimming the flowers and I was singing. Then, they moved. She moved her eyes.

DYLAN
Stop doing this to yourself.

MICHELLE
(Turns toward Daisy and begins talking to her)
Baby, can you hear me?

DYLAN
You know she can't hear you.

MICHELLE
Don't say that.

DYLAN
She can't.

MICHELLE
Baby, it's Michelle. I'm right here.

DYLAN
The patient...

MICHELLE
(Turns back toward Dylan)
My wife... your daughter...

DYLAN
The patient can't hear anything. She's a...

MICHELLE
She's a person. Like you or me. She has a heart beat. She has eyes. She has a smile.

DYLAN
I don't see a smile.

MICHELLE
Then you can't see your daughter.

DYLAN
I don't see my daughter. I see the pile of flesh with bunch of tubes jammed inside of it. That's not my daughter!

MICHELLE
You don't even know *her*.

DYLAN
What is that supposed to mean?

MICHELLE
Daisies.

DYLAN
What?

MICHELLE
You got your daughter daisies.

DYLAN
She loved them.

MICHELLE
Your daughter has always hated daises. She told me on our first date. What kind of father would get their daughter a flower they hate.

DYLAN
Michelle, she's gone.

MICHELLE
She's alive. She's right here, breathing.

DYLAN
She's not breathing. A machine is pushing air in and out of her.

MICHELLE
That doesn't make her non existent. She's still in there and she's going to make here way back to us.

DYLAN
Do you remember what today is?

MICHELLE
I won't let you.

DYLAN
The court sided with me.

MICHELLE
That doesn't make what you're doing right.

DYLAN
It's what's best for her.

MICHELLE
It's what's best for you. You don't care about her.

DYLAN
Don't say that.

MICHELLE
You don't want her. You don't love her.

DYLAN
I loved her! From the moment I first laid my eyes on her I loved her. She was my everything, and she made everything better. This isn't her. This is a science experiment. If I wanted to see that I would go to a high school gymnasium.

MICHELLE
Stop it!

DYLAN
This isn't right. You're running yourself ragged trying to keep this alive.

MICHELLE
Her...

DYLAN
No, this. You want to keep *this* alive and you only want to keep it alive because you can't accept what's happened. She's gone. This isn't what she would have wanted.

MICHELLE
She wanted to be with me. She wanted a life. She wanted kids and a big house.

DYLAN
She can't have any of that. She can only lay here and "breathe". It's happening today.

MICHELLE
She's your little girl. She's my wife. Do either of those things mean anything to you?

DYLAN
This has gone on too long. You need rest and it... she needs to move on.

MICHELLE
I'm fine.

DYLAN
When was the last time you've looked at yourself. You look terrible, and your arm...

MICHELLE
Like I care about my arm. I would tear it off if it meant you would see her the way I do.

DYLAN
It's happening whether you're on board or not.

MICHELLE
She's alive. I won't let you...

DYLAN
You don't have a choice.

MICHELLE
You don't have to do this. Please. Look at her at tell me she's gone.

DYLAN
I'm sorry.

Michelle goes over to Daisy's bed and begins crying. Dylan walks over.

MICHELLE
Go away.

DYLAN
It's what's best.

A voice comes in that sounds as if it's coming in from an intercom, "Doctor Brunson to the I.C.U. Doctor Brunson to the I.C.U."

MICHELLE
Just go, I want to spend some time with my wife.

Dylan reaches into his pocket and pulls out a full bottle of pills.

DYLAN
Just in case your arm is hurting you.

Dylan exits. Michelle continues to cry. After a while she grabs the pill bottle and takes a hand full of them. Slight pause. Then, Daisy slowly turns her head toward Michelle.

DAISY
I really hate daisies.

MICHELLE
I know baby, he never listens. (pause) Do you know what they're about to do?

DAISY
I know.

MICHELLE
Is that what you want?

DAISY
You know all I want is you.

MICHELLE
I want you too, but they want to take you away.

DAISY
Then fight them.

MICHELLE
I have. They already won. No one wants to believe you're alive.

DAISY
You have to make them believe.

MICHELLE
I'm trying!

DAISY
I know, but I need you to try harder. The woman I married would get the yes no matter what was in her way.

MICHELLE
This is different.

DAISY
Why, because some stranger decided I was dead. Screw him. He doesn't know me. Stop them. Slap some sense into them. Do something!

MICHELLE
It's just...

DAISY
I know you can do it. Did you see how my father looked at me, he wants to believe you.

MICHELLE
Did you hear him?

DAISY
(Beginning to become angry)
Yes, and right now you're sounding like him. You're acting as if I'm already dead. Do you already have the funeral planned out. I bet you got daisies for the memorial service.

MICHELLE
Baby...

DAISY
Probably have a date right after, hope you thought of a good reason to show up in a black dress.

MICHELLE
I only love you, now and forever. You know I love you. You did everything for me, and I owe everything.

DAISY
(Calms down, looks away from Michelle)
That's not true.

MICHELLE
Yes it is. I wouldn't be alive if it wasn't for you.

DAISY
It wasn't enough. Your arm...

MICHELLE
Who cares about my damn arm. You swerved so I wouldn't be hit. That means everything to me.

DAISY
I should have done more. I didn't want a scratch on you.

MICHELLE
I wish you cared more about yourself.

DAISY
I'm still here.

MICHELLE
For now. No matter what it takes, no matter how hard I have to fight, you're going to stay by my side.

DAISY
I love you.

MICHELLE
I love you too.

Dylan walks back on stage.

DYLAN
Michelle, it's time. Please don't make this harder than it already is.

MICHELLE
Is it hard? You seem to be taking this very easily.

DYLAN
It has to...

MICHELLE
SHE.

DYLAN
She was my daughter.

MICHELLE
How is she any less your daughter today than she was before.

DYLAN
This is not Daisy.

MICHELLE
Of course you think that. I'm the only one who truly loved her.

DYLAN
Don't think for a second you know how I'm feeling.

MICHELLE
It was only the two of us...

DYLAN
I was there for my daughter, there for the sunny days and the days that weren't so sunny. I helped her on her feet when she feel down and gave her the push she needed when she was too afraid to move. I was there for her first love and her first heart break. You've been together for five years. My time with her makes that seem like nothing. You are just a part of her life, I was her life.

Michelle moves toward Dylan. She stumbles slightly.

MICHELLE
Are you trying to hurt me.

DYLAN
I'm telling you the truth.

MICHELLE
We both know that's shit.

DYLAN
Michelle, how many of the pills did you take.

MICHELLE
Not enough.

DYLAN
Too many of those and you could die.

MICHELLE
Like you care. If the life of your daughter doesn't matter to you anymore then why should you care about me. After all I was only a part of your life.

DYLAN
I love you Michelle, you just need to let me help you.

MICHELLE
You only want to help yourself.

DYLAN
I'm not the bad guy.

MICHELLE
Are you sure about that? You're acting kind of funny if you want to be the hero.

DYLAN
Michelle.

MICHELLE
What? God forbid if I want you to stop trying to murder your daughter.

DYLAN
I'm saving her.

MICHELLE
This is wrong. Try to justify this anyway you want, it's still murder.

DYLAN
This is no way for someone to live.

MICHELLE
You don't even think she's alive.

DYLAN
She's not. Enough about her, I need you to throw up the pills.

Michelle goes back towards Daisy's bed.

MICHELLE
Don't you dare touch me.

DYLAN
Calm down, I'm only trying to help you.

MICHELLE
There is nothing wrong with us, we're fine. Stay away.

DYLAN
I just want...

MICHELLE
If you say "what's best for us" I'm going to scream.

DYLAN
Enough of this.

MICHELLE
No.

DYLAN
Michelle...

MICHELLE
Stop!

Michelle takes the rest of the pills.

DYLAN
I need some help in here.

Tries to grab Michelle, but she grabs the trimmers from the ground and points them towards Dylan. Dylan backs up.

DYLAN (CONT.)
Help, I need security sent to room 323.

DAISY
What did you do?

MICHELLE
I don't know? I'm sorry.

DYLAN
I don't want to hear you're sorry.

MICHELLE
They're never gonna let us be together.

DAISY
They're gonna take you away from me.

MICHELLE
No one is going to take me from you.

DAISY
I don't want to lose you. What are we gonna to do?

MICHELLE
Shh... it's alright.

DYLAN
What are you doing?

MICHELLE
Saying goodbye to my wife.

Michelle climbs into bed with Daisy.

DAISY
I love you.

MICHELLE
I love you too.
(Begins singing again)
Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do. I'm half crazy, all for the love of you. It won't be a stylish marriage, I can't afford a carriage. But you'll look sweet, upon the seat of a bicycle built for...two

Blackout. the heart monitor continues for another 15 seconds then flat lines.

Intertwined

Dori Gronich

Poltergeist

Lucki Cooper

I saw you but no one believed me,
a glimpse of your silhouette by the bathroom door.
When Willow wept I ran upstairs,
floor flattened by each step,
so inclined I crept,
more terrified than before.
Willow's eyes leaked a faint red
like broken rusty faucets. A few
bolts loose would serve
as a fitting cliché
for us both. Willow's innocence
flawless, I borderline
on the brink of tears
and nausea, for I had believed
I saw it!

You invited yourself
inside without any guide,
and I'd retreated as if
to hide. On top of Willow's oak wood
dresser, new Barbies, fair princesses,
and spotless mirrors reside. Reflected from
the grim glass reproduction, a more
clear form of your decomposed entity
lies above Willow, it's grin awry.
Obsidian in texture, gaseous in form,
you held my daughter's throat
until the cries morphed into
pants for oxygen.

I watched with troubled eyes,
but no one believed me. They locked
me up, yet why? How aren't you
responsible for where my baby
lies.

Stagnant

Sarah Fessler

"Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes"

-Walt Whitman

The roses on the table
rest between baby's breath
and venous leaves on stems cut
at an angle to make them last
(at least that's what they say)

sit in water so still I'm forced
to touch them to make sure
it's not fake, glue in the bottom
of a vase to keep them perfectly static.

Coffee on the counter chills
in the muted room muffled
by the dripping sound of liquid
dropping into its glass cavern,
(grounds remain sleeping on its roof)

foot steps lack the tenacity to break
the barrier required to make waves,
unsure of its absolute actuality
the mahogany remains placid.

The hands on the wall cover
my six, it's halfway to mourning
when my lungs start to drown
in the air that surrounds my bed
(gasping at a tremble)

its thickest layer is filled
with elephantine dictionary words
I'm not sure anyone can pronounce
let alone define without stuttering.
I am cool and composed.

Great Gig in the Sky I

Morgann Smith

Don't You Ever Forget It

Torrin Kearns

Jamal's lighter wouldn't light.

"Yo, that thing's never going to light in this wind," I said, shoving my hands into my hoodie.

"Relax, nigga. I got this," Jamal said, continuingly stroking the wheel of his lighter with his thumb.

"'Ite, nigga. Good luck with that."

I stood up from the cold bench, since it was making my nuts recede into my body. Jamal hunkered over his lighter, attempting to block the wind enough to spark.

"Yo, hold this."

Jamal handed me the unlit blunt.

I snatched it and shoved my hand back in my pocket. I looked out at the empty field. In the dark, I could just make out the swaying stalks of grass, in desperate need of mowing. The wind rippled the waters of the various SUV sized puddles scattered across the field.

"Ain't this a great way to spend Christmas Eve?" I asked rhetorically.

"Yup, nothing better than getting high on a holiday," Jamal said, still arched over the lighter.

"Shouldn't you be with your family?" I asked.

"I wasn't feelin' 'em today. Besides, I'll be with my mom's tomorrow anyway."

Headlights flashed in the distance.

"Shit!" I hissed.

"Don't worry," Jamal said. "The cops don't come round this area. This is a good neighborhood."

"Oh, like your hood?" I asked.

"My area's sorta hood."

"You live in Park Slope, land of rich white people."

"Whatever, nigga."

A stiff breeze came in, tearing through my hoodie and

shivering my bones.

"This is why I hate the holidays," I stated, my teeth chattering. "Instead of having a nice dinner around a table with a big family in a warm house, I'm out here in this shitty weather trying to get high."

I saw a flash of light appear between Jamal's hands.

"Quick, gimme the weed. I got a light."

***

This has to be the earliest I've ever been up on Christmas. It's so early the sky is still black, not the dark purple that means the sun's coming up soon. I look at the TV for a second and see that a re-run of Space Ghost Coast to Coast is on. I don't care less what's on TV, though. All I care about is my new Optimus Prime Transformer. I now have all the Autobots. I spend the morning gang banging Starscream.

By 10:00 A.M. I'm bored. The tiled floor of my room is cold, and my legs hurt from hours of sitting on my knees. I walk into the living room. Everything's dark, except for the small white Christmas tree glowing in the corner. The tree's the size of a shoe box, but I put a string of about 800 lights around it, so it's pretty bright. My dad's asleep on the dark side of the room. I'm not going to bother waking him. He won't get up. I doubt he's even sleeping. He's just lying in bed, waiting for the holidays to be over. He's like this every year, from Thanksgiving till New Year's. The apartment is always dark during this time, except, of course, for the Christmas tree.

I'm hungry. It's time to make the Christmas meal. I've failed every other year, but this time I know I'll pull it off. I'm making pizza. This will make my dad so happy. He may even turn the lights on and smile. I took 20 dollars from his wallet to buy the ingredients. He'll be pissed when he finds out, but the delicious pepperoni pizza will make him feel better.

Things don't start well. I can't get the can of pizza dough open. I suspect Pillsbury is hiding national secrets in this can because it's impossible to open. Finally, I give the can a strong twist and the thing explodes. I catch the dough that springs out and throw it on the baking sheet. For some reason, it only occurs to me now that I need a rolling pin. My dad and I normally live off frozen food and cold cuts. Things such as rolling pins haven't graced this apartment since Mom left. In a pinch, I use a can of aerosol. I just have to make sure not to hit the spray nozzle.

"Tor-Tor, are you in the kitchen?" my dad moans.

Whenever he talks he sounds miserable, like he's

taking the world's hardest dump.

"Yes, I am."

My hand slips and presses the nozzle.

"Dammit!"

"What's going on? I hope you aren't trying to cook anything."

"Well, now I'm not," I say as I watch my pizza drown under a cloud of Ozone-killing foam. "You made me mess up."

I hear the floor creak. He's on his feet.

"I told you not to make anything," my dad yells entering the kitchen.

"I know, but I wanted to surprise you and—"

"Every time you attempt to cook it goes bad, and I have to clean it up. Where'd you get the money to buy this stuff anyway?"

"Um, I sort of took it from your wallet…"

"What! Why the fuck would you do that? I don't have money to be wasting on shit like this. That was my last 20 dollars. I hope you can eat whatever that is you're making because I can't buy food until I get my check!"

My dad holds the wall to steady himself. The effort it took him to get out of the bed has exhausted him.

"I'm sorry. I just wanted to make a good meal for Christmas like Mom used to do."

"Mom's gone, and that's not changing. I bet you're not even going to clean this up," my dad says, only picking his head up to speak.

After the words come out, he lets his head droop. It takes too much energy to keep it lifted.

"I was just trying to make Christmas better!" I scream, standing in front of the ruined dough, arms held out.

"Why would you do this to me? You know how sick I am. The clinic is closed until next week. I'm going back to bed."

And with that, my dad staggers his way back to bed, bracing himself against the wall, like an infant learning to walk.

I start crying. I knew it would come to this. It always comes to this: tears.

***

Jamal smoked me up good. I was still high hours later when I got home. The front door to my apartment was ajar. I figured my dad had another one of his "Breathing Attacks." They were really panic attacks. He got them when he was

stressed about something, which was always. He claimed this was proof he was, in fact, expiring. I would've believed him, if he hadn't had them daily for the previous five years.

The apartment was dark, except for the bathroom and kitchen lights, which were always kept on. Something was not right, though. Somehow, I knew. I walked into the living room and saw my dad laid out across the short side of his bed. I walked up to his bed and switched on the overhead lights. One of the bulbs had gone out and needed changing. My dad stared up at me. One eye was open, the other only halfway. His mouth was shaped into a circle, as if he had gasped for air. I grabbed my dad's face and wiggled it. His cheeks were cold.

"Ah, shit," I said, taking a deep breath. "You died on me, didn't you, Dad?"

I didn't expect an answer.

"Great, now I have to deal with this. What a pain," I said, complaining out loud.

I searched my phone for my aunt's number. I was going to complain to her about this massive inconvenience. On Christmas Eve, no less! Then I remembered: There's a dead body in my apartment. I should probably call 911.

***

I wish Ally would close the door, but she won't.

"I'm keeping it open in case students need to talk to me," she says. "This won't take long."

This is a bad idea, but Ally won't heed my warnings. So I sit. The plastic seat is cracked and uncomfortable, but I'm used to it. It's the same chair the school uses in the classrooms. Ally stares at her computer screen. The paperwork for my loans, now digitized, unfolds before her eyes.

"Are you willing to accept these?"

"Yes," I say.

I've never been so sure of something in my life.

"You know you'll have to pay them back eventually, right?"

"I know."

Around me is everything a guidance counselor should have: college brochures, SAT prep books, scholarship resources. The room is small. The cabinets and shelves make it feel even smaller. My ear ruffles against stacks of paper. At my feet is a box of unused scantron sheets. I feel suffocated by all the guidance.

"Okay, so everything's ready. We just need your dad

to sign off on this one loan in particular."

Ally pushes her finger into the computer screen.

"I'm telling you, he won't do it. He'll get pissed and hang up, and that's if he's in a good mood. Isn't there another way?"

"Not for this loan, there isn't. He has to sign off on it. It needs to be in his name. I'm sure it'll be fine. Almost everyone needs at least some financial assistance in order to pay for college."

"I know that, but my dad's crazy. He thinks just because we're poor, I can go to school for free, like he did. He still thinks it's the 70s."

"If you insist on going away to college, then you need this loan," Ally says dismissively.

"Once again, I know this. My dad, on the other hand…"

"I'm sure if we just explain the situation to him calmly and clearly, he'll understand."

"No, he won't. The man doesn't understand logic."

She dials the number. What's worse, she switches the phone to speaker. The phone rings. The sound bounces off the constricting dimensions of the office and thunders out the door and down the hall.

"It's going to go to voicemail," I say. "We let every call go to voicemail."

Ally looks at me skeptically.

"We get a lot of bill collectors. My dad wants them to think he's dead. Just leave a message saying who you are. He's always home. He'll pick up."

Ally begins to leave a message.

"Hi, this is Ally Mutum from the Norland School. I'm calling because—"

"Hello, who is this? What do you want!?" My dad answers as if we're prank callers who never give him peace.

"I'm your son's guidance counselor. He's sitting right next to me. I have you on speaker."

"Hey, Dad," I say weakly.

"Hey, big guy," my dad says. "Is everything okay?"

"Yes," Ally says. "Everything's fine. We're just going over some things regarding your son's college."

"Oh, is something wrong?"

My dad's calm right now. He must have just taken his Methadone.

Maybe this won't be so bad, I allow myself to hope.

"So, Mr. Kearns, we've filled out everything regarding his application. We just need you to sign the Parent Plus

Loan, and he'll be set."

"Hold on, what do you want me to sign?"

I hear suspicion creep into my dad's voice.

"The Parent Plus Loan," Ally continues. "It's an unsubsidized loan provided by the federal government to help lower income families pay for college. It appears that you qualify for the max amount, about 5,550 dollars."

"I'm not filling out any loans. I barely get by as it is."

"Well, you can either pay it off every month starting when your son starts college, or you can defer it for two years," Ally says, blind to the storm that's about to hit.

"Can I defer it to him?" my dad asks, feeling no shame in throwing me under the bus.

"No, this loan has to be paid by the student's guardian, which is you, Mr. Kearns."

"Oh, then I'm definitely not taking out any loans."

"Mr. Kearns, your son needs this in order to—"

"He doesn't need shit! He can go to school in the city like every other poor person!"

I interject.

"Dad, you know if I go to school in the city, I won't be able to dorm, right? I'll have to live with you."

I hope this threat softens his stingy resolve.

"Oh, if you think you're going to live with me, you have another thing coming."

"Then sign off on the loan!" I scream.

"No! I can't afford it!"

"Then what am I supposed to do?"

"All I know is that you can't live here. That's for sure. I can't have you here. It'll kill me. Go be a janitor or something."

"You see, this is why I'm going away to school. To get away from you!"

"Well, I hope you have the money to pay for yourself because you getting jack shit from me!"

"Gentlemen!" Ally yells, "Can you both calm down?"

"No, I'm not going to calm down. My son is trying to hose me and you're supporting him," my dad screams with all his might.

The effort is causing his words to come out raspy and filled with bitter, venomous pain. "A real son would never do that to his father!"

"A real father would support his son's ambition to go to college!" I yell so loud my voice cracks.

"Well, I guess I'm not a real father. In that case, don't bother coming home tonight. You're not my son anymore!"

The man formally known as my father hangs up.

A silence falls over the office. It's the sort of silence that screams louder than my dad and I were. Ally stares at the phone, stunned. Her bright blue eyes become still. Her brain's rebooting, unable to process the strife.

"Well, that didn't go well," she finally says.

I almost slap her.

"Gee, you think!?"

I try to hold back the tears. But they jump me, coming hard and fast. I break down.

"I told you this would happen. Why didn't you listen to me!?"

My words are mushy, and my sight's a watery blur.

Students stick their heads through the door, curious about the commotion. They wonder why the school jester is crying his eyes out. Ally waves them away.

"Calm down. Getting upset won't solve anything," Ally says sternly.

"My dad just disowned me! I have the right to be upset!"

"I'm sure he didn't mean it."

"You don't know him," I say, my head now in my hands.

Despite my efforts to stop, I can't cease my crying. I wipe my nose with my sleeve.

Ally gets annoyed.

"If you're going to carry on like this, close the door. I don't want the whole hallway hearing our business.

To Ally, I was simply an orphan that cried too loud.

***

For some reason, the 911 operator told me to move my dad's body from the bed to the floor. The lady on the phone said this was important, as if moving him would somehow make my dad less dead.

I moved him, but it wasn't easy. This once skinny man had allowed himself to balloon up to around 300 pounds. Accordingly, he shrank in height, gradually acquiring a hunch as the years went by until he looked like Quasimodo after an overdose. I grabbed his arm and pulled. After about 15 minutes of strenuous effort, I managed to drag the body off the bed. My dad's head hit the floor with an audible THUMP!

Well, if he wasn't dead before, that probably did the trick… I thought.

I knew the paramedics would arrive soon, so I hid any visible packets and bottles of Methadone (there were many),

then searched the various drawers around the apartment for money. I stepped over the body and reached into the desk drawer next to the bed. I tripped on my dad's arm, stumbled, and almost hit my head on the wood desk. I caught myself, thankful that my dad's attempt to bring me down with him had failed.

I found a few 20 dollar bills in my dad's underwear drawer.

"Eureka!" I screamed, pocketing the money.

This was all the money he had. It would've been another week before Social Security forked over another 1,000 or so dollars, half of which was destined for the IRS. My dad now had a price tag: 60 dollars and change. I wondered what my price tag was—probably less.

I had just pocketed the money when the paramedics arrived.

"Wow, Tommy finally died," the lead paramedic said as he entered the living room where my dad's body was. "That's sad."

My dad had collected enough frequent Ambulance Rider Miles that the paramedics knew him on a first name basis.

They pronounced him dead practically on sight.

"Hey, do you need me to move that table out of the way so you can move the body?" I asked, pointing to our dining room table, which took up most of the space between the corpse and the front door.

"Oh, we can't move him," another one of the paramedics said. "That's the morgue's job."

"When will they be here?"

"We don't know. Did you father have a will?"

When I thought about it, I realized how hypocritical it was that he had never bothered to make a will, yet he had proclaimed his imminent death unceasingly for years.

"He doesn't have a will," I said with notable bitterness.

"Oh, well then, it could be a while before the morgue picks up his body," the lead paramedic said solemnly. "They have less people on staff on Christmas Eve."

"How long will they be?" I asked, looking at my dad's body.

He had died in his underwear. I wondered if he had shit himself.

"We don't know how long it'll be," the lead paramedic said.

His face told me that they wouldn't be here anytime soon.

"They're usually busy on this night. Christmas Eve has the highest suicide rate of any night of the year."

"Then why does the morgue have less people on staff?"

"I don't know. It doesn't make a lot of sense."

The lead paramedic's gaze became blank momentarily. He was probably thinking of all the times he'd seen this situation play out.

"We have to get going, but there will be some police officers up here shortly to wait with you until the morgue workers come. I know it doesn't mean much at this point, but Merry Christmas."

After the paramedics left, I finally got around to calling my aunt.

"Hey, guess what?" I blurted as soon as she had answered the phone. "Your brother's dead!"

"Wait, what do you mean he's dead? Like dead, dead?"

There was the purest form of shock in her voice. I could almost hear the electrical signals flying along the nerve endings of her brain, as it desperately tried to process this new piece of information.

"Well, I don't know what other sort of dead there is. But I found the guy cold and not breathing."

The weed was wearing off. I could hear the tone of my voice now. My continued calm scared me.

"Well, did you perform CPR when you found him?" My aunt asked.

She was panicking now.

"I'm pretty sure that by the time I found him, it was too late for that."

The truth I didn't want to admit to my aunt was that I wouldn't have tried to resuscitate him, even if there was a chance. Saying it would've made the fact real.

***

I'm going to die today. My mom is going to kill me.

"Listen," my dad says. "Just stay in your room and let me talk to Mom."

He's not going to stop her. My dad's just as scared of my mom as I—and everyone else—am.

"I don't want to go with her, Daddy," I cry.

"I know you don't. But you're supposed to live with her on the weekends."

I fear my dad won't protect me. He'll shrink in front of her and fall victim to my mom's eyes. They're angry eyes

that promise death to all who cross her. I've seen huge men break when my mom stares at them.

"I don't want her to hit me again."

I grab my dad's waist and bury my face in his stomach.

"Don't worry, I'll make sure she won't."

My dad's grip on me tightens.

The phone rings. We both know it's Mom, but we let it go to voicemail. We let everything go to voicemail.

"Hey, Tommy. I'm just getting off the train. I'll be there in a few minutes to pick up the kid."

She sounds in a better mood than usual. I guess she didn't have dialysis today. Now she'll be at full strength. We're doomed.

"Don't make me go! Don't make me go! Don't make me go!"

I hope if I say this enough times, I'll be transported to Oz, like Dorothy when she got caught in the tornado. At the very least, maybe my mom will get trapped there.

There's a knock on the door. She's here. I run and hide in my room, burying myself under my Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles blanket. I'm not pulling the blanket over my head just yet. I want to hear what my parents have to say. The walls are thin, so the words come through clear.

"Kathy," my dad starts. "I think I'm going to keep the boy with me this weekend."

My dad doesn't say it with enough force. She's going to eat him alive.

"No, you're not, Tommy."

My mom's voice rises.

"You insisted that he'd do better in school if you had him during the week. I agreed. Now you're trying to take him away from me!?"

"He's scared of you."

I hear glass break. My mom must have thrown a plate or something. At least that's what it sounds like.

"I'm calling the police, you crazy bitch," my dad screams.

This isn't the first time I've heard him say that.

"Fuck you, Tommy! I'm grabbing the boy and leaving!"

"Don't you dare take one step towards that room!"

There's a fire in my dad's voice I've never heard before. Maybe he will be able to stand up to her this time.

"I'm not going to let you beat him again."

"I don't hit him that often. How dare you accuse me of abuse! At least I can actually support him. I have to pay you

child support. If I want to set his spoiled ass in line, I will."

"If you touch him again, I won't need the police. I'll kill you myself!"

Do it, Daddy. Kill her before she kills us, I cheer my dad on in my head.

My mom shrieks something I can't make out. She sounds like a demon. I pull my blanket over my head. I want to get lost under the covers, disappear into the stitches and fuzz. I don't want to hear the conversation anymore. But I can't block out the words. The walls are so thin.

Soon, I hear people in heavy boots stomp down the hallway. It's the cops.

"Oh, great. The fucking pigs are here," my dad yells.

"You're the one who called them, remember? Or do you have shit for brains?" my mom responds.

My parents let them in. After a few minutes, one of them heads towards my room.

"Hi," the man in blue says. "Are you okay?"

"Yes," I say, poking my head out from under the blanket.

"Don't worry. I know you must be frightened right now because of the noise your mommy and daddy were making. But everything's going to be okay now."

"Are they going to let me stay here?"

"Yes, we talked it out with your parents, and they've decided that it's best you stay here with your dad for tonight."

The policeman is so calm, like he's seen my mom and dad fight a bunch of times before. He probably has.

I feel relieved, until he says, "Your mom is going to come back here and say goodbye to you. Is that okay?"

My mom appears behind him. She's huge, bigger than the policemen. She's dark, the color of burnt. From over the cop's shoulder she looks at me. If I say "no," my life, as well as the cop's, could be in danger.

"Hi, Mom," I say.

I try to smile but can't.

"Hi, Torrin," she says sweetly.

She has no problem faking a smile. The cop walks out of my room. She waits till he and the rest of them leave the apartment, then she turns to me.

"Listen, you little brat. I see what you're trying to pull. You got away with it tonight, but don't think this changes anything. You're coming with me eventually, and I don't want to hear any complaining. Goodbye," she says, slamming the door behind her.

She's right. Eventually she'll come for me, and I will

die. But for tonight I'm safe. My dad protected me. He saved my life.

***

I went on Facebook to pass the time while I waited for the morgue to show up and remove the dead thing. Midnight came and went. Still, there was no sign of them. I looked for a blanket to cover the corpse with. Eventually, I dug out my old Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle blanket and put it over him. I got sick of my dad looking at me. Whenever I glanced back from the computer desk, there he was, lying on the ground facing me, eyes half-open.

Are you happy now? the face said.

A policewoman was sent to my apartment. Her job was to stay with me till the body was removed. She stayed in the kitchen the whole time, so she wouldn't have to face my dad's gaze. The woman in blue told me that she used to work in Corporate America but found the job soulless and empty. She became a cop to serve her community. Now she was spending Christmas Eve with a corpse and his dispassionate son. I felt bad for her.

I fell asleep. The policewoman agreed to wake me up when the morgue showed up. She woke me up around 2:00 A.M.

"They're here," she said. "If you want to say goodbye to your father, now's the time."

I walked out of my room and was immediately hit with a knee-buckling odor. Placing a blanket over my dad with the heat in the apartment going at full blast proved to be a terrible idea. I didn't make it to the living room. The smell was too strong. I stayed in the kitchen with the cop while they carried the now decomposing body out. The stench was so powerful; it pushed passed my nostrils, tunneled its way into my brain, and cemented itself on the surface, leaving an imprint that no surgery or drug will ever remove. Anger, grief, joy, all my feelings were buried under this cloud of death.

This was my dad's goodbye.

***

My dad's breathing fire this year. Normally, he climbs into bed around Thanksgiving and hibernates till after New Year's. But this holiday season, he's seemingly devoting himself to killing happiness and good cheer wherever it raises its glowing head.

I stay in my room to avoid his wrath. I need an excuse to get out of the apartment. I wish I was back at college. I

have no one to hang out with today. It's Christmas Eve. All my friends are with their families being all lovey dovey and shit. In desperation, I text Jamal.

"Yo, u tryna smoke 2nite?" I ask.

While I wait for a response (I doubt the pothead will turn me down), I venture into the kitchen. I'm hungry. There's nothing to eat in the apartment, except Bran Flakes and two-week-old cold cuts. We don't even have bread and milk. I slam the fridge shut, announcing my presence.

"Is that you?" my dad calls out, sounding miserable as usual. "Are you in the kitchen? I hope you're not trying to cook anything."

"How can I? We don't have any food."

Our pantry resembles the food stock of a bomb shelter, with cans of decades-old vegetables and corned beef scattered around and covered in dust. I don't know why my dad's worried about me cooking. I can't cook, and he knows it. Even if we had an aisle of Pathmark in our kitchen, I wouldn't bother. I used to attempt to prepare food during the holidays. Every year, when I was a kid, I wasted money on various raw foods, beef, chicken, and pizza dough, and I found new and creative ways to fuck up. The idea was to spread yuletide cheer to my Grinch-like dad and make the holidays less depressing. It never worked out. I stopped trying to make things cheerful, and now I just embrace the darkness. I haven't even put up a Christmas tree in years. These days I hibernate during the holidays, like my dad normally does. But this year his bitching and moaning have made that impossible.

I check my phone. No response yet.

"Why the fuck is there never anything to eat in this house!?" I belt.

I'm saying these words from a different room. I should speak my peace to his face, but he's not worthy of that honor.

"There's never anything to eat because I'm broke and you don't have a job!" my dad says.

"I can't work down here. I go to college upstate," I remind him.

"Oh, you mean collect debt you think I'm going to pay back?"

"Whatever, you don't support me as it is. You're truly the shittiest father in the world. You know that, right?"

My phone lights up. Jamal has responded.

"I'm down to smoke," the text says. "Let's meet in Flushing at 5."

It's already five past three. Flushing is an hour and a half away. I have to leave immediately. I throw my clothes on and rush towards the front door.

"Hey, I need your help with something," my dad yells out.

"What is it?" I say, annoyed.

"I need you to change the light bulb above my bed. I'm in too much pain to reach it."

"I'll do it when I get back. I'm in a rush."

I say this while walking into the living room, away from the front door.

My dad's sitting on his bed in his underwear. He points at the blown out light. Above the light, hanging from the ceiling, is some sort of lumpy orange-brownish substance. My dad once told me that the substance is food from a plate my mom threw at him about 12 years back.

"There you go again," my dad says, starting up. "You never help out around here."

"I'll do it later," I repeat, heading back towards the door before things get bad.

It's too late.

"First you abandon me by going to school in fucking Siberia, then—"

"Oswego," I correct him.

I don't know why I bother.

"Wherever the fuck! It might as well be Siberia. Now when you're home, you won't even help your poor old father?"

I shouldn't respond. I should walk away. I'm already late. But douchebaggery such as this cannot go unchecked.

"Listen, you fat, lazy, stupid piece of shit. You can't tell me what to do anymore. If I feel like changing the light bulb, I will. If I don't, then you'll just have to live in the dark. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go get high because I can't deal with your shit!"

I march out of the apartment. My dad yells after me.

"Torrin!" he screams, with what could've been his last breath of life. "You're a scumbag. You're a scumbag, and don't you ever forget it!"

Don't you ever forget it! I think as I walk away.

La Douleur Exquise

Maggie Faller

In the Absence of Light

Brendan Tymon

Midnight: the witching hour. A veritable blanket of darkness engulfs me and all around me and blots out the stars and silences the world. Silences all but the incessant thump of my heart against my chest. It's the same, always the same when he arrives, his enigmatic presence gripping me like a vice. Never do I hear him approach; I don't hear him now and yet there's his icy touch on my shoulder, from nothing, from nowhere. There's the familiar jolt in my spine, the intense swooping sensation in my gut. Is it fear, excitement, curiosity that I feel? I can't quite say.

"You have what I asked for?" His voice is no more than a whisper, and yet it cuts through the silence like the first war-cry before a glorious battle, burns itself into my earlobes. I nod and reach into my jacket pocket, grasp the cool golden chain and pull it out to show him, holding the necklace in front of me. The crystal glows a brilliant, blazing white as it dangles from the chain, alleviating the chill darkness by the smallest degree, bringing some warmth back to my body, and I feel suddenly calm. He takes the necklace from me gently, his hand deathly pale and skeletal, and he sighs in satisfaction. As that crystal disappears from my sight, so does the calmness disappear from my body and my breath from my lungs.

"Well done, well done. Until we meet again, my friend," he says, and he removes his hand from my shoulder as I close my eyes. I can feel his presence receding, some semblance of life returning to my world. A cool breeze plays across my face, cicadas buzz, and in the distance a dog barks in time to someone's car alarm. I open my eyes and look up at the stars that have just returned, and I wonder when he'll need my services again, and if I'll finally have the courage to deny him. That crushing darkness which engulfs the cosmos has begun to fill my soul and I yearn for the day when I can see the light once again.

The Gambler

Christine Czarnecky

The Gambler took the dice. Set them at a corner square,
he scratched his shoulder. Adjusted the die.
Slightly moving one up, then the other.
Barely moving either of them.
He scratched his shoulder. Went to adjust the dice but just
touched them.
Then scratched his shoulder again.
Threw the die, won hundreds of dollars and
touched the die. Scratched his shoulder. Touched
the dice again before throwing them down the long table.

People laughed and yelled at him.
He didn't let them bother his rhythm.
He had unusual ticks.
But I have some too.
I make sure all the fixtures in the bathroom are straight
and the soap pump lands directly over the sink. All the
light switches face the same way before I leave.

Can't leave my house until all the knives face
left and all the forks are down.
Can't leave until I glance over the room fifteen times looking
for the one chapstick to be out of line on my vanity.

You won't know that I cannot write my notes with just any
pen,
it has to be the same one I've used since high school.
You won't know I start my day the same exact way,
and start over when something is different.
When I miscount my steps, I go all the way back
to my room and begin counting again.

But it won't take me fifteen minutes to throw the die.

Nature v. Nurture

Mareena Razik

"How the trees rise and stand up-with strong trunks-with
branches and leaves!
(Surely there is something more in each of the trees-some
living soul.)"
From "Song At Sunset" by Walt Whitman

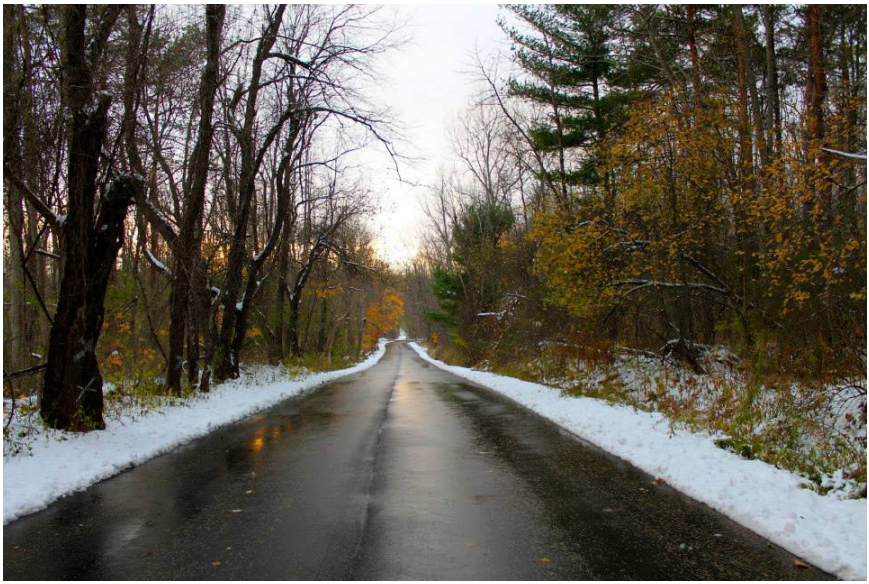
There may be more to me than meets the eye
But I have a hard time pulling through the weeds and
vines that have some strange strong hold on me.

There may be more to me than meets the eye
but I have a hard time seeing how these rings of mine
indicate the life I've led better than the bags
under
my
eyes.

There may be more to me than meets the eye
but how often are others swallowed up by the shallowness
of my bright foliage,
my
tall,
thin
frame,
my
brown
eyes?

There may be more to me than meets the eye
but there are times when the bully wind
pushes me too harshly,
tries to make me bend in ways
I don't fully comprehend.

There may be more to me than meets the eye
but I have a hard time seeing past my weathered ways,
and of thinking that my isolation from the rest of these fine
trees
had anything to do with nature,
and more to do with nurture.



Traveling Towards the Rice Creek Field Station

Alexis Corcoran

Hair

Kiana St. Louis

“Momma, it won’t go through,” I cry.
Another pair of teeth stuck in my
deep dark curls

hair thick as fog,
to get lost in its bouncy center means
trying to tame the uncontrollable, covering
my face and running down my spine, it spills
from my head in three-quarter time.

Poor comb. Advertised to defeat the
kinks and knots of all hair types –
except mine.

I sit in between momma’s knees as she
pulls and tugs and tries to set my hair free.
I hate this part, detangling my natural mane as I
watch little white girls put clips and colors in their
long, straight fleece. Every strand of blonde like honey

wavy like the flow of water,
autumn colored, long enough to
tie into your thoughts.

“Why can’t I look like her, momma?”
Slim frame, powder skin that all make-up looks
flawless on. Never a problem finding clothes or combs
society just works for them.

At age 8, I watched TV comparing my
chocolate to their vanilla, I felt small, a black pebble in a
white world.
In high school, I watched my brothers get arrested,

I called after the red and blue flashing lights powerlessly.

In college I sit as the only woman of color in
my classes. I think now not of honey blonde dreams, but
for the thickest black that screams.

Long lasting, unmanageable, unbreakable and powerful.
Black hair to match the skin that I am in.
Black hair to reflect our struggle; the beauty of our kin.

I am the un-straightened curl, the dark depth and fullness of
the ocean
I am my hair.

Clocks

Stacey Baran

Clocks tick. It's a known fact. They do it a lot.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

They tick for so long. They tick for seconds, then they tick for minutes, then they tick for hours, and I think they might even tick for days.

It's like they never shut up.

How long could you deal with an incessant child's babble about 'Why can't the sky be green and the grass blue and why doesn't four come after seven and why are you wearing that shirt?' before you would want to bash your eardrums in with a nice-looking bat? Not that long, I would imagine.

Not that long.

I, for one, couldn't deal with it.

This one clock, it hangs on the wall and ticks and doesn't shut up for days.

And it's the odd one out--the one that didn't get put together quite right. It's like it's hanging crooked on the pretty golden wall that used to be pale blue before it got painted over, but I just stare at it and stare at it, and there isn't one thing wrong with the way it's hanging.

And then I tilt my head to the left a little bit, hoping maybe by doing so, the sounds that hit the eardrums I want to bash in with a nice-looking bat will match up with the way my head's aligned, and maybe that clock will tick right.

Tick…tick-tick. Tick…tick-tick.

It doesn't.

The ticking goes on and on and on, and because it's wrong, the time is wrong, too. You sit there and watch it for half an hour, and you glance at the digital clock to the right of you, and you notice that this damn clock is fast by a few minutes.

Another half hour.

Now it's fast by five minutes.

Another half hour.

Seven minutes.

Now the real clock says it's eight to whatever hour of the night you've wasted, and the wall clock chimes to that very same hour of the night you've wasted, but then you do a double-take, and you realize that it's eight minutes early.

And then you get up, pull back its gold-rimmed door covering the two stupid hands, and you grab the dainty little minute hand--so fragile, so slender, so senseless. One push or pull the wrong way or direction, and it snaps. It's a lot of wasted care you put on such an awful piece of clockwork. You set it back eight minutes.

And then another half hour goes by.

And somehow, that damn clock is fast by a few minutes.

Again.

I bet you just want to rip it off the pretty golden yellow wall and smash its outside to pieces and then take its insides and crush those into silvery gear mulch, too. And then you want to take that silvery gear mulch and smashed pieces of exterior and jam-pack them into a small blender.

Take the blender and set it to purée and bolt behind a table so you can peer over to watch what is left of that damn clock explode inside your blender and coat your pretty golden wall with silvery gear guts.

But you can't do that.

Because then people would think you're crazy.

That's why that pretty golden wall isn't covered with silvery gear guts.

Because then people would think I'm crazy.

Sometimes I think people already think I'm crazy.

Industry vs. Nature

Zachary Donofrio

INT. CHEVY - DAY

CASEY(22) is a clean cut guy with his hair combed back, face shaved and a slim fit suit on. He is flipping through radio stations that are only playing Christmas songs.

EXT. BACK ROAD - DAY

There is light snow starting to fall and stick to the ground. There are small cabin homes few and far between.

INT. CHEVY - DAY

Casey is gripping the steering wheel as the snow starts to pick up. He begins to slow down to see where he is.

CASEY
(sotto)
By time I find this house the party will be over. Late for the family picture.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSTANG - DAY

SALLY is an older woman wearing a track suit with her hair a mess from the open car window. She is speeding in the mustang. She is cranks up the music.

SALLY
(singing)
I'M SO FANCY!

EXT. BACK ROAD - DAY

Sally spots the Chevy and slams on the breaks. The Mustang rear ends the slow Chevy. Sally pulls over.

CUT TO:

INT. CHEVY - DAY

Casey shakes his hands in the air.

CASEY
I'm too young for this!

CUT TO:

INT. MUSTANG - DAY

Sally looks at the dented Chevy.

SALLY
Not again.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK ROAD - DAY

Both Casey and Sally get out of their cars.

CASEY
Why is this happening to me!

SALLY
That is a beautiful car! My first husband had a car like that back in the day.

CASEY
I was barely moving! You didn't see me?

SALLY
Honey, if I would of seen you, I wouldn't of hit you.

CASEY
You should of been paying attention!

SALLY
I'm a wanted woman, I don't have time.

CASEY
That doesn't matter! It's snowing!

Casey starts pacing back and forth.

CASEY (CONT'D)
(sotto)
I just paid this car off, I have the worst insurance, I'm going to have to do illegal things to-

SALLY
Don't talk to yourself in front of strangers dear, it makes you look crazy.

CASEY
What? Do you even care if I'm okay?

SALLY
You seem fine to me! Extra fine. I haven't seen a man dressed that nice in decades. You remind me of my second husband.

Casey leans against his damaged car.

CASEY
This is the worst day ever!

SALLY
Don't be dramatic sweetie, it gets worse. Trust me.

CASEY
Why are you so calm about this!?

SALLY
Because you aren't! Unclench a little. You look like you have somewhere important to be, judging by your getup. Where are you off to James Dean?

CASEY
Why so you can harass me somewhere else? I barely know you, I don't need you following me.

SALLY
My third husband would say things like that all the time before we were married.

CASEY
Excuse me but how old are you?

SALLY
78 years young handsome! Can't stop, won't stop!

CASEY
You shouldn't be driving at this age, you're a danger to society!

SALLY
Age has nothing to do with my driving abilities, I've always been reckless.

CASEY
I hope you have bingo prize money saved up, you're paying for this!

SALLY
I do suppose I should since it is my fault. Do you have a pen and paper so I can give you my information?

Sally is batting her eye lashes at Casey.

CASEY
Sure, just, stop making that face.

SALLY
No promises, make it quick sexy.

CUT TO:

INT. - CHEVY - DAY

Casey looks for a pen and paper. He hears an engine revving.

CUT TO:

EXT. - COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Casey looks up and sees the mustang peel off and shrink as it speeds down the road. Casey is confused. As he stands in the road, a van drives up that reads 'Senior Home Care' on the side.

DRIVER
Excuse me sir, have you seen an elderly woman pass through here? She escaped earlier today and stole a doctors car.

CASEY
The reckless, 78 year old with 6 husbands? She went that way But-

Hastily the van speeds off down the road in order to chase Sally.

CASEY (CONT'D)
Who is going to pay for this!

CUT TO:

INT. MUSTANG - DAY

Sally has one hand on the wheel.

SALLY
(sotto)
Could of been husband number 4.

FADE TO BLACK.

Vintage

Sarah Fessler

The two of them are a vintage photo,
aged sepia with bent edges encapsulating
the love found within it as if that specific
moment could last decades beyond our family.

He's been sick for a while now, every
problem adding on to the first as if
he's an exponential equation, disease
doubling, tripling as we count the days left.

Still, everyday at his side she remains stronger
than the foundation beneath their 1920's home,
stuck in a time warp, brown speckled carpet and all.
Eighty five years and they still look at each other

as if they've just met, a navy man and his patient wife.
Every phone call sends a wave of panic through
our gene pool, our tree is rooted in their beginning,
fearful our leaves will wilt when they've reached their ending.

They are tethered, one cannot be without the other.
Like a light bulb to a lamp, separate they serve no purpose,
but together, they light up the entire room.

Oswego Re-imagined

David Owens

We're Nice People