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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Our lips match, catch fires, spit sparkling dust that settles onto your skin. My back pressed to your chest, a handful of peach skin, show me to your grave.
I would imagine the mulberry tree in our backyard was probably very useful once upon a time to the people who had previously lived in the house before we moved in. They would probably get out their ladders, climb up on top of them, and pick the little white berries from the branches. Maybe they’d be dexterous enough to scramble up the trunk of the tree and perch up high on a thick bough, throwing down the mulberries from up above at the people below. We didn’t do any of that. The tree itself was pretty useless. It was all by itself, all the way in the back of the backyard. The berries just ended up being blown off by the wind, scattered all over our green yard. They actually didn’t taste very good either. They were a little sweet, but something felt off about them. They were incredibly annoying to step on as well, staining the soles of our shoes or even our bare feet with that nasty violet shade, leaving behind small, ugly seeds. I really didn’t like that tree and all the trouble it caused.

On the other hand, my Woody doll was something I cherished as a child. I would take him everywhere with me, especially to bed. Something about him was very emotionally appealing to me. I think I had a lot of empathy for him, someone whose life was perfect until some new cool guy moved in and ruined everything. I thought about how it must feel for him to look underneath his boot and see the name of the most important person in the world to him written on his sole, and realize that Andy might not feel the same way about him anymore. The letters slowly begin to fade as time passes, and I thought about the fear of being forgotten and left behind that must have stricken Woody’s heart. He was someone who felt alone and outcast from the people he used to know. I think as a kid, I could sense that. I wanted to be his friend, to let him know that he wasn’t alone. I still have him back at home, though I don’t take him with me anymore. I think we’ve both done a lot of growing up since then.

I never really thought about what you must have been feeling for all these years. You are alive (a fact that often slips my mind), and you must have been living there for decades. I
wonder how many generations of families had come and gone in your lifetime. Who were the people who planted you there so many years ago? They’d be long gone by now, but despite everything, you still stand tall in the backyard, a resolute, determined silent giant. After all these years, your berries still continue to fall all over the square plot of green grass, still continue to stain my soles purple whenever I walk around in the backyard. I still don’t really like you but I can imagine the neglect, the loneliness, the isolation you must feel after all this time. Maybe one of these days, I’ll give you a sense of belonging; a purpose. I’ll come home and sit underneath the shade of your leaves, or pick some of your berries and make a mulberry pie with them. One of these days, when I won’t mind you staining my soles.
INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Heavy rain pounds against the house from the outside.

BARBARA (18) sits on a couch, one leg crossed over the other, a book in her hands. She yawns as she turns the page.

Thunder shakes the house and the lights flicker. A little girl's scream envelops the home. Barbara jumps up from her seat, then takes a few breaths to calm down.

MELANIE (O.S.)
BARBARA!

Barbara puts the book down on the couch.

BARBARA
Coming!

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The hallway is full of doors. Barbara rushes to one of them and opens it.

INT. HOUSE - MELANIE’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room inside is dimly lit by a plug-in unicorn night light.

MELANIE (8) lies in a small bed and holds the blankets up to her chin. She shivers under the covers.

Melanie points at her window. The blinds are wide open and rain slams against the windows. Lightning illuminates the sky followed by the deep laugh of thunder.

MELANIE
Barbara. . .
Barbara enters the room and bends down until she is face-to-face with Melanie.

**BARBARA**
It’s just thunder and lightning, Melanie. It’s okay.

She goes to Melanie’s windows and closes the blinds. She stops for a second and turns back to the girl.

**BARBARA (CONT’D)**
Why’d you open these?

**MELANIE**
Sh-she told me to?

**BARBARA**
Who?

Melanie points at the window. Thunder booms. Melanie cries.

**MELANIE**
I he-heard kn-knocking on my window. I went to it and there was a girl there.

Barbara cocks her head in suspicion.

**BARBARA**
A girl? Mel, it’s pouring out there. Why would a girl be outside?

**MELANIE**
I... I don’t know. she told me to let her in... Then there was lightning... .

Melanie shivers again.

**MELANIE (CONT’D)**
She knew my name. She told me hers was Lily.
Barbara moves the blinds to the side and looks outside.

**EXT. GRASSY LAWN - CONTINUOUS**

There’s only grass outside. No people. The sky is full of darkness and rain. The darkness disappears for a second as thunder and lightning intermingle and enter the world.

**INT. HOUSE - MELANIE’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Barbara turns back to Melanie.

**BARBARA**

I don’t see anyone out there. Maybe you just had a bad dream.

**MELANIE**

It wasn’t a dream.

**BARBARA**

Then where’d she go?

**MELANIE**

I think she went to the front.

Barbara goes back to Melanie's side to comfort her.

**BARBARA**

It’s alright, Mel. You’re safe now.

**MELANIE**

Her eyes. . . They were black. Donny told me about black-eyed children. . . they have no souls. . . And they torture the living! They come at night and try to make the people inside let them in their homes. . . to kill them. . . I don’t want to die.

Melanie cries harder. Barbara sighs.
BARBARA
Honey, your brother was lying. There’s no such thing as black-eyed children. You’re safe here. Calm down. Everything’s going to be o-

The doorbell rings.

Melanie hides under her covers.

MELANIE
Don’t let her in.

Barbara looks at Melanie, trying to hold back the fear the child had instilled into her.

BARBARA
I won’t.

She slowly makes her way to the door.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS
Barbara walks down the hall at a slow pace. She tries to see if she can see through the windows by glancing at them from the side to get a look behind the closed curtains.

After failing she continued on into the . . .

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS
She goes to the door and looks out of the peephole.

PEEPHOLE POV
A pale young girl, LILY (8) stands at the doorstep wearing a black poncho. She stares at the peephole. Direct contact. Black eyes. Lily smiles.

LILY
Open up, Barbara. It's really wet and cold out here.
BACK TO SCENE

Barbara lunges back from the door. Lily rings the doorbell again. Melanie shrieks from her room.

The doorbell rings again and again, its sound deafening and somehow almost louder than the thunder.

LILY (O.S.) (CONT’D)
Let me in, Barbara! Let me in!

Barbara grabs her phone and dials a number.

The doorbell stops. Barbara holds the phone up to her ear as she waits for the person on the other end to answer.

MIKE (V.O.)
What’s up, Bar? Is Mel alright?

BARBARA
Mr. Mike, there’s a girl at the door. She has black eyes. She knows my and Mel’s name. She won’t leave us alone. She wants to be let in.

Barbara makes her way to the door again and slowly eases her way up to the peephole.

MIKE
We’ll be home in five. Just stay on the line with me and-

The call drops. Barbara gapes on the phone.

BARBARA
No. No!

Thunder booms. The lights flicker, then go off. Barbara and Melanie scream. Barbara falls back from the door.

The doorknob rattles and rattles.
The door opens.

Lily stands at the doorstep, looking in at Barbara.

**LILY**

Why couldn’t you just let me in? It’s wet and cold out here.

**BARBARA**

Le-leave us alone!

Lily takes a step into the house. Barbara tries to move backwards from where she lay on the ground.

**LILY**

I just wanted some shelter

Tears stream down Barbara’s face.

**BARBARA**

What are you?

Lily smiles.

**LILY**

I just wanted to be dry.

She advances toward Barbara.

**FADE TO BLACK.**
Untitled
Laura Panagis
Starry Nites
Nicole Hube

a café on the corner of
university and atlantic
is a quiet refuge for my heart

lamps illuminate a van gogh mural on the wall
while the aroma of coffee grounds
sends me back to my home

a rainbow flag flutters outside in the breeze
and the lady behind the counter with the glasses
fixes me another sandwich

a newspaper sits on a sofa in a corner
near the doorway
an old man raises and unfolds it

he adjusts his reading glasses
stifles a sneeze
and carries on with his day

this café wears kitten heels
and a miniskirt with stockings
perhaps a sweater, too

this café would tie its hair into a messy bun
would dream in the daytime
and it would not walk

it would dance
I bounced up and down in my seat as the van creaked to a stop, its tires sinking slightly in the mud. The sun hung low in the sky, casting orange and pink rays on the clouds. The abandoned railroad that hid behind my dance studio sat coldly in front of us.

“Can we go on the railroad?” I asked excitedly.

“Only for a few minutes, dance is gonna start soon,” my dad responded, a sigh hanging on his lips. He knew that once we were on the rails, there would be no way for us to make it back in time for my class. That may be why we would only go about once a month, but for me it always felt like eons had passed since the last time we went on the rails.

The leaves danced in the wind as if to play music for our adventure. Flowers crept along the tracks, some inching their way between the boards. The brush and thicket crowded around the abandoned factory building that stood tall a few feet away from the track. Its brick walls crumbled and glass windows shattered from years of disuse. The tall smoke stack seemed lost without smoke billowing out from it. The scene in front of me beckoned me forward, calling for me to explore. This was our railroad and the road to our adventures summoned us.

I rushed to unbuckle my seat, my dad chuckling as he shoved his keys in his pocket. I kicked my bag to the side as I swung the door open. I nearly fell to the ground as I clamored out the door. My feet sunk in the mud as soon as they touched the soft ground. I ran from the van, mud flying behind me, straight towards the tracks.

My dad followed slowly behind me, taking his time to avoid the deep puddles that were scattered throughout the grass. His faded t-shirt blew in the wind, hugging his portly body. He ran his hand through his receding hairline, wiping the sweat away from his face. It was warm that day, the sun had blazed as he worked on the yard while I was at school. The grass stains on his jeans seemed to match with the immense thicket.

“Dad, hurry up!” I said as I bolted towards the factory wall.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m coming.”
Right next to the factory was a concrete foundation protruding out towards the track. The concrete seemed to have stood there forever. Gashes and pockets formed within the concrete, probably from years of being at odds with Mother Nature. Its stone slabs had little squares cut out of them, almost like windows. I had to stand on a tree branch to look through one of these windows. I called this the Cabin even though it could never have been one. The floor of the Cabin sat two floors down into the ground. Trash and litter flooded the floor, as did leaves and small flowers. A single large branch which had fallen off a nearby tree, stuck out from the ground and leaned up against one of the stone slabs. The branch seemed to beckon me to come down there and explore.

“Can I go down there yet?” I asked as my dad caught up to me.

“One of these days, but not tonight,” he told me. He always says this when I ask.

I frowned as I looked down to the Cabin’s floor, hoping to see something, anything, happen. I always thought some magical creature lived there, and it only came out when I wasn’t looking. All I ever saw were squirrels rummaging through the trash.

I stepped away from the Cabin, holding my dad’s hand to help me get down. I skipped my way to the tracks and jumped onto the rails. Suddenly I was a trapeze artist, walking the tightrope that was this rail. The audience roared as I walked carefully forward, my arms held out to give me some semblance of balance. The vision slipped away as my dad ran up behind me to grab my shoulders.

“Don’t fall!” he shouted as he shook my shoulders, making sure not to shake enough for me to fall.

“Rude!” I said as I turned to frown at him. He returned the frown with a goofy face, his tongue sticking out and his eyes going cross-eyed. My frown soon crumbled into giggles as I jumped onto the boards between the rails.

We spent the next hour kicking at the rocks and jumping on the rails. During these adventures, the world fell away. The Earth seemed to hold its breathe as we traversed the rails. Sometimes I would imagine that this railroad wasn’t abandoned. I’d imagine that we would jump in a railcar and travel to distant lands. We would go all over the world in that one railcar.

Occasionally, we would find a stray railroad nail. Finding
these was like finding the holy grail. They were the epitome of our great adventures. Railroad nail in hand, my dad on the opposite rail, we would slowly make our way back to the van. The dance class I was supposed to have gone to must’ve just got out. My classmates jumped around in the parking lot as their parents followed them. The other parents grumbled to each other about my classmates, mumbling something about finicky 8-year old’s acting up.

Exhausted from our trek to the “unknown”, I would climb into the van. My mud-covered sneakers would have dirtied the seat as I curled my legs under me. My dad would ease into the van, start up the noisy beast that it was, and finally head home.

When you think of railroads, you probably think of trains. At least, usually that’s the case. Teachers tell you how important railroads are, and how they used to be the biggest thing of the 1800s. Honestly, I hadn’t cared. I cared about the track my dad and I would climb on. When I was on those tracks, I didn’t think of all the time and effort it took to make them. I thought of the magical fairies that lived in the Cabin by the tracks. I thought of the magnificent treasure of the railroad nails. When I think of railroads, I think of my dad.

When I was a kid, I was told that trains used to be the best way to travel. Trains were the epitome of speed and efficiency. I had never seen a train in real life, at least not a working one outside of a museum. Millions of people had ridden trains by the time cars had come around. So many people had trains involved in their life, one way or another. The tracks’ grasp on the world was irrefutable. They brought soldiers to wars, they brought families back together, they made the unknown places known to the world.

How could something so nonexistent in my life have been so important in some past world? It seemed almost eons away from my grasp, I couldn’t understand it. Those rails I jumped on were hundreds of years old and here they were, still standing tall in my life in the present. Why they were still there, I didn’t know. It seemed almost a waste of space and resources to just let them lay there unused. The only use I ever saw from them was the unintended aftermath of an industrial age. A little girl and her dad, jumping around on the ruins of a track, chasing an imagined goal of adventure.

These tracks carried passengers home. They carried people to places unknown. These tracks were used for exactly
what I used them for, adventure. Before planes, trains were the way to go. I never imagined jumping onto a plane and having an adventure. It was always a train. I always imagined a railcar speeding by, its door swung open as if it had opened just in time for my dad and I to make our daring jump. Him and I would travel until we both grew old and sat with our treasure by the tracks it all began at. It was always us and the rails against the world. I imagine a lot of people used to think that way about trains in the past, that is before planes trumped that dream. Once planes came into the picture, trains were considered unsafe and inefficient for the adventure bound passenger. That was never the case for me.

Thirteen years later, I’ve moved into an apartment hundreds of miles away from my childhood home, right next to one of the Great Lakes. It’s in an apartment complex that sits right in front of an active railroad. Late at night we will hear the whistle and chugging of a train passing by. Its rumblings echo through our home and shake our building. School books lay scattered about my living room, making my home a minefield of supplies. My cats would constantly flit about, running away from my rambunctious dog. Old Halloween decorations plastered the walls even though it was March. I always loved that holiday.

I always wanted to visit those tracks whose ghostly train filled my nights in my new home. I figured that they might hold some long-forgotten magic that I used to have in my life. I was always just a little too busy, or a little too nervous of being caught by a railroad worker. One day, when I was finally brave enough, I went to them. I hooked my dog Akeela up to his leash and headed out the back door. The short sheepdog bound towards the grass beyond the paved parking lots and I slowly walked behind him. A small field bordered by a short bit of tree line borders my building, a barrier between the railroad and me. His black spotted fur seemed out of place in this ocean of green ahead of me.

The day I went to the railroad was the first day of sunshine in a week of down pour. The ground was soft where I stepped, my feet sinking in the muddy ground. Akeela tugged on his leash urging me toward the tree line. The apartment building loomed behind me, giving me no encouragement as I moved. I knew the train didn’t come by at that time but my nerves were still high. Maybe it was because I didn’t have my dad to hold onto my shoulders as I walked. Or maybe it was
because all I had to protect me was this little dog instead of having the hero that was my dad. Who would come save the day if the adventure turned sour?

Once I jumped over the puddles that bordered the tree line and traversed the trash littered thicket, I finally made it to the tracks. They were lined with rocks, allowing no plant growth to even come near. The sun glared into my eyes, the trees next to me gave me no protection. The boards were synched into the rails with metal plates, each holding a year. The years moved from 1939, 1946, 1938 as the track headed away from my building. I wondered if those numbers were the years the plates were made. Or perhaps dates of the track being put together. Or maybe, it was a memento to those building it, like concrete signatures in sidewalks. Immigrants from all over worked tirelessly and cheaply to create these, it’d be only fair to give them some sort of recognition for this track.

Akeela hobbled along the rocks, sticking close to me. I was thankful he was no longer tugging on his leash, it would’ve made this adventure much more treacherous. A banging rhythm danced around me as a nearby tractor trailer door slammed open and shut. The wind whipped my hair into my face making it hard to see. Trash littered the rocks, broken beer bottles, candy wrappers, and even larger food containers.

I crossed the track carefully, checking to see if the train decided to surprise everyone and run at that second. Clear of any catastrophic death scenarios, I jumped on the rail. Akeela sat down next to me and started licking it.

“Don’t be a goober,” I said to him. He stopped licking it and looked up at me. His brown eyes shimmered with joy.

I looked down the track and saw cars passing on an overhead, oblivious to me standing there. I didn’t become a trapeze artist, I didn’t imagine escaping on a railcar, and I didn’t fall off the rail. Instead, I got off the rail and walked a little way more to the thicket that borders the other side of the track. A rusted barrel sat on the edge of a cliff that dropped into a creak. The barrel had become more frame than barrel. It must’ve been there for years.

After walking next to the track for a while, I decided it was time to head back. I jumped back onto the rail and moved to the middle. Akeela anxiously waited for me on the other side, tugging at his leash again. The wind had died down so I was able to see clearly down the track. I felt the urge to walk it. I wanted to keep walking down it and see where it took me. The
old feeling of adventuring into the unknown rose in me again, and suddenly, I didn’t feel so alone.

Trains aren’t used to transport people as much as they used to. I guess that makes sense, with planes and cars nowadays. The rails I traversed no longer transported me either. Trains are now mainly used for goods, to hold things and carry things. They no longer hold any magical fairies or heroic adventures in my eyes anymore. What they do hold is much more precious. They hold memories. They held my dad and mine’s relationship in their steel arms.

Their boards are creaked with age and misuse, their nails inch out of the ground as trains sparingly pass by. They are old, they are beautiful, and they hold the wisdom of thousands of memories. Railroads and trains were considered dangerous. That’s why they started filtering people away from them. They caused accidents, mishaps, and catastrophes much faster than newer transportation. The first recorded train disaster in America was in 1832, where four people were thrown from a cart off a cliff. One of the worst accidents proved fatal to over 1700 passengers in Sri Lanka in the year 2004. Train accidents still occur to this day. Ambitious travelers all over the world face the perils of train accidents to this day and age. There’s a reason the “Golden Age” of railroads ended in in the 1920s. This could be blamed on cars becoming popular around this time, but it could also be because people were tired of risking their lives to travel.

My relationship with my father is different, but strong. We have thousands of memories built between us and not all of them are good. Memories of the Cabin now rest in later memories of financial arguments. Our conversations have less to do with magic now but more to do with the importance of family. Our adventures have shrunked to short visits littered with errands and to-do lists. Somehow, we are still able to move forward, still supporting each other in different ways. We are more like allies now rather than princess and knight in shining. We both fight the battles nowadays, fighting the monsters of everyday life. We are both the heroes, saving each other when the other falls.

“How are things at the house?” I asked my dad.

We both sat in my car, hoping to catch a break from being rained on. We were picking up my little sister, Faith, from
“Same old, same old I guess,” my dad said before letting loose a sigh.

“You’re exhausted, you have to stop stressing so much. You need to just move forward and let life take its course,” I said to him, hoping he would finally listen to me.

His life was filled with more stress than I could possibly imagine. I would always try to talk him into letting some of the stressors go. Taking one step at a time always proved too hard for him, still I tried to help him walk through everything.

“I know, I raised a smart girl,” he said.

“Damn right you did.”

When I look at us now, it seems as if the world has changed around us but we are still two heroes, trekking through the adventure we create. Railroads don’t change much but the world around them sure does. The tracks that I used to go to in my childhood have a new world around them. There no longer stands the Cabin of my dreams. The brick factory is now a pristine building that has no shattered windows. The thicket and flowers have been cut down and pushed back. The railroad though, that’s still the same. Strong and beautiful as it ever was.
Cold Water
Deanna Newman
Little Miss Red
Nick Brown

I just slept with the sun
I invested a quarter score into them
And asked for a summer back
Apologized in the winter
Solicide ate me in August
Colored my bathwater crimson

Tried to solicit a friend on the web
Hit my nadir instead
Then little miss red
Saw her at the mall, had my credence in a fortnight
In that city of grey and that mind full of blackness
I had red
I took quick showers again

She went to new york city
A train ride is 40
And if I lost my wallet
And she needed a pillow
I'd go to the station and beg for a quarter
Then do it again
Until I had 160
Hector looked up yearningly at the glass mason jar sitting on the mahogany shelf in the kitchen. A light glaze of dust covered the jar, but he could still see that it was empty. He stood on his tiptoes and reached his arm up to the shelf. His hand barely even glanced the bottom of the shelf. Hector tilted his head to the side and put his hands underneath his chin in a pose that he thought made him look like he was thinking deeply about how to solve this predicament. He stood there for a moment and then walked over to the dining room table and brought back with him a chair. Hector took a deep breath before standing on top of the chair and reaching for the jar. His fingers recoiled at the texture of the old jar, but he quickly got over it and gingerly placed it into the pocket of his overalls. Hector hopped off of the chair and ran to the back door. He unlocked it and stepped through the door into the backyard.

Hector stood on the steps of the porch and looked ahead at the lawn of green grass where the bugs buzzed and the squirrels sprinted. He walked down the steps and kept walking until his feet touched the grass. It tickled at first, Hector liked the way it felt. He plopped down onto the soft grass and started picking at the dandelions. Hector pinched his fingers at the dandelion stem and decapitated the crown of florets from the rest of the body. He took out the mason jar and put the flower’s head into the jar and looked for another flower. Hector didn’t understand why the golden flowers and the cotton balls were both called dandelions and thought about it for a minute before settling on the fact that they both looked like the dandy manes of lions.

Hector crawled around on all fours for a minute before he found one of the cotton ball dandelions and yanked the entire plant from the ground. Small bits of soil fell from the tips of the roots and fell into the palm of his hand. He emptied the dirt from his hand and then took a deep breath in preparation for the exhale that would obliterate the cotton ball. As he was about to blow death to the dandelion, a garishly orange butterfly flew in front of his face and stole his attention. It fluttered curiously in front of his face before resting on the seed head. Hector blew a gust of air at the dandelion, scattering its gray hairs into the wind, but the butterfly held
fast and did not move from the head. Impressed with the bravery of the butterfly, Hector resolved to capture it. He gently placed the lifeless stem on the grass and unscrewed the top of his jar. The butterfly did not move or seem interested in moving. Hector cupped the jar over the butterfly and it crawled into the bottom of the jar. He sealed the jar with glee and delight, capturing his newest friend. Hector thought for a minute on what to name the butterfly, and decided on Agatha.

***

Hector took the jar with him up to his mother’s bedroom and made it his goal to impress her with his newest friend. She hadn’t been impressed with anything he told or showed her for the past few weeks. Hector’s mother wouldn’t leave her bed. He was starting to get worried about her, and he hoped Agatha would make a difference.

He knocked on the door and called out to his mother. As usual, she didn’t answer him, and so Hector opened the door. A putrid smell assaulted Hector’s eyes and nose, which told him that his mother hadn’t gotten up from bed or showered. Sure enough, despite the darkness of the room, Hector could see the familiar slumped shape of his mother under the covers. He unscrewed the lid of the jar and Agatha crawled out onto the palm of his hand.

“Momma,” Hector said. “Momma, look, I made a new friend today. Her name is Agatha, and she’s quite a brave butterfly. Look at her, she’s on my hand right now.”

His mother said nothing and did not move. Hector stood in the darkness and waited for her to respond. Today, he would make sure she gives him an answer. He tapped his foot impatiently as Agatha skittered around on his hand.

“You should really get up and take a bath, Momma,” Hector said. “You smell absolutely horrible! Doesn’t it bother you that you smell so bad?”

Of course, Hector received no reply. He was beginning to feel dejected from his mother’s neglect. As he walked over to his mother’s bedside, the pungent smell began to get stronger. He stopped at the window and opened it, releasing the noxious fumes from their prison. Hector turned back to the bed and placed a hand on his mother and started shaking her. She felt
softer than usual, like a jelly person.

“Goodness gracious Momma, you’re not looking very well,” said Hector nervously. “I might have to ring up Doc Smith sometime, what do you think?”

She answered him with silence and he replied, “Oh yes, I do think it’s about time you’re due for a checkup. Gosh, looks like you don’t like chamomile tea much, do you, Momma?”

Hector picked up the filled teacup that he had left on her nightstand the previous day and emptied it out the window. The faded pyrite liquid splattered onto the ground below and left a brief, reminiscent hint of sweetness before being smothered by the rancid odor.

He looked down at Agatha and thought that she must be hungry. He left his mother’s crypt and gently closed the door, hoping tomorrow she would be more open to talk to him. Hector went downstairs into the kitchen and took out some peach preserves from the pantry. He scooped some into the jar and tenderly put Agatha back into the jar and watched her feed on the fruit. Hector smiled and sealed the jar and took it upstairs to his bedroom. He placed the jar on his desk beside his bed and turned off the lights and wished Agatha goodnight. Hector clasped his hands together and prayed that he and Agatha would have more fun adventures tomorrow.

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The next morning, Hector woke up to a cloudy grey sky that blocked out the sun. He got up and checked on his fairy pet. Hector peered into the jar that had become hazy from the morning dew, and he saw that Agatha wasn’t moving. She was not fluttering her wings or brushing her legs against the glass. She lay crumpled on the bottom of the jar, her legs folded crookedly and her wings rigid and stiff. Hector felt his heart pound and panic began to set upon him. He realized that she had suffocated in the night and felt incredibly ashamed and guilty at the death of his friend. He tearfully unscrewed the lid of the jar, lifted Agatha by her paper wings out, and placed her on his desk. A hurricane of emotions and thoughts wracked his mind about what to do with Agatha. Waves of melancholy washed over him and torrents of rage rained upon him. Hector struggled to compose himself, but he remembered what the doctor told him to do when he was having a fit and
slowly took deep breaths and counted to 10. He calmed himself and remembered hearing about people preserving insects by pinning them to a board. Hector reckoned this would be the most appropriate way to remember Agatha.

Hector took out his old shoe box from the closet and some pins from his desk and prepared Agatha’s grave. He decorated the borders of the box with dandelion heads and laid Agatha down to rest in the center. Hector stuck a pin through Agatha’s body and her torso fell apart. Hector screamed in agony, as if he were the one whose body was broken and pierced. He began sobbing uncontrollably and felt like he had killed her again. His eyes rolled to the back of his skull as he stood up and began pounding his head into the wall.

“STUPID! STUPID! STUPID! STUPID!” Hector shouted. He didn’t care if he woke his mother up from her slumber; he only wanted to forget about Agatha and the short span of their friendship. Hector began to hyperventilate and his breathing became uncontrollable and desperate. He would not be consoled and was incapable of counting to 10. In the midst of his misery, Hector thought he heard something from the other room. His heart stopped beating so that he could listen for the noise and Hector could swear that he heard his mother say that she knew how to make Agatha forgive him.

He listened intently and thought he heard her say in his head, “Hector, sweetie, I know a way you can be with Agatha forever and ever.”

“How, how, tell me how, Momma,” Hector moaned.

“Eat her.”

“No, no, Momma. I don’t want to hurt her anymore,” Hector cried.

“Honey, she told me herself that she’ll forgive you if you eat her. That way you will be together for the rest of your life.”

Hector turned away from the wall and looked into Agatha’s grave. His breathing was heavy and his sobbing was deep and pronounced. He reached into the box and picked up her remains. Hector brought Agatha up to his mouth and smelled her scent for one last time. It smelled soft and sweet and of happiness and joy.
“Do it,” beckoned the voice in his mind. It was familiar but Hector couldn’t tell if it was his mother’s or Agatha’s voice. In his mind, he pictured a small cupcake with a butterfly decor and a sign that said, “EAT ME”, but Hector opened his eyes and saw Agatha’s torn body in his hands again and burst into tears.

“Eat me.”

Hector thrust Agatha into his mouth and devoured her. He chewed mercilessly, his jaws pumping like pistons, crushing Agatha’s body into bits and pieces. She tasted bitter and sad and lonely and Hector could feel her legs getting stuck in between his teeth. Her wings crumpled and ripped apart and stuck to his gums like wet paper. Hector mustered whatever strength he had left and it culminated into swallowing Agatha down his throat. He felt sick to his stomach, but also felt an immense relief cloud his head. Hector sighed and collapsed to the floor, his eyes glazing over and his lips quivering with a terrible euphoria. He saw himself in a golden field of dandelions with his mother and a nebula of butterflies surrounding them in a frantic frenzy. They all looked like Agatha and they were all whispering in a collective buzz: “Eat me.”
The Creator
Victoria Jayne
Mother Always Spoke of the Jades
David G. Manke

The Jade's House. Exotic aromas, endless hallways, a home. Walls, wrapped in a Victorian embrace; elegant and warm. A hearth settled into the walls, beaming with riveting curls. The ones that dance across shoulders, whether cast in sunlight, moonlight, or starlight. A twostep. I've never had the pleasure. At least not the Jades my mother spoke of.

Relatives.

Their walls were different. Still draped in a Victorian shroud, elegantly deceiving. A masquerade. The hearth, black iron. Soot, unsettling. An embrace leaving an eternal hue. Coals, dimly lit beneath the cage, dress the room in sickly shadows, many of them my own. They curl and dance. The warmth from behind the gates of the pitch castle. A breath tiptoeing down the lengths of my spine.

The air, thicker than the night sinks in over the barred windowsill. Its ink leaks onto the floor, and slowly fills the room. The coals, now bits of dark licorice, are silenced by poor penmanship. Ankle deep. A waltz stepping through a vacant night sky. Waist deep. Soot, now replaced by a molten hearth of the same hue. Neck deep. The churning waves, move with the waltz. Curls. The ones that hang across shoulders.
I give every picture I pass a five-fingered touch.

I have the urge to pull on his ponytail but I pick a red flower instead.

I wave at my friend when she greets me.

I pick other flowers because I can.

With my fingers
I mash the fleshy petal to a pulp
and it leaves a purple pigment bruise.

I put my hand out the window of the SUV and it went limp in the wind.

My joints ache.

I pool water in my hands and drown my face.

I pop my knuckles.

I touch the soft cat.

I touch my hair.

Some things
I cannot touch.
Into the Woods
Rose Banks
INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

The light in the elevator flickers as an alarm blares.

THE LIGHT FLARES ON. WE SEE THE HAGGARD VISAGE OF IAN.

IAN (47) is a gray-haired man who tells himself fatherhood just isn’t for him. His clothes desperately need to be ironed, and there is a coffee stain on his shirt.

THE LIGHT FLASHES OFF. IT FLICKERS ON TO SHOW MARIE.

MARIE (6) is bouncing in place, making scared exclamations every time the light flashes. She has pulled the sleeves of her blue raincoat into the zipped jacket with herself.

THE LIGHT FLASHES OFF. IT FLASHES ON TO SHOW JARED.

JARED (15) is over it. He’s just so over it. He’s looking at nothing, his arms crossed over his chest stiffly.

THE LIGHT FLASHES OFF. IT FLASHES ON TO SHOW LIAM.

LIAM (17) is wearing a nice blue button-down shirt and ironed dress pants. He appears unfazed by the situation, if not somewhat annoyed.

The light flickers off. It flashes back on to illuminate the whole elevator, one person in each corner.

LIAM
Dad, would you just. . .

IAN
Not until whoever hit the buttons admits it.

JARED
But like, you hit the alarm, so. . .
IAN
Whoever hit the buttons for the three floors below ours has better admit it, or we’re staying in this elevator until the firemen drag us out.

MARIE
Wasn’t me! I don’t have arms, see?

She turns side to side, showing off her tucked-in sleeves.

LIAM
That’s nice, Marie. Dad, it was me, whatever. . .

IAN
No, you’ve been in that corner the whole time. Marie, Jared, which one of you pushed it.

Marie squeals, causing everyone to jump.

MARIE
I! Don’t! Have! Arms!

JARED
And I don’t have time for this. Can we just go? It doesn’t matter.

Ian narrows his eyes as the lights flash again.

IAN
So was it you?

JARED
No. I just don’t care. You’re being stupid, Dad. You’re wasting more time than the buttons would have.

LIAM
Dad, is there something you just need to be mad about?
Ian stomps his foot in anger. Marie delightedly copies the action.

**IAN**
Stop trying to be your mother, Liam.

**JARED**
So is that, like...a yes?

**MARIE**
You yelled at Mommy, too! Last night, you were so mad.

Everyone in the elevator stiffens and slowly look to Marie.

**LIAM**
He was yelling at Mom last night?

**MARIE**
Yeah! He said... no, she yelled at you back, and you told her to stay quiet because she would wake us up.

Liam and Jared look to Ian. Liam crosses his arms, Jared uncrosses his. Ian hits the alarm button, but the elevator doesn’t start moving after the alarm shuts off.

The elevator has a sign for the United Women’s and Children’s Hospital.

**JARED**
Mom’s on the seventh floor, Marie.
MARIE
Yeah! I want to meet baby Vicky!

LIAM
Did you see who the woman was last night, Marie?

MARIE
No, but it had to be Mom! She was in their bedroom!

Ian is hitting the buttons at random, trying to get the elevator to move.

IAN
Marie, it was just the TV, like I said.

MARIE
No, she said your name and everything.

IAN
You must’ve just heard it wrong. It was the TV.

LIAM
What were you watching?

IAN
The game.

JARED
Your bedroom TV doesn’t get the sports channels. You complain about it all the time. We’re not stupid, Dad.

MARIE
I’ve got no arms, though.
IAN
Would you just put your arms through your goddamn sleeves, Marie!

LIAM
Don’t yell at her just because you screwed up! How can you bear facing Mom in the hospital, after she had another baby girl for you. . .

JARED
And if you think we’re not telling Mom, then you’re crazy!

Ian starts laughing.

IAN
Oh, kids, I was going to put up with it to raise you well, but if you really want to keep pushing this, fine. I got a vasectomy after we had Liam.

JARED
A what?

IAN
Means no more kids. Or so I thought. Your mother wanted more, so I didn’t tell her.

LIAM
So that means. . .

MARIE
You all need to look! because I have no arms!

Marie pushes her arms back through the sleeves of her coat.

MARIE (CONT’D)
And now I do! Two of them!
The Cage
Joshue Faulks

There’s a cottage on the east side of town
where deer run and the buck stops.
mist hangs like breath in January,
dusk and dawn play Marco Polo.

This shadow of innocence is where I came of age.
Reaching for beer bottles I could not drink
pointing at punch-buggies I could not drive
searching the skies for a blue heron I could not chase

I was in the cage.

My liver hurts these days
vertigo strikes when I look down.
Always a pair of headlights in the rear-view,
clamping my nose in the presence of roses.

Cage is in the word cottage,
and the keys to life taunted my armspan.
But now that I’m free to roam greener pastures,
the colors fade with the taste of beer,
the sensation of a pedal to the metal.

I am in the cage.

The only magic is green,
earning crust, yet earning no miles.
A million ideas in my head,
with six digit price tags and hours to take.

The cubicle is my cage,
my innocent smile buried under a brown nose,
the heron died a long time ago when his wings were clipped.
He’s mounted in my supervisor’s house,
next to the mount of my ass.

I will be in the cage.
Untitled
Laura Panagis
Green pears, green moss, and green grasshoppers, surrounding the picnic, seems like a green face; green puke from green ice cream, as green leaves descend, and she grins ‘cause she guessed he ain’t like this green. Spending those green dollars on her green vegetables, green ways of living, the plastic can be recycled like all of her past ideas, her creativeness always hindered by her believing her green methods fail, so she just follows the prose; the green on the moldy bread, the green on the apple jacks, made her get 1% milk and green bowl to pour it in, grinning as last drop touched down like a snow day right before the time of the red and green lights.

But those greens she’ll have for dinner: broccoli, lettuce, celery, with asparagus, but only if she cooks it correctly; these greens require proper seasoning like Spring and Summer, where those greens can be breathed from a mile away.
i stand silently
while you compare the brands
of cheap cigarettes, a pack
clanched in each fist.

sinners and saints are
plagued with the same aches:
deficiency, doubt, and despair fill
the vacant voids within.

i am thinking of someone else
while your hands are on
my thighs, my neck, my back.

bloodshot, tired eyes mirror
the orange tints of the sunset,
earth's very own confliction between
heaven and hell.

i stay silent during the entire
car ride home, while your smoke
poisons my asthmatic lungs.
In Bloom
Rose Banks
People Become Poetry
Brooke Lehr

When you love them, that’s when it happens.
Their body is a map of their past
like old photographs buried in the back of their mother’s closet.
Their mind is a library full of books you long to read,
ink filled pages of history and heartache.
Their heart morphs you into a detective as you try to find the key to
inside where it is humble and warm.
Ink rapidly pours onto the paper
in loops and strands of cursive.
Ongoing sentences swirl through your mind
like a train ride you can’t bring yourself to jump off of.
You know exactly what is happening.
They found a way into your heart through ink blotted pages,
becoming a part of you,
simply because they are a part of your poetry.
This shallow water lies
Underneath my knees and oh, I find
The ripples scratching at a time
When I was cold, and didn’t know
That when we die, the silence cries.

I found my heart
In the story of the land like
Being born
In a small child’s hands, and
Even though
the road remained the same,
I was changed.

The words came from my mouth,
A weakness tied to a deeper sound
And I gave in to the scars
On my bones, and no, they won’t
Leave me blind to the light.

I found my heart
In the story of the land like
Reaching out
Where there’s no room to stand, and
Even now,
When there’s no other way,
I’m okay.
San Remo, Italy, even during the night, was pleasantly warm in the middle of August. Guests could hear the waves overlapping the rocks from the balcony of the San Remo Country Manor up the hill, where a party was being thrown in the honor of Dr. Justin Giampiccolo for winning the recent election.

“Did we really have to fly all the way from Scotland to attend this party?” Matilda Smith commented under her breath as she walked alongside her husband and partner, former detective Lance Smith. She was dressed in her finest satin dress and emerald earrings; a wedding present from her husband after finally getting married last Spring.

“Now, now Matilda, these are our friends,” Lance said cheerfully, plastering a smile on his face as they passed a group of gossiping politicians.

“Old clients are not friends,” Matilda said gently as they entered the San Remo Country Manor. She remembered the crimes that had been committed by these very politicians and how Matilda and her husband were hired out to make sure that their mercenaries had covered up any loose ends that the police could tie back to them. It was a room full of snakes, poised to attack each other at any minute.

Inside the foyer, Matilda and Lance were met by Mr. Barbone and Mrs. Radice, two old clients and the ones who had extended the invitation to the party to the Smiths.

“Ciao detective Lance, and Matilda looking beautiful as I last remember you,” Mr. Barbone was a gregarious man with a funny mustache and a charming personality.

“Former detective, if you please, Mr. Barbone,” Matilda said. “I’d hate for my husband to get it in his head that he may continue his investigations after we have agreed to retire.”

“My apologies Signora.”

“A wondrous occasion,” Lance commented, glancing about the room, recognizing faces. His eyes landed on the particularly rotund figure of Dr. Giampiccolo, who was standing by the buffet table hoarding sausages and accepting
the many praises that were coming his way.

“If by wondrous you mean dreadful,” Mrs. Radice chimed in with clear distaste. She fanned her long face with an exquisite paper fan and turned her nose away from the sight of the newly elected official. “He only won the election because of the influence of his uncle.”

“Did he really?” Lance said, feigning rapt interest. His charm and good nature were always what landed them jobs.

“It was Dr. Patricolo who should have won the election, everybody knows it!” Mrs. Radice said passionately, rolling her large brown eyes to the elegant ceiling in distress.

“Now, now Signora Radice, allentare. Relax.” Dr. Giorgio Patricolo was a tall, handsome man with shoulders always straight like a soldier’s.

“Mio Amico, it is true my friend!” Mr. Barbone chimed in, reaching over to shake Dr. Patricolo’s hand. “It should have been you. Dr. Giampiccolo, he is too egoista, too big-headed!”

Dr. Patricolo smiled at his friends’ appraisals but merely shook his head at their complaints of Dr. Giampiccolo. “If it should have been me, it would have been. Dr. Giampiccolo won the election. Everything will run its course the way it is supposed to in the end.”

“Always a good sport,” Mr. Barbone said proudly. “Ever since we were piccolo.”

“How long have you two been friends?” Matilda asks, eyeing the two of them.

Dr. Patricolo, with a winning smile and a generous laugh that was practiced and mastered by all the politicians in the room, said, “I stopped wetting the bed long before Barbone did.”

Matilda and Lance offered polite laughs before Lance held out his hand toward his wife. “A dance?”

Matilda gratefully allowed Lance to excuse them from the group and lead her towards the polished hardwood floor of the ballroom where many couples were beginning to dance the traditional waltz.
“He seems to be enjoying his new position,” Matilda said to her husband, catching sight of Dr. Giampiccolo as he disappeared up the grand staircase, following what could only be a hired prostitute.

“Why are you looking so gloomy?” Lance asked, ignoring her comment.

“You know I hate conversing with these people,” Matilda muttered under a convincing smile.

“These people helped pay for that pretty dress and those gorgeous earrings my dear,” Lance said back playfully, his eyes glancing around the room and admiring the amount of grandeur that it had to offer. Matilda noticed the familiar longing in her husband’s eyes as he took in the spectacular chandelier and famous paintings.

“I hope you’re not thinking of taking up any more jobs,” Matilda said with a hint of warning in her voice, her eyebrow lifting suspiciously. She knew her husband had a weakness for the lifestyles of the rich.

A loud thud sounded outside, followed by a collection of screams that interrupted Lance before he could reply. A large crowd rushed to see what had happened. Lance and Matilda forced their way to the front of the crowd.

A man with a large belly, expensive slacks around his ankles, exposed for the whole crowd to see, lay motionless before them. It was clear from his grand clothes and strong cologne that he was a politician at the party – the recently elected Dr. Giampiccolo. Matilda’s shocked expression turned into one of mild annoyance, while Lance looked positively joyful.

“I always knew you were psychic my love,” Lance said happily, turning to look up at the windows of the upper levels of the manor.

“Where did he fall from?” Matilda asked, trying to mask her disappointment. She knew her husband would jump on this investigation long before the police arrived to take control of the situation.

A woman with long brown hair in stunning ringlets and bare, tan shoulders stared down in horror at the scene below.
When Lance caught her eyes, she disappeared from the fifth floor window. Lance pointed up to where her face had just been.

“There,” he said before he rushed back inside and headed for the grand staircase that Dr. Giampiccolo had disappeared up a few minutes earlier. Matilda followed quickly at his heels.

By the time they reached the fifth floor, Lance and Matilda could hear the sounds of a woman crying, and followed the sounds to a cracked door at the far end of the hallway. Lance pushed the door open and stepped inside.

The prostitute Matilda had seen leading Dr. Giampiccolo away earlier was sitting on the love seat in the far corner of the room. Her brown, cotton dress had been pulled down around her stomach, exposing her naked upper half, though she seemed far too distressed to notice her appearance.

“What happened m’lady?” Lance asked.

“Dio mio! È morto!” The prostitute cried, pushing her face down into her hands.

Matilda approached the prostitute, sitting next to her on the loveseat and trying to calm her down. It was clear she did not speak English, so Lance turned his attention toward the room instead. A bottle of wine sat newly opened on the mahogany desk on the other side of the room, and a tipped glass lay on the floor by the window, a deep stain beginning to set in the carpet.

Lance walked over to the window and glanced down, spotting Dr. Giampiccolo’s body and the crowd that still remained around him. Someone had pulled his pants back up from around his ankles.

Footsteps sounded from the hallway before multiple guests, including Mr. Barbone and Mrs. Radice, entered the room, looking around as though expecting to catch the criminal still standing there.

A waiter with a stencil mustache, noticing the naked state of the prostitute, came forward and pulled a blanket from the back of the loveseat, wrapping it around her shoulders. The prostitute looked up at him and quickly pushed him away,
wrapping herself tightly in the blanket.

“She’s in shock,” Matilda said, noticing the startled expression on the prostitute’s and the waiter’s face. “We need to start interviewing people,” Matilda turned her attention towards her husband. “Before anyone can leave the party.”

“Il dottor Patricolo!” The prostitute suddenly exclaimed, looking with wide eyes at Matilda. “Patricolo!” she repeated just as eagerly.

Matilda and Lance shared a glance.

“I’ll need everyone to leave the room,” Lance said to the small group. He turned toward the waiter. “Fetch Patricolo, per favore.”

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Dr. Patricolo’s lanky figure arrived in the doorway in the next minute, rubbing his wet hands together and looking shaken. His tan face suddenly looked paler as he approached Lance and Matilda and sat himself down on the loveseat across from them.

“A tragic thing,” Dr. Patricolo spoke quietly, glancing at the opened window behind Lance’s head.

“You appear very disturbed,” Lance observed. “Care for a tonic?” He gestured towards the open wine bottle sitting on the desk.

“No, no,” Dr. Patricolo murmured, his face paling even more. “You don’t suppose,” he swallowed, “that it could have been me to have been attacked? If I had won the election?”

“I don’t believe so,” Lance said carefully, staring at Dr. Patricolor’s wet hands, which he dangled from his pointy kneecaps. They steadily dripped water onto the expensive carpet under their feet. “Where were you a few minutes ago, Doctor?”

Dr. Patricolo blinked slowly, but Lance could see his eyes shielding defensively. “I was in the restroom.”

“Can anybody confirm that you were?” Matilda asked conversationally, crossing her legs, as though they were discussing the warm sunshine earlier that day on the beach.
Dr. Patricolo’s face hardened and his jaw clenched. “I’m not aware if anyone watched me enter the restroom, Mrs. Smith. I don’t know how it is in Scotland, but generally, I don’t look over my shoulders when going to the restroom.”

Before Lance could say anything more, the stencil mustached waiter entered the room at a brisk walk, carrying a hand towel. He walked straight to Dr. Patricolo and handed it to him. Taking the towel to dry his hands, Dr. Patricolo jutted his chin at the waiter.

“He’ll have seen me! He’s the waiter that stands in the restroom and hands out mints and towels.”

Lance turned his attention toward the waiter, who began to head for the door again.

“Scusi, mi scusi,” Lance waved the waiter back into the room. “Was Dr. Patricolo in the restroom a few minutes ago?”

The waiter looked between Lance, Dr. Patricolo, and Matilda, a confused expression on his face.

“Non parlo Inglese, il signore,” the waiter wrung his white-gloved hands together, glancing around at their expectant faces.

“He doesn’t speak English, Mr. Smith.” Dr. Patricolo said with a little annoyance. “The help rarely do.” He turned his attention toward the waiter and asked in rapid Italian whether the waiter had witnessed him enter the restroom stalls a few minutes prior to the death of Dr. Giampiccolo.

The waiter hesitated a moment before he dropped his hands to his sides and nodded his head in final understanding. “Si, si Signore.”

“There, you see?” Dr. Patricolo said, looking triumphant. “I don’t harbor any ill feelings toward Dr. Giampiccolo. I told you that earlier!”

Lance and Matilda exchanged a look before they allowed the waiter and Dr. Patricolo to leave the room.

“Do you think we can rule him out completely?” Lance asked, as they followed Dr. Patricolo down the stairs to the ballroom, where everyone had been gathered when the police
arrived to ensure that no one would leave the party without being questioned.

“Everything will run its course the way it’s supposed to in the end,” Matilda said, quoting Dr. Patricolo. She watched as he approached Mr. Barbone and Mrs. Radice, talking in hurried whispers. He looked humiliated and annoyed by the stern set of his eyebrows and the red in his cheeks. Mrs. Radice waved a dismissive hand at him.

“Nobody is going to miss that buffoon! He wasn’t right for the position and everyone knows it. I’m not surprised someone has already done away with him.”

“Perhaps Mrs. Radice?” Lance suggested, looking to see what Matilda was concentrating on.

“Someone who has just murdered a man would not be boasting so loudly about how much she disliked him in front of a room full of people,” Matilda said.

A few police officers entered the ballroom, glancing around at the large crowd and instructing them in Italian that they will be conducting interviews of each person. Lance noticed the way Mr. Barbone switched his drink from one hand to the other, wiping his palm on his pant leg before adjusting his sleeves.

“Perhaps the only person you can count on to rid someone for you is a loyal friend.”

“Perhaps,” Matilda agreed.

They headed over to where Mr. Barbone, Mrs. Radice, and Dr. Patricolo were standing, eyeing the police officers as they went around the room writing down everyone’s name.

“Mr. Barbone, would you mind if we had a word?” Lance asked.

Mr. Barbone turned to look at the two of them, glancing them up and down as though they were suspicious characters before he smiled. “Of course, of course.”

They led Mr. Barbone away from the crowd in the ballroom to a far corner by an open window. The warm air filtered in from the outside.
“I regret saying so many bad things about Dr. Giampiccolo now,” Mr. Barbone said, chuckling nonchalantly as he switched his drink from one hand to the other.

“Why is that, Mr. Barbone?” Lance asked, plastering on a polite smile.

Mr. Barbone blinked blankly at Lance before he cleared his throat and tried again for a nonchalant tone. “Well, because of his awful fate, of course. A dreadful man he might have been, a nightmare really, he hardly deserved to fall to his death. And in such an indecent way.”

“Mrs. Radice doesn’t seem to mind,” Matilda said, eyeing the woman on the other side of the room, who was still trying to console Dr. Patricolo by scorning Dr. Giampiccolo even in his death.

Mr. Barbone chuckled easily. “Mrs. Radice is an extraordinary woman, but when she’s got an opinion about something, or someone, it’s hardly going to change.”

“Where were you and Mrs. Radice at the time of Dr. Giampiccolo’s murder?” Lance asked.

Mr. Barbone’s cheerful attitude faltered. “We were still in the foyer, talking to other guests.”

“Who were you talking to?”

“Dr. Giampiccolo’s brother, actually.”

Matilda and Lance both shared a surprised look.

“Dr. Giampiccolo has a brother?” Matilda asked. “Here?”

“Of course, he’s here. He’d never miss an opportunity to come and harass his brother about the privileges he’s rewarded with by being his uncle’s favorite.”

“He sounds bitter,” Lance said.

“You would be too. Dr. Giampiccolo’s uncle sent him to a private boarding school in London, and his brother went to work as a waiter for parties and events at twelve years old.”

“His uncle was very invested in him?”
Mr. Barbone glanced around them before he leaned closer and lowered his voice. “He was the only one who would. Their father was dead by the time they were old enough to walk, and their mother became a Signora della Notte.”

“A prostitute?” Matilda asked curiously.

“Si,” Mr. Barbone nodded.

Lance turned toward Matilda, lowering his voice so Mr. Barbone could hardly hear him. “We should talk to Dr. Giampiccolo’s brother.”

“We should talk to the prostitute again,” Matilda said, her eyes straying over to the prostitute who sat on the other side of the room in a tall-backed armchair.

“The prostitute? She can’t speak English.”

“But Mr. Barbone can,” Matilda said, turning to look back at Mr. Barbone. “Would you mind translating for us? We’d like to question the witness.”

A look of relief flashed across Mr. Barbone’s face before he nodded and flashed a smile. “Of course, Signora.”

Matilda led a confused looking Lance and Mr. Barbone across the room to the prostitute. The stencil mustached waiter was handing her a glass of water when they stopped in front of them. The waiter looked up at them approaching and turned to leave.

“Scusi,” Matilda addressed the waiter before he could disappear into the crowd. “Could you stay please?”

The waiter hesitated, trying to understand what she was asking of him. Matilda turned to look at Mr. Barbone.

“Could you ask her what happened before Dr. Giampiccolo fell out the window?”

Mr. Barbone turned toward the prostitute, questioning her in rapid Italian. She downed her water and eyed them all carefully before she took a shaky breath and began to explain slowly what happened. Mr. Barbone translated to Matilda and Lance.

“She says she was doing her job when Dr. Patricolo...
came running in, yelling about the election results. She says he grabbed Dr. Giampiccolo and punched him over and over. She said she screamed for him to stop but he wouldn’t listen. She says Dr. Patricolo hit him so hard that he stumbled back and fell out the window. After that, Dr. Patricolo ran away.”

Matilda stared at the prostitute while she spoke, watching her closely.

“That many punches and one strong enough to knock him out a window must have left a bruise,” Lance concluded. “I didn’t see a bruise on Dr. Patricolo’s hand when we interviewed him.”

“What hand did he punch with?” Matilda asked. Mr. Barbone quickly translated.

The prostitute looked between them all before she shrugged frantically. “Le manca.”

“The left,” Mr. Barbone said curiously. “It’s impossible,” he said suddenly, looking at Matilda and Lance. “Dr. Patricolo has just had surgery on his left wrist. He suffers from the tunnel carpale.”

“Carpal tunnel? It would be impossible to punch with a wrist that has just had surgery for carpal tunnel,” Lance said. The prostitute, noticing their conversation taking a turn, noticeably began to fidget in her seat. “R-Right!” She said suddenly, her eyes bulging. “Must have been right!”

“So you do speak English Signora,” Lance said with a voice of accusation and amusement.

“Are you sure it wasn’t your brother who attacked Dr. Giampiccolo?” Matilda asked.

The prostitute looked like she was drowning, her eyes bouncing frantically from one person to the next. Her hands shook in her lap and her lower lip began to quiver. The stencil mustached waiter, who had been standing off to the side quietly, suddenly turned to leave again but was stopped by the prostitute’s quick hands, who grabbed him by his sleeve and began pleading with him in rapid Italian.

“Ah! Stupido! Let go!” The waiter yelled, yanking his
sleeve out of her grasp, but before he could run for the crowd, Lance and Mr. Barbone grabbed him by his arms and pulled him back.

Lance reached for the waiter’s left hand and pulled off his white glove. On his tan knuckles, cleverly hidden under his glove, was a blossoming purple and blue bruise. Lance turned to his wife with admiration and pride shining in his eyes.

“A brother?” he says, sounding astonished. “How could you tell?”

Matilda smiled a little at her husband. “I first considered him when I saw them standing next to each other in the room upstairs after Dr. Giampiccolo had been pushed. Look. See, the similar slope of their noses and the small nature of their ears. Of course, I couldn’t just assume their relation simply on looks. Many people of the same nationalities share similar features. My first real clue was the hastiness in which he covered up his sister upon seeing her naked. With her profession, it’s not so surprising for her to be naked, and unless he had some sort of close relationship with her, why would he rush to cover the decency of an unknown prostitute?”

“He could be a good man,” the prostitute whispered harshly through her tears.

“Chiudi la bocca Maria!” The waiter spat harshly without looking at his sister. “Shut your mouth!”

“It’s unlikely,” Matilda continued, ignoring the outburst. “After I started suspecting him, I began to think about his location during Dr. Giampiccolo’s assault. He said he had seen Dr. Patricolo enter the restroom, but if he had remained at his post during the time of the assault, why did Dr. Patricolo exit the restroom with wet hands? There was no one there to give him a towel. When Mr. Barbone mentioned the idea of family, a brother to be more precise, it finally clicked. I became sure of my suspicion when she gave up a very important piece of information. The bruising. The waiters are the only ones who could have hidden a bruise on their knuckles under their gloves.”

“He was touching my sister! Il Porco!” The waiter interrupted, pulling against Lance and Dr. Patricolo.

“Your sister chose her profession,” Matilda said, crossing
her arms. “Dr. Giampiccolo was a client. Whether you agree with what he was doing or not, murdering him was not the answer.”

***

The police, after Mr. Barbone explained who Lance and Matilda were and what they had found out, confined the waiter in handcuffs and took him away. The rest of the guests were allowed to leave.

Lance and Matilda were by the front door when Dr. Patricolo, Mrs. Radice, and Mr. Barbone approached them.

“We can’t thank you enough for your work,” Dr. Patricolo said, holding out his hand.

Lance shook his hand happily. “Hope there are no hard feelings for our suspicions Dr. Patricolo.”

“None at all, detective.”

“Former detective,” Matilda said, stepping forward and looping her arm around her husband’s.

“Ah yes,” Dr. Patricolo said, a humorous glint in his eyes. “A former detective will not be needing payment then, yes?”

An annoyed look flashed across Lance’s face, but one look at Matilda forced him to tighten his lips and nod his head.

“No payment required,” he said stiffly. “It was all in a day’s work. For old times’ sake.”

Matilda smiled at her husband. “Let’s go home, darling.”
Untitled
Laura Panagis
Red String Bracelet
Christina Bandru

She looks in the mirror and pokes at her wrist. The red string bracelet hangs looser than it did last week. That’s good though; it means she’s doing something right.

She looks at the carpet and lets a tear fall. She knows the progress means absolutely nothing because she’s not perfect, not even close.

She looks back at the mirror. She screams but no sound comes out. The red string bracelet starts to cling to her as tightly as the fixed noose around her mind.

She’s not perfect, not even close.
INT. HOUSE - BASEMENT- NIGHT

Moonlight shines through a tiny window. Junk lays in the corners of the room. A dark set of stairs going upstairs are against a wall.

GERARD

A well-dressed thirty year old man is covered in blood. Gerard sits on the floor in a puddle of blood. His eyes clamp tight and his body trembles.

He slowly pulls a knife out of his leg.

Gerard throws the bloody KNIFE across the room, and he takes a deep breath. His body shudders and his head falls into his bloody hands, and his tears stream down his face.

Gerard whimpers and tries to stand. He grunts as he rises to his feet, only to fall back down.

He crawls to the stair banister and uses it as a crutch to pull himself up. He looks at the ground to see a PUDDLE OF BLOOD.

He takes a step forward and stumbles away from the banister only to fall to the ground. He looks up at the ceiling and wipes tears from his face.

Police SIRENS blares from the outside. Gerard sees red and blue lights from the outside.

Gerard pushes himself up, but he fell back down. He hears adoor BANG open.

INT. HOUSE- KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS
OFFICER DANIELLE SANTIAGE
A tall, forty year old woman.

OFFICER MURPHY BROWN
A nervous, twenty six year old man.

Both officers look around the bland kitchen. Both officers draw their guns and move forward.

Danielle glances at Murphy. She points at herself and points at the ceiling. Murphy nods.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The living room is a mess. A coffee table is flipped over, furniture ripped, and a broken lamp lies on the floor.

In the corner of the room are stairs leading upstairs.

Pictures covered the walls. The pictures shows Gerard and TABATHA (30). One picture shows Gerard in a suit and Tabatha in a wedding dress.

Danielle walks over to the pictures and looks at them.

INT. HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Gerard crawls to the stairs to the cellar door. He reaches them and smiles. He begins to lift himself up each step.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Murphy looks down at the BLOOD DROPLETS on the floor. The blood leads to an open door. The door goes to the basement. He looks down the steps.

INT. HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Danielle looks inside to see ROBERT (30), His head is a pulp, and his blood everywhere.

Danielle looks at the scene and holds her hand to her mouth. She looks away.
A baby’s CRY echoes from another room.

**EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

A cellar door opens and Gerard crawls out onto the grass.

**INT. HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BABY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Danielle stands over SERENE (1), a crying baby girl in a baby crib beside a window.

Danielle sees something moving outside, and she looks outside to see...

**EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Gerard crawls across the grass towards his car.

**INT. HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BABY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Danielle runs out of the room.

**INT. HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Murphy shakes as he finds Tabatha’s lifeless body slumped over the banister, and her skull is bashed in.

A shotgun lays on the steps below her and a blood trail leads down the rest of the steps.

Murphy hears Danielle run across the house above him. He looks back up the stairs, and he watches Danielle run past the door.

**EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Danielle charges at Gerard who reaches his car. Danielle throws Gerard to the ground, and she grabs her HANDCUFFS and cuffs him.

**NEIGHBOR**

A forty year old woman watches the scene from her window.
Danielle pulls Gerard to his feet, and she brings him to the cop car. Danielle opens the door and places Gerard inside the car. Danielle slams the car door and turns around.

Murphy walks outside, and his head hangs low. He looks up at Danielle and shakes his head.

A baby’s CRY came from inside the house.
Untitled
Nicholas Nicosia
Saturday Night Live
Eric Adsit

One two three...
four and one more.
shots shoot, skin shudders.
It's cold outside but I'm burning up.
Drinking drugs drag me down Drives
to be me, and free.
Past tree names on street
signs and blurry lines.
Wide open doors and
backlit tapestry windows peer
down
at drunk dumb faces
and I, eyes maybe
Bleeding or maybe weeping,
Or blinking away
enter... duck and breathe
in the sweat. Alcohol
pouring out of pores.
The smell of vomit and stale beer
and sex on washing machines
I was homeschooled until the 8th grade. My mother made this decision partly because she grew up in England and did not know very much about academic institutions in the United States when she moved here with my father. Thus, she took it upon herself, and her degree in education, to become my own personal teacher, along with my two siblings. This was a time in my life that I will never forget, as I was able to experience considerably more in a varied and unique way, than what the average scholastic textbook would have offered. Many hours of my elementary school education was spent outside the regular schoolroom, enjoying what the outside world had to offer and teach me. I was also able to explore my personal interests and take advantage of real life experiences that my mother believed to be educational experiences that would prepare me for the real world.

One of my personal interests is food. I love everything to do with food except for making it. I have come to understand this about myself through an experience I had while working at my father’s café.

My father is a successful entrepreneur whose primary business is a company that deals with researching into the value and effectiveness of pharmaceuticals. This is something I know nothing about, but I do understand that he is a very intelligent man who loves his children and wants them to love what they do, just like he does. He has many interests and one of these led him to acquire a coffee shop in the same location as his main business when it became available. He had always been intrigued by the food service industry. So, he made the purchase of a small coffee shop that includes, one counter with just enough space behind it for two people, a large espresso machine from Italy, cabinets filled with fruit salad and yogurt, refrigerators for cold cuts, and large assortments of pastries.

Unlike my dad, I’ve never known what I wanted to do with my life. Although I always wanted to be one of those kids that knew exactly what she wanted to do when she grew up, I just wasn’t. I came to terms with this, but my parents did not. So, they decided to do everything in their power to try and
change that.

Homeschooling did not require a structured schedule of classes. So, as long as I finished the work that I was assigned during the day, I was able to do many other spontaneous activities. This resulted in my parents scooping us kids off at any given moment to go road tripping, or tag along on one of my father’s many business trips if we wanted to. I loved this, as I was able to see so much more of the world, which opened my eyes to different cultures and lifestyles. As I reflect on that time in my life, I realize that it was a much more effective way of teaching than sitting in a classroom while listening to a tired and overwhelmed teacher yell at me for failing to pass a test. My mother would bring us to see exhibitions at museums instead of history class, and other times we would dress up in outlandish garments while making huge feasts as we learned about the medieval times.

Homeschooling also gave my parents multiple opportunities to show me all of the jobs and careers out there so I could find something that interested me. Throughout my childhood, they constantly volunteered my brother and I in order to give us as much experience with different lifestyles as possible. At the age of eleven they decided to drop us off at a farm in upstate New York to work for a few weeks. That experience still scars me to this day. We had to wake up at the crack of dawn every morning to manually churn this large tub of manure, and then proceed to fling it all over the miles of land that the farmer owned. Then in the evenings, we would be expected to sing all of these church songs, which honestly felt like a form of torture. This was the only time in my life that I have ever seen my brother cry. A few brutal days later I remember convincing someone to let me call my mother because I was so homesick. Then, once I was far enough away and out of earshot from anyone I announced to her that if she didn’t come bring us home as soon as possible I would run away and she would never see me again.

On a more positive note, my father took me to his office on multiple occasions. He works with a hand-picked team of extremely intelligent people who have Masters’ degrees and PhDs from Ivy Leagues, so this only furthered my belief that I would never be intelligent enough to be a scientist. They expected me to do some kind of scientific analysis on a new
research they had just begun to conduct. I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. It made my head hurt, and my heart sink. Then lastly, when I was thirteen, my mother suggested that I spend a day working at my father’s little café in Hoboken, New Jersey.

This idea interested me the most, as my mother told me stories of her working in sweet little tea shops in London when she was growing up and having these daily interesting exchanges with people. I was also obsessed with the fact that she grew up there. So, at the age of 13, with high school, and “the rest of my life” my mother would say, right around the corner, I immediately agreed and eagerly waited for the day that I got to work at my father’s café.

The morning of, I got up excessively early to get ready, as I was too excited to sleep any longer. I was in the stage of my life where I loved wasting hours analyzing myself in the mirror and putting on unnecessary amounts of makeup. This seems ridiculous to me now, as I hardly remember to brush my hair in the morning these days. Anyway, I eventually pulled my hair back in an extremely tight ponytail, and put on the uniform collared shirt that was given to me. I was told that I would be working with this woman named Val, who would most likely call me “Mami” and give me coffee orders all day. I was ok with this, as I was only really concerned with how I was going to greet my customers when they entered the shop. However, that turned out to be the least of my worries.

When we arrived at my destination, my father dropped me off, saying he was “late for a meeting,” or something annoying like that, so I hopped out of the car and I strutted into the large office building with the utmost confidence. The large glass revolving doors seemed to be inviting me in. I saw Val right away, as the shop was right by the entrance, and I hurried round back behind the counter to greet her and get down to business. She hurled herself at me with a huge bear hug at the ready, as though we were old friends. We talked about her customers that come in and order “the usual” at the same time every day, and we laughed about my crappy Spanish compared to her flawlessly fluent native tongue. Then she showed me the ropes, how to make various types of coffees, and taught me how to work the cash register. She also told me to make myself comfortable and that today would be busy since it was
Monday. That made a little bit nervous. However, I also knew that I could always ask Val if I had any questions, so I wouldn’t get myself into too much trouble. This is where I couldn’t have been more wrong.

I don’t think that I had been there for an hour when she approached me with this ridiculously over exaggerated puppy-dog face. She expressed to me with her utmost sorrow that she had just gotten a call about a family emergency and had to leave right away. I thought she was joking, as she appeared to be such an amusing woman just a few minutes ago. I was also really disappointed about the fact that we weren’t going to get to know each other all day since she seemed really interesting and funny. So I waited, with a blank expression on my face, for her to start laughing and tell me she was kidding. She did not, and sure enough five minutes later I found myself standing behind the cash register with a growing line of customers in front of me.

So many emotions rushed through me in that moment, but I was mostly horrified. Me, a thirteen-year-old, having full responsibility for an entire café. There is absolutely no way that could have been legal. But nevertheless there I was, standing on my own in my collared shirt and black apron just as the lunch rush began.

I remember looking down at one point in the day at the rubber floor mat underneath me, and noticing that it had turned my green vans into trash from darting around and fetching various items for the customers all day. I had sweat above my brow, and my feet ached from standing. My fingers were also burnt to a crisp from carelessly retrieving toast from the oven without any protection. There was an annoyingly loud buzz from the refrigerator and occasional crash of ice coming from the freezer. Also, I wasn’t able to change the music, as it was a fiddly dial and I really didn’t have time, so I was stuck listening to coffee shop radio, which made me want to casually smash my head against a wall. The agitated tapping of feet coming from the customers was rubbing off on me. This was slowly turning into the worst day ever, so I decided to take my sweet time making their food.

The aromas in there consisted of burnt eggs and lots of smelly cold cuts. Not a very appealing combination. The
egg scenario was completely my fault too, as I kept forgetting about them until I would notice the room getting dangerously smoky. I would have to stand up on this incredibly shaky, ancient stool and use a newspaper to fan the smoke away from the alarm. I probably looked absolutely ridiculous but I wasn’t about to have the fire alarm go off on me. That would have been much more embarrassing, not to mention the intense lecture my father would have waiting for me when we drove home later. The smoke in that little room could have resulted in multiple fires, but I eventually figured it out and started setting timers to remind myself. Another problem was that I was also a vegetarian at the time, and found all kinds of meat to be absolutely repulsive, so making numerous, enormous sandwiches for meat-lovers was pretty nauseating.

The nadir of my day must have been having this wildly overweight man approach the counter and request a sandwich that wasn’t even on the menu. The worst part was that he wanted it to be a triple-decker sandwich, which meant twice the cold cuts and three slices of bread. He also asked for me to throw a sunny side up egg in there. The idea of it made me want to dry heave. I wanted to ask him if this looked like a McDonalds to him but thought that it would probably be better for me to hold my tongue.

Anyway, making this sandwich almost killed me. I had absolutely no idea what I was doing, and wanted nothing to do with it whatsoever. If there was a certain way I was supposed to orientate the cold cuts and vegetables in order to make them look appetizing, I didn’t do it. However, I decided I should start with putting on the condiments, which I forgot to inquire about, so I made the game time decision to smother it in mayo. He was also watching me the entire time, so I was under pressure and extremely stressed out. This is never a good combination for me, as my whole body gets uncomfortably clammy while my face turns the color of a tomato. It’s very attractive, really. So, needless to say I got all frazzled and accidentally dropped a bunch of lettuce on the floor. I then proceeded to pick it up while still wearing the gloves that I had on during the construction of this poor man’s sandwich. Definitely a number one sanitation don’t right there. Then I added his requested combinations of protein, carbs, and dairy substances, which made me feel sick and wrapped it up in a
fresh piece of foil.

The end result was truly something scary. The bread was all soggy and floppy, so it didn’t rest like normal sandwiches do, but I guess this wasn’t a normal sandwich. Also, once I cut the sandwich in half the egg yolk exploded everywhere. It made the sandwich look diseased. If I were him, I would have just thrown it out and ordered a Chinese takeout.

After he paid, he walked away looking extremely disappointed and revolted while muttering something like, “umm, yeah, thanks,” I wasn’t sure if he was more grossed out with what I had given or him of if it was just my presence in general at that point. I was furious and exhausted and verging on tears. So, I decided that he was going to be my last customer of the day. I closed the shop and sat on the dirty floor mat, which at that point was covered in food and drinks, and cried my eyes out.

My father picked me up at the end of the day and I told him about what had happened.

“Good God! Why didn’t you call me right away?” he exclaimed.

I was reluctant to explain to him that I failed at my task, because all I really wanted to do was show him that I can be a hard worker and ultimately make him proud of me. He is so successful and I look up to him in so many ways, that I would be broken if he saw me as the disappointment of his three children.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t want to bother you. I thought you might be upset with me, and think that I wasn’t taking it seriously,” I confessed.

This is something that I’m still working really hard at, as he is indeed always telling me to be more serious like my siblings. I have always been the one that laughs too loud in the car, which results in him yelling at me, and am certainly the quickest to make his blood boil. However, I find it tough comparing myself to them because I know that I will never be as intelligent, or have straight A’s and my life figured out like they do. My older sister has her Masters in Social Work from NYU and my brother studies Pre-med at Fordham University, and is on the Dean’s List, and meanwhile I’m struggling to pass all my classes. However, although I’m working hard to try to be
more like them, I know that I need to develop my own inner strengths, because I can’t change who I am. I’m just hoping that my father accepts me, and loves me for the way I am.

Once I spilled to him all that had occurred during the day, and expressed my frustration and despair at how it had all turned out, there was a moments silence as he was taking it all in and my heart sank. I was as ready as I’d ever be for his wrath. However, he looked at me with those same kind, large brown eyes that I’ve inherited, and in that moment, I knew everything would be OK.

“Listen Bells, this wasn’t your fault, don’t be sad. Val should not have left you in the lurch, but things like this do happen in the food service industry and you just have to be on your toes.”

I was so surprised that I almost choked on my tongue and died. I was ready for a personal Bella Roast, but he was utterly sympathetic. I had forgotten that all of this was really Val’s fault, but I completely put it on myself. All this time I should have reminded myself that Val had also bailed on me. Also, this made me realize that him and my mother will love me unconditionally, and always be there for me, regardless of how many times I screw up. I may fail many more times than I succeed, but if I work hard, and try my absolute best, that’s all that matters. Also, although this situation made me realize what I did not want to do in the future, it was great experimental learning.
Untitled
Laura Panagis
Dear Whisperers
David G. Manke

I heard you the first time;
incompetent, naïve.
This place that you hush about;
how is it that I am all over it?
I retort your claims
with a scream
across the mountains,
past the sea.
Ye of little faith!
I am myself!
I am me!
Though volume shares
no discourse.
Sincerely,
The Whispers
I heard my phone buzzing and opened my eyes. I never got calls from that part of town. Usually it's around the bars, picking up the patrons who've poisoned themselves too much. The ones who stumble into my car with a crooked smile on their face, the ones whose gleeful grins betrayed the hurt in their hearts; they're the ones who I preferred. They needed the ride home.

I was surprised to see that I was being requested to pick up someone from Lethe. I thought it might have been a glitch in the system, but I checked with my boss and he confirmed that I had a passenger waiting for me there. While I was still in the city, I downloaded the map for that area on my phone. Lethe was a ghost town, a long forgotten, deserted piece of history, lost in the grainy sands of time, alive only in the memories of those who used to live there a century ago. I remembered my father showing me an article in the paper that said that the nuclear meltdown of the plant in Lethe killed more than half of the townspeople. The rest of them evacuated, fearing the residual effects of radiation. I was reassured by my boss that the area has long since been cleared of radiation, and he encouraged me to just go and pick up my passenger. I couldn’t help but feel a twinge of nervousness, but nonetheless, I buckled up and drove to Lethe.

My silver ring glinted slightly in the darkness of the car, reflecting the light from the moon and the stars outside, winking at me like the way she used to with those blue-gray eyes. I didn’t mean to think about her that night; she just happened to float into my mind as I was cruising down the lonely desert highway. The spinning tires kicked up pebbles and sand into the air; the chilling desert winds whipped up the earth’s debris and formed her elegant silhouette in the air around me. It’s been a while since I last saw her, and it was nice to see her in my mind’s eye, a glowing saint of beautiful sorrow. She was calling for me, beckoning for me to come find her, hold her, whisper into her ear, just one last time. Just one more time.

I pulled into the town of Lethe and slowly drove down the road, looking at the remnants of the lives that were left
behind. The drug store sign was hanging at an angle, the windows of the clothing store remained shattered, the shards of glass still spilt all over the ground. The decrepit police station no longer held any prisoners but those who were unable to break free from the shackles of memory that held them captive. I passed by Lethe Elementary School, where the children used to learn and play. I saw their shadows dancing on the moonlit ground, fully alive and jubilant. Lethe wasn’t a lonely town; rather, it was alive with the ghosts of the people who used to be, who were walking around in the full emptiness of the town’s dusty memory.

I checked my phone again and saw that I was approaching the coordinates of my passenger. I wasn’t sure at first what it was, but as I drew closer, I felt the familiar sense of dread that you experienced not when you were coming across something unknown, but when you were coming back to something that you used to know. It was Lethe Cemetery, that massive labyrinthine complex filled to the brim with the wandering spirits of the underworld. I’d been here once before back when I was just a kid so I could meet some ghosts; I did, but they weren’t what I was expecting them to be. Most of them were sad, unfulfilled souls.

I drove into the cemetery road, looking at the rows of somber blue faces that stared down into the ground as I passed them by. Mothers and fathers hung their heads in shame and guilt; even the children looked down and away from me, refusing to make eye contact. The moon shone down on all of those sad spirits, filling them with its light. At the end of the road, I came across the marble mausoleum of Lethe’s patriarchal muse: Orpheus. The pallid bust of Orpheus gazed down at me from atop the tomb, those melancholic eyes met mine and set fire to the spiritual torch within me.

I saw her inside that temple of death. She looked the same, even after all these years. Time hadn’t left its ravaging mark on her body; she looked as beautiful as she did on our wedding day. As she walked out of the mausoleum, I could see how finely her youth had been preserved over the past seventy years. Her hair was still that vibrant, golden shade of beach sand, though not as rough or coarse, no, never. There wasn’t a single wrinkle on her face, I’d always told her she’d get lines from smiling so much, but they never really stuck. She looked into my eyes and I into hers, and saw the calm, bright, and
soothing light within those blue-gray eyes. And here she was, in a garishly plain white dress, standing in front of me, as if she never died.

“You’re late,” she said, smiling.

“Sorry,” I barely uttered.

“Let’s go home,” she said, still smiling.

“Let’s go home,” I repeated, my eyes fixated on her elegant stride and figure.

She walked behind the car, and I heard her open the door and sit down on the leather seat. I heard her buckle up her seatbelt and hum that little melody that she used to hum all the time. I started the car and began to drive out of the cemetery. The wheels rolled easily along the dirt path, whipping up a dusty whirlwind that softly beat against the windows. The moon disappeared behind the clouds, and the moonlight stopped beaming down to the cemetery. I saw the heads of all the people slowly lift and turn to look at me. I felt them all staring intensely at me, burning those pitch-black coals of eyes into me. Those eyes followed me as I drove down the road, searing the pain and sorrow of a life left lost and unlived to the fullest into my still beating heart.

As I hastily and quietly made my way out, I realized that I stopped hearing her hum that song that she used to hum. I reached the entrance of the cemetery, but I couldn't leave yet. I felt something went wrong. Something happened to her. I could feel it. I needed to see, to make sure that she was still there. I steeled myself to turn around and face her. My head slowly twisted to the side, my eyes straining to catch just a glimpse of something in their peripheries, anything to let me know that she was still with me. In the cacophonous silence of the night whose moon was shrouded by the clouds of darkness, I heard the ancient, rusty gears of my vertebrae creaking and groaning, pounding and beating in my eardrums, and finally I turned around to face my fears.

My eyes met hers, but they weren’t the blue-gray eyes that I remember. They were as pitch-black as oblivion, empty and lifeless as the void. They stared into me, wide and unbearably open, threatening to swallow me whole. She smiled, but it wasn’t the smile that made you feel like everything was
going to be alright. It was a defeated, accepting, and tired smile. The moon came out from behind the clouds, once again shining its bright light onto the graveyard. The men and women and children closed their black eyes, and crumbled into ashes and dust. The moonlight shone down on her, and for a split-second in frozen time, she looked regal, stunning, radiant basking in the light of the moon. Her skin glowed vividly under the pale moon, and she was alive. Then her face began to crack. Those lines that I always said she’d get from smiling so much started to appear. A piece of her fell off and crumbled into dust. She reached out a hand to me, but it broke off, and shattered on the floor. She gave me one last look that said: “I’m sorry,” and when she closed those sad black eyes for the last time, she faded into nothing.

Despondent and despairing, I turned my head back around to the front, and gripped the wheel hard. I’ve lost you again. You weren’t meant to be found, and I wasn’t meant to look for you. I shut my eyes, stepped on the gas, and accelerated. I rolled the windows down, and heard the wind howl and scream with the cries of a thousand burning souls. The engine roared with the fury of the departed and the tires screeched with the grief of the bereaved. I became lost in the sound of suffering, and in the blinding darkness of Lethe’s moonlit cemetery, I disappeared into the abyss of memory.

* 

I heard my phone buzzing and opened my eyes. I was surprised to see that I was being requested to pick up someone from Lethe.
Majestic Beast
Dori Gronich
Scott
Nicole Powers

You cannot be a daddy’s girl
If your father decided to leave.
He did not tell me
I was beautiful.
He did not threaten high school boyfriends,
He did not twirl me around
In a fluffy princess dress,
Or teach me to dance.
He turned on the football game,
Gave me one good look,
And shook his head in disappointment.
The swing set swung back and forth as Meredith pumped and released her tiny legs, the hot July sun’s rays splashing on her from above. Her mother, Joy, sat on a bench beside the swing set, a phone to her ear and a scowl on her face. Ahead of them was a fence which separated them from the dangers of the crosswalk and the road.

“Big, fat, looks like a hobo dressed as an apple, whatever your heart desires! Just put it in the report, Christine. He needs to be found. Now,” Joy demanded.

“Mommy, Mommy, look!” Meredith said as she swung higher and higher into the air. Her mother turned away from her and rolled her eyes.

“Not now, Meredith. Mommy’s busy… What? … Not you, Christine. I was talking to my daughter… Yup, she’s five now… Yeah, she’s getting old, I know… No, not too old for him, and that’s why you need to report him, now.”

Meredith grunted and stopped pumping her legs. She looked around the park as the swing squeaked and squealed and came to a stop. They were the only ones here. No one was on the jungle gym, no one on the slides, there weren’t even any kids rushing to the porta potties. It was only them. While everyone else was out vacationing or at summer camp, she was here with her mother who didn’t even want to watch her swing.

Meredith looked straight ahead and over the fence. There was a man there now, and the sight of him made her smile.

“Mommy, look!”

Joy turned away from her and covered her phone with the other hand. “Mommy’s busy, Merry. Just, shh.”

Meredith smiled at the man across from them, and he smiled back at her. It was him. Her mother had always told her that he was a big man who wore an even bigger red jacket. He even looked jolly, his cheeks red like Meredith heard they would be. He wasn’t perfect, though. His beard was greyer than
she heard it was, and she didn’t see a sleigh in sight. But that didn’t matter to her. He came early this year.

The jolly man waved at her, and she waved back. Her mother didn’t see. Meredith was sure she wouldn’t have cared anyway. She was always on the phone or at work.

“No, Christine. It’s not that hard. I don’t want to have to come down to the office just to do this because you’re too incompetent!”

The jolly man motioned for Meredith to come to him, his arms hung over the fence and his stomach bulged against it.

Meredith pointed at him.

“Mommy! Santa!”

“Honey, it’s July. Santa doesn’t come until December... No, Christine, I’m not talking to you, just... hold on a second.” Joy put her phone to her chest and looked at Meredith. “Mommy will be right back. I just need some silence so that I can talk to Christine.”

Joy rose from her seat and walked away, her phone back to her ear. She stood beside the slide a few feet from the bench, her body away from Meredith and the man.

The man motioned for Meredith to come to him again, a smile on his face. Meredith looked back at her mother. She wanted her mother to see him, to see that he came in July, but she knew her mother wouldn’t care. She doubted that her mother would even budge if Meredith were in real danger.

She turned back to the jolly man and smiled. At least he would give her presents.

She rose from the swing and walked to him. She could hear her mother yelling at Christine in the background, but the jolly man was all that mattered.

“Come here, little girl. What’s your name?” he asked her in a soft and quiet voice once she reached the fence.

“Merry.” She smiled. “Why are you here now? It’s so early.”

The jolly man’s face twisted with confusion. “What do
you mean? I was just walking by and I saw you. I wanted to say hi and offer you some–”

“Presents?” she asked.

The man chuckled, smiled, and nodded. “Yes, how’d you know?”

“Where’s your sleigh?”

“My sleigh?” the man asked.

“Yeah. Your sleigh and your reindeer?”

The man stared at her for a second then looked down at his attire. His eyes opened wide and he understood. “Oh! Yes! They’re right around the corner. Did you want me to show you them?”

Meredith smiled. “I wanna see.”

He reached down to pick her up. “Then come with me. I’ll show you.”

Meredith turned back to look at her mother, still consumed with phone call and yelling at Christine. “What about my mommy?” Meredith asked. She turned back to him.

The jolly man was casting a smile on her. For the first time, she noticed that he was missing several of his teeth. “We’ll be right back. Don’t worry about her.”

“But…”

The man reached even more over the fence to try to grab her, his stomach contorting the fence, yet he missed. His stomach was too big and blocked his path.

Meredith stared the man in his eyes. “I don’t want to leave my mommy.”

“But I have presents,” he said. “And you can see my reindeer and my sleigh... and my elves.”

Her eyes widened. “Elves?”

“Yes. I’ll show them all to you. Just come with me. I promise, we’ll be right back. Your mommy won’t even know you’re gone.”
She looked back at her mother and felt that the jolly
man’s words were right. Her mother wouldn’t even care if she
was gone. She turned back to the man who looked upon her
with grey eyes.

“You want to be a good girl, don’t you?” he said. “Of all
people, don’t you want to be nice to dear old me?”

And she did. Oh, she did. After all her parents taught
her, she didn’t want to be on his naughty list. She reached up to
him, and he grabbed her by the waist. He hoisted her over the
fence and placed her next to him. Hand in hand, they walked
back around the corner back the way he said he came.

Joy hadn’t known that Christmas could come so early.
On the Rise
Annie Nicole Woods
Dust on the Ground
Sarah Ohlhorst

i bear your disappointment like a cross,
but God can't save me this time.
each day weighs heavier on my shoulders
than the next. i told you i was drowning
and you sighed, sadly. we all are.

there are remnants of you still under
my fingernails and behind my knees.
i cried that day, when i gave you my
favorite book with margins covered
in messy blue-inked annotations.
you didn't read it.

we both feel too much, too strongly.
our sensitivity is all that we cling to,
helpless souls with empty, unknown bodies.
i cannot get up from the failure pinning me
to the floor, like dust on the ground.
i have been trying for the past twelve months and
everything has changed but nothing is different.
i am still drowning. we all are.
Hot. So hot. The tiny window facing the dumpster, full of rotting garbage on a summer day, is closed shut. The white blinds are pulled up, letting in the blinding sunshine. An invisible warm hand is clamped over my nose and mouth. I can’t breathe. I need to get out.

It’s the pits of Hell. Hades himself stands in the corner, sitting atop the bare mattress pad. He grins devilishly. His mouth full of sparkling white teeth, blinding me with sickly sweet promises. They’re empty. He’ll never fulfill them. He raises his garish, red right hand, burnt from boiling temperatures. His fingers are a jumble of knots. His joints bulbous. Slowly he waves them at me as if to say, “Welcome to your hell.”

I turn to the faces of my family. They’re sardines packed in a tin can left out in the sun for too long. Am I the only one that sees him? Their blank expressions show no signs they see the giant with horns in the corner.

My heart races and the warm hand tightens, completely cutting off my airwaves. A second hand grabs onto my throat. Its skin is dry and scaly, like the cracked ground of the Sahara Desert. I need to get out. I hate this place. Get me out of here.

“So this is where you’ll be staying for the next year, huh?” my father asks.

“Oh yes, she’ll be safe here with me,” Hades cackles. His voice is deep and endless. A black hole, sucking the life out of me. Stealing my happiness. “Welcome home.”

He extends his tree trunk arms, that have black, rotting flesh spots, to showcase my jail cell. My prison for five days out of the week. This isn’t my home. Far from it.

Double sets of fake wooden desks, drawers, and beds, in that order, are the only things in the room. They are bare. Void of any life. Dead. Carcasses picked of their flesh by the vultures, hyenas, and stray animals. Stripped skeletons, bleached by the sun. A dull brown that was once vibrant and full of life, now aged from violent wear and tear of college students.
The skeletons take up half the room. I stand in the only strip of free space in the jail cell. The walls, an off-egg shell white, creep in closer. They are the predator and I am the prey. Hades gets closer and closer. His hot breath tickles the escaped fine blonde baby hair of my ponytail. Sweat trickles down my back. His rough, forked tongue darts out to lick up the droplets. I shiver in disgust. Bile forms in the back of throat.

I close my eyes to escape. I welcome the darkness like a close friend. When I open them the walls are back to where they should be, but Hades now stands in front of me. His eyes the first thing I see. The pupils are black voids. Huge, like saucers. I blink and they are changed. Now they are cat-like as if he is a lion. His eye color is yellow. The color of urine left in the toilet bowl for a day. Vomit green speckles are splattered throughout.

“This place doesn’t look so bad,” my father says. “Hey, it’s your home away from home.”

No, it’s not. This is not my home.

“Yes, it’s your home away from home,” Hades says. His voice is a crack of thunder and lightning. “Welcome to college.”
Rise
Nicole Hube

it’s amazing
what a pair of heels
can do for a woman.

red lips now speak louder
and shatter glass ceilings;
a word can bring the world to its knees.

it’s amazing
what a mirror
can do to a woman;

her smile fades.
her radiance eclipsed by blackness.

wasted warrior,
sunken savior,

every wall set before you
was meant to crumble
so your stilettos could crush
your doubts into dust
with every step.

it’s amazing
what a woman
can do to a mirror;
give it the authority to interrupt
and trace every scar back to its origin
until it bleeds again;

give it the authority to tie
a noose of white men’s hands
around her neck
to silence her.

i paint my lips the color of war.
i cut my hair short
yet i can feel every strand
lift with the wind.

i shatter my mirror every morning
with a fist of iron.

and then?

i rise.
All About Balance
Deanna Newman

Down They Go
Deanna Newman
FADE IN:

EXT. POND - EVENING

ANTOINETTE (19), dressed in a ratty old band sweatshirt and jeans, looks over Central Park. Her hands are gripping the railing.

ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
Death was never something I feared. How could I? It had been with me since I was born.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. OLD MANSION BALLROOM - NIGHT (FOURTEEN YEARS EARLIER)

YOUNG ANTOINETTE (5), dressed in typical young girl apparel. She holds a small doll in her hand as she looks around the ballroom. Her hands graze over a large and ornate fireplace.

ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
While other girls were playing with their dolls in their small little doll houses, I was playing with them in old decrepit houses.

Young Antoinette continues to play with her doll, laughing and spinning around with the cloth doll. Suddenly, she stops as if she felt something. She looks around, trying to see if anyone has entered.

Young Antoinette hears the CREAKS that old houses tend to make. She begins to become frightened, backing up against the wall. Her small hands grip the doll and she closes her eyes tightly. The CREAKS and FOOTSTEPS only become louder until GEORGE (24) and ARIA (23), her parents, come walking into the ballroom followed by a CAMERA BOY (early 20s). Young Antoinette lets out a sigh of relief as she walks over to her mom and
dad, allowing them to feature her in front of the camera.

ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
Being raised by ghost hunters wasn’t the ideal American upbringing, but they were my parents. They loved me more than I think any parents have loved any child. I never went without. Yes, I lived with the dead a lot of my life, but it was never more lively.

END FLASHBACK

OVER BLACK:

A door SLAMS.

INT. ANNIE’S DORM ROOM – EVENING

Antoinette sighs as she throws her bag onto the ground, art supplies and pencils sticking out of it.

ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
But we all grow up one day, don’t we? Childhood wonder doesn’t stay for long. Knights and princesses fade into history. Dolls become these creepy little trinkets. Life becomes less magical.

She pulls her hood down and fluffs her hair. Her hand trembles significantly. She looks at it, giving a slight glare.

ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
And, no matter how much they try, parents can’t protect us from everything.

She crawls onto her bed and pulls her laptop onto her lap. Her wallpaper is of her, George and Aria more recently. She beings playing some sort of Indie-Folk music (Preferably The Civil Wars).

ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
Especially when that thing is your own body.
Antoinette searches for the effects of Multiple Sclerosis on the body into her search bar, browsing around many different sites.

ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
You know, when you get hit with news that your body just refuses to work correctly, it can seem like a life sentence with no possibility of parole.

She opens a new browser and begins to search about lupus.

ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
Two at the same time seem like a death sentence.

Antoinette eyes the bottle of pills on her night stand. She picks them up and fiddles with it. She shuts her eyes tightly as her hands open the bottle. For a moment, she takes deep breaths, considering the bottle. The song ends and she's left in silence, which is what pulls her out of her little trance. Antoinette huffs and screws the top back on, opens her night stand drawer and throws the bottle into her drawer. The drawer is filled with dozens of pill containers and medical equipment. She gets off the bed and shuts it with her hip. She grabs her phone and begins typing.

ANTOINETTE (TEXT)
I can't do this anymore.

Antoinette sends the text, grabs her key, and leaves the room. The browser is still open on the lupus page, showing the organ failure rates.

OVER BLACK:

ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
Friends can help during the process of realizing you are dying. But you never want to be that hand grenade. You never want your emotional shrapnel to plague them.
FLASHBACK TO:

INT. ZACK’S DORM ROOM – NIGHT (A FEW MONTHS EARLIER)

ZACK (20), a tall and lanky boy who is dressed smartly, fiddles with wrapping paper and tape as he is attempting to wrap a present.

His hear a KNOCK at his door and he looks up from his present, which looks as if it was wrapped by a five year old. He walks over to open the door.

Antoinette stands in the doorway, dressed in a very feminine dress and her hair curled. She smiles. Zack looks awestruck.

ZACK

(teasing)
Wow, I haven’t seen you in anything that pink since third grade.

Antoinette rolls her eyes and gives him a push.

ANTOINETTE
I’d kill you if you weren’t my best slash only friend.

ZACK
You know you look great.

ANTOINETTE
Thanks, but I more know that I feel highly uncomfortable.

Both laugh. Zack reaches for the present.

ZACK
(handing her the gift)
Happy birthday, Annie.
Antoinette smiles widely. She rips off the haphazardly wrapped paper to reveal an old book underneath. She grazes her fingers over the font which reads “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”.

ANTOINETTE
Zack. This is too much. It’s far too much.

ZACK
No, it’s no big deal. Mom’s friend owns a book shop and he happened to have that. So, I used half my short film budget to snatch this third edition for you. Well, Mom and Dad also chipped in, but whatever.

Antoinette hugs him tightly. Zack reciprocates. When they part, they both look at each other with smiles.

ZACK (CONT’D)
So, ready to go to dinner?

Antoinette walks into his room and closes the door behind her. She pushes some hair behind her ear.

ANTOINETTE
Actually, I was thinking we should have sex.

ZACK
(flabbergasted)
Uh, what?

ANTOINETTE
I think we should have sex. Making love? Doing the do?

ZACK
(laughs)
Yeah, I get that. I think my question is why?
Antoinette sits on the bed and slips off her heels.

**ANTOINETTE**
Zack, I’m 19 years old and have kissed one boy my entire life. I also have one functioning kidney which, unlike having a milkshake, does not bring the boys to the yard. I’m also pretty sure I’m going to die in about fifteen to twenty years.

**BEAT**

**ANTOINETTE (CONT’D)**
(dramatically)
Plus, I want to experience my first encounter with this magical part of life with someone I care about.

Zack runs his fingers through his hair.

**ZACK**
Is this really what you want?

**ANTOINETTE**
No, I asked you just for shits and giggles.

Zack rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

**ANTOINETTE (CONT’D)**
If I didn’t want to, I wouldn’t have asked.

**ZACK**
Alright.

**ANTOINETTE**
Alright.

Zack walks over to Antoinette and places a hand her cheek. The two kiss.
ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
But friends can only do so much. There are sometimes where the end is truly the end.

INT. ZACK’S DORM ROOM – EVENING
Zack sits at his desk, playing some sort of video game. His phone goes off, causing him to pause the game. He picks it up and as soon as he reads the text, his face drops.

ANTOINETTE (TEXT)
I can’t do this any more. I’m sorry, Zack. You’ve been the best friend a girl could ask for. I love you.

He bolts out of his chair, grabs his jacket and runs out of the room.

INT. ROOFTOP – NIGHT
Antoinette holds onto the railing, rocking her body back and forth. Tears are streaming down her face. She backs up for a moment, only to throw up beside her.

ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
The fight between body and mind isn’t one you can win. Both will do whatever they can to try to make their side the side you listen to.

She wipes her mouth and her cheeks as she continues to cough. Her jacket is stained with a little bit of blood. She is shivering and shaking.

INT. OUTSIDE ANNIE’S DORM ROOM – NIGHT
Zack knocks on the door frantically. DAISY (19), Antoinette’s roommate opens the door. The two talk. They are inaudible.
ANTOINETTE (V.O.)
You can love people so much and always want to be in their life, but sometimes, you have to listen to your body when it says it’s done being alive.

Zack runs down the hall.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT
Antoinette gains a little more strength and begins to stand up. Her hands grip back onto the railing. With the little strength she has, she pulls herself to the other side of the railing. Her feet are place precariously on the edge.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT
Zack runs up many flights of stairs. He is obviously over exerting himself. Finally, he reaches the top. He opens the door and...

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT
The spot where Antoinette was is now empty. The SIRENS of the city seem to become louder. Zack walks, in shock, to the edge of the roof. He looks over to survey the damage. His eyes grow wide.

FADE TO BLACK.
Untitled
Dori Gronich
Ocean
The newly arrived
school of freshmen fish swim past
the tired senior sharks.

Degrad ing
No A/C in dorms.
We melt, spoil, and rot like food
in an unplugged fridge.

Sirens
Fire alarm again.
Man-children left home without
learning how to cook.

Wendigo
Oswego devil
winds shriek like witches at night
summoning winter.

Hygiene
College students are
disgusting. Please wash your hands
before you shake mine.

Harmony Restored
A stone thrown into
the lake generates ripples
before calm returns.

Winter Mournings
Sleep sweetly before
the slippery snow and sleet
sweep you off the street.

Smile
Smile not just for the
Times of happiness. Smile to
Bring light to the dark.
INT. CAR - NIGHT

TYLER (40), a tired, introverted drug addict sits in the front seat of his 1998 Subaru Forester with his hands gripping the wheel. Tyler looks like he hasn’t eaten anything in days, he has dark circles under his eyes.

He wipes his palms on his worn, black jeans and his finger under his nose, leaving a small red trail of blood. He’s coming down off of a high and lights a cigarette as he sinks into the seat. The car windows are rolled up.

Suddenly a SIREN wails and red and blue lights flash. Tyler jolts awake and looks around panicked. He opens the car door and is blinded by the interior lights. He slams the car door shut behind him.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Tyler's car is parked in an empty corner of the parking lot, far away from the sign that reads EMERGENCY ENTRANCE.

Tyler walks the length of the parking lot with the cigarette in his mouth. He finishes it as he approaches the doors and ashes it under his foot, two feet away from an ash tray.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Tyler walks into the waiting room and goes to approach the front desk. He spots his sister NATALIE (38), a feisty, overambitious business woman, and her husband STEPHEN (40), a level headed family man. Natalie is wearing a pantsuit and has her hands firmly on her waist. Stephen watches her pace with his hand tucked into the pockets of his blue jeans.
Natalie spots Tyler and looks confused. Tyler moves away from the desk and approaches them.

**NATALIE**
You heard about Dad?

**TYLER**
Uh... Yeah. Is he okay?

**NATALIE**
Could be better. Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes.

**STEPHEN**
No, this is good. Tyler can stay with you while I go check on the girls.

Natalie scowls as Stephen hugs her.

**STEPHEN (CONT’D)**
I’ll be back in a few hours. Just sit tight.

**NATALIE**
Just make sure the girls are okay first.

**STEPHEN**
I will. For now, you have company.

Natalie stares off as Stephen kisses her on the cheek. Stephen offers a reassuring smile to Tyler and pats his shoulder before walking past. Tyler stumbles from the strong grip and nearly falls over.

**NATALIE**
Let me guess, you’re drunk.

**TYLER**
Nope. What exactly happened to Dad?
Like you care.

I’m here, aren’t I?

Dad’s managing. I don’t know why Mom let him up in the attic on his own.

He’s a stubborn guy. It’s almost Christmas, probably wanted the decorations.

Stephen was on his way over to get them for him with the girls. He drove up to them boarding Dad in an ambulance in front of the house.

Is that where Mr. Perfect is off to?

Natalie cuts him a glare as she plays with the ring on her finger. She turns away from Tyler and sits down by the window. She pulls out a metal water bottle and takes a long sip. Tyler sits two seats over and clasps his hands between his knees. He sniffs and rubs his nose. He pulls a tissue out of his pocket and dabs the end of his nose, a visible red spot appears. He shoves the tissue back and disregards it. After another sip from her bottle, Natalie paces again.

CUT TO:

Tyler approaches the vending machines full of candies and snacks. He pulls out and opens his wallet and stuffs a few bills into the machine. He loses his balance and falls against the machine, no one notices.
Tyler looks back and forth between a package of gum and a package of Reese’s. He presses a button and reaches into the bottom tray.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM

Tyler approaches Natalie and offers her a Reese’s. She pauses mid-step and stares at him before politely taking it.

TYLER
Peanut butter always makes you less cranky.

NATALIE
(rolls her eyes)
And how do you know that?

TYLER
If you’ve forgotten, we lived together for a long time.

NATALIE
Yeah, till you ran off.

TYLER
I didn’t run off. Dad told me to leave.

NATALIE
To live with your friends and get high all the time? Can’t imagine it was a hard decision.

TYLER
Sorry I didn’t end up Mr. and Mrs. Perfect like you.

NATALIE
I hate when you call me that.
TYLER
What, perfect?

NATALIE
Like you’re so great yourself.

Tyler knocks his head back and laughs to himself. He coughs violently for a moment. Natalie watches him shocked.

TYLER
I know I’m not. I’m the furthest thing from it, but at least I don’t pretend.

NATALIE
Like you pretended to forget Mom’s birthday last month?

TYLER
I thought her birthday was in March?

NATALIE
THIS is why I can’t stand you. You don’t care about anything.

TYLER
It’s easier than caring too much.

Tyler dabs the tissue to his nose again and reveals a larger spot of blood. He sniffs and shoves the Reese’s into his mouth while Natalie takes a larger sip of the bottle.

TYLER (CONT’D)
When’s the last time you talked to the doctor?

NATALIE
Just before you showed up. Said Dad might have broken an arm.
TYLER
Hey, remember that time we went to visit Uncle Ted when we were kids?

NATALIE
When Dad got drunk and fell off the porch into the pool?

TYLER
Yeah, Dad's a bit of a klutz.

NATALIE
Not funny, Tyler. What if something worse had happened to him?

TYLER
We would have been some traumatized children.

Natalie throws her bottle at him in frustration, it hits him in the face and lands in his lap. He grabs it with both hands while he processes the pain.

NATALIE
Why did you even bother coming?

TYLER
I...

NATALIE
You didn’t have to come. You could have gone home and put who-knowswhat up your nose and passed out but you decided to come here.

TYLER
It’s Dad, Nat.
NATALIE
I hardly believe that, there’s always something. It’s been over a year since I last saw you.

Tyler crumples the Reese’s wrapper and throws it towards the garbage can, it misses. Natalie glares and walks over and sticks the wrapper in the garbage. Tyler opens her bottle and takes a sip, it’s wine.

TYLER
Calling me a drunk but here you are with your own Chardonnay!

NATALIE
I have a career, I have a family. I take care of Mom and Dad, there’s a lot on my plate.

TYLER
Oh, boo hoo.

(imitating Natalie)
Look at me! My life’s so tough!

NATALIE
Just do what you do best and leave.

Tyler coughs again and spits blood onto the carpet in front of them. Natalie’s face softens with concern.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
Tyler, what the hell?

TYLER
It’s nothing.

Tyler bites his tongue and pulls the pack of cigarettes in his pocket out and sticks one in his mouth. He turns away from Natalie and walks back towards the front door. Natalie stands and moves after him.
NATALIE
Where are you going?

TYLER
Get some fresh air.

NATALIE
Just sit down, I’ll go get a doctor.

TYLER
No, I’m fine. Let’s just focus on... Dad...

Tyler loses his balance and leans against the wall. Natalie grabs his other arm and tries to steady him, he shakes her off.

Stephen opens the front doors with TWO LITTLE GIRLS at his side. They run past Tyler, not recognizing him, and grab Natalie.

Tyler continues walking towards the front doors with cigarette in mouth as he coughs. Natalie gives the two little girls a big hug and kneels down as she motions for Stephen to go after Tyler.

Tyler collapses and falls into the front doors. His hand falls through the glass and it SHATTERS. A trail of blood flows from his nose and lips, his eyes are wide open.

FADE TO BLACK.
Sunset
Ashley Radder
Too loose shoes?
Lose two shoes!
Tacos
Mary Katherine A. Moylan

I looked at him across the table, slight disgust rolling off of me as wet food slowly slipped from his lips down toward that one long chin hair he never let us shave. I nearly gagged. His elbows rested on the table, his dominate hand clutching the tortilla wrap in an unforgiving grasp, lettuce and seasoned beef, no tomatoes because he hated tomatoes, squeezing out of either end as he barely took time to chew before tearing off another hunk, his jaw mechanically opening and closing with audible slops.

My mouth turned downward as I set my taco down, unable to eat at the moment. He shifted forward in his chair, his big wobbling eyes finely focused on his spilling dinner, a warm color of melted cheese and meat grease, beginning to slowly drip and snake its way down his fingers, past his wrist, and now on its way trickling down his forearm. I cringed again.

“What?” he managed to speak around the chunk of food in his mouth. His eyes finally rolled to meet mine with an intense focus despite the fogginess and grime of his crooked glasses. His voice graveled in this gross tone he had been speaking in lately. It was a mix between a chain smoker and an old man with a head cold.

“You’ve got food on your face.” I simply said sourly, seeing his eyes narrow in a glare, he just wanted to eat his meal in peace. “Take your napkin, and wipe it off.”

It was a simple interaction, one we had countless times and will no doubt have plenty more of. He grunted in distaste and rolled his eyes, his nostrils flaring with a bitter pout, much like an angry old pup, but I didn’t talk back for once. Instead of setting down his tortilla and letting it unfurl and erupt, he lifted the dead weight of his tight left hand onto the table to pinch at his napkin. It was almost like a crab claw slowly inching toward its target. He snatched the napkin in his long nails, that I would most likely have to cut that night or the next and we would bicker and then move onto a common enemy of
the day, whether it was a mean bat of a teacher, or some girl that tried playing with his heart, but we would get through the task of clipping nails. He pushed the napkin to his face in a quick swipe, doing a poor job and then crumpled the napkin and set it down to dive back into the mauled mess of a taco.

We hadn’t argued which was new. Maybe we matured finally, though I strongly doubt it. We knew how to poke and prod one another like cats and dogs, it was in our DNA to be at odds. I watched his little claw, his flipper, we called it, and thought of the life he could have had if it were me instead of him, something I would cry and wish for when I was younger. The twin with cerebral palsy, and epilepsy, and asthma. A time of him crying with rage, that he too gets lonely flashed in my mind as it often does at times now, and I felt a small twinge in my heart. And yet we could be cruel to one another.

The disgust I felt minutes before dulled as a wave of emotion washed over me. Most people didn’t have a person to shared their entire life with and I was blessed with one, me of all people, one least deserving. I looked as I watched him talk about his day, a laugh bubbling out of his chest, a beautiful laugh that warmed you like the first rays of sun on a summer day; his toothy grin wide, a small smile lined my lips. Picking up my taco I watched him laugh, his big eyes bright, half chewed food, and all as he spoke. I was lucky to call him my brother.
Untitled
Laura Panagis
Photograph
Kieonté Miranda

I look at this brass, beaten down frame
and realize the inside
wields the axe of happiness and sorrow,
but no matter how many times we swung,
we were too weak to lift it.

I look at this caramel-colored frame,
and think back to those sweet moments
we had that day;
the calm, dream-like stroll by the hedges
in the sunlight that rested on our melanin skin
like a newborn in her bassinet,
trying to foreshadow the future.

I think back to the smile we gave each other
as we watched the young woman
take a few terrible selfies in which I assisted her
with one by the water fountain in the garden,
and we believed we could take a better one;
we believed we could be better then.

I look at this faded, water-damaged frame
and watch the seconds tick past
since the emotions were at a high tide;
two rivers hoped to connect to a bigger body,
knowing they could never be the ocean.
Gay
Kevin Sun

He gazed down on the small blue planet from His heavenly throne and scanned the world with ancient eyes. He watched the lions chase the gazelles on the savannas of Africa, then the whales swimming tranquilly in the Atlantic Ocean, then the bustling crowd in New York City. He saw a parade on Main Street; half-dressed men and women adorned silly hats and skin-tight underwear and draped themselves in rainbow flags.

“Gays...” He muttered.

He snapped His fingers and above the parade there was a loud boom of thunder. He blew a gust of air over the world and clouds suddenly appeared over the city. He shed a tear for humanity, and a heavy downpour of rain washed over the parade. Though some demonstrators were annoyed by the weather inconvenience, most of the people kept on celebrating their pride, rain or shine.

“What I wouldn’t give to start over with another flood,” He said to Himself.

He sighed and turned His attention away from Earth. Those mortals and their silly, blasphemous sinful lovers will meet their maker one day, He thought. Suddenly, He felt a strange feeling. Something was amiss in His paradise. He left the throne room, and walked over to His son’s bedroom and opened the door. He saw His son in the arms of a familiar figure with horns and cloven feet. Their lips were locked, and the devil held His son in a tight embrace.

“JESUS CHRIST!” He boomed.

Jesus let go of Satan and stared flabbergasted at His Father. Satan chuckled and gave a cheeky smile before vanishing in a wisp of smoke.

“Oh my God, Dad, you can’t just--”

“THOU SHALT NOT USE THE LORD’S NAME IN VAIN!”

Jesus took a deep breath and said, “Dad, you can’t just barge into my room like that.”
“Yes, I can,” He retorted. “I’m God, I can do whatever I want. There’s no such thing as privacy.” He snorted like an angry bull and said, “Anyways, what on earth were you doing? That’s the devil! You were literally sleeping with the devil!”

“We love each other, Dad,” Jesus said, as-a-matter-of-factly.

“You what?”

“Oh man, you weren’t lying when you said he’s a snake,” Jesus giggled. “He’s alllll serpentine.”

“I COMMAND YOU TO STOP AT ONCE!”

He looked at His sweaty, naked son, lying on the bed and thinking He did nothing wrong. This is disgusting, He thought to Himself. My son slept with the devil! And it’s even worse because He’s another form of me, so it’s like I slept with the devil!

“Jesus,” He sighed. “You are banished from Heaven. Leave immediately. I don’t want to see you until you’ve performed 50 miracles and repented for your sins.”

Jesus laughed and responded, “This is a joke, right? That’s my punishment? See you in 3 days, Dad.”

He watched His son step through a portal of light and disappear. Unbelievable, He thought. My own son, a homosexual! By extension, that makes me a homosexual!

How could I have let this happen? So this is how Satan is growing his army.

He angrily walked back to His throne and looked at the world again. The male lions were having intercourse with each other. He scowled and looked away, only to see the whales rubbing their penises against each other’s bodies. He sighed and looked back at New York City. The rainbow humans were all hugging each other, caring for each other, loving each other.

“Maybe it’s time for a change in the rulebook.”
Game Over
Victoria Jayne
We're Nice People