

GREAT LAKE REVIEW

FALL 2018



THE GREAT LAKE REVIEW

SUNY Oswego's Literary Magazine

Fall 2018

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GREAT LAKE REVIEW

Interior Design: Marissa Specioso

Publisher: Great Lake Review

Printed in Syracuse, New York

86th Edition

State University of New York at Oswego



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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Red and Red

Brianna Harington

Red roses; reek of passion and fury. Red hearts; pumping for
the other beating only to see one more day.
Red lips; full and ready to absorb his blow. Red gowns; rippling
off the curves of her
body she strides around the room flaunting her bosomy body.
The rhythm of love; playing in the
background intertwining with the mingling lovers. The story of
falling in love; as lovers discover
their senses each exploding with fulfillment.

Red eyes; countless arguments put her over the edge. Red
nose; still dripping from the last blow
from his ridged fist. Red blood; clotting at the surface of the
wound recovering from the never
ending night. Red scars; smooth and tender rest atop a layer of
flesh waiting to be torn open
again. Fury from the unknown; there is no reason to his rage
and there is never an end. The story
of her last breath; she screams she's sorry again and again,
waiting for the room to fill with red.

Steam: An ABC Memoir

Camrey Whyte

At the time, nothing stunned me more than strolling into the dining hall for coffee and a bagel and leaving with little more than some spattered remnants littering the tiles and my clothes. Crazy enough, I also managed to snatch a hot accusation of stealing food, since apparently the dining hall only accepts ID these days when your face isn't presented electronically. I thought everyone working at that particular dining location knew me anyways; I was the girl with the ID failing to swipe on the daily, always seeming to have some unknown error with the card I had to get over at least six times for different problems.

Had I known upon the first clutch of fingers to paper cup and the magical dripping intoxication of coffee-scent that this special brew were to be shortly ripped from my possession, Jiminy Cricket I would have avoided that tainted space before ever arriving and stuck strictly to killing my hunger and useless hours of procrastination at the vending machines.

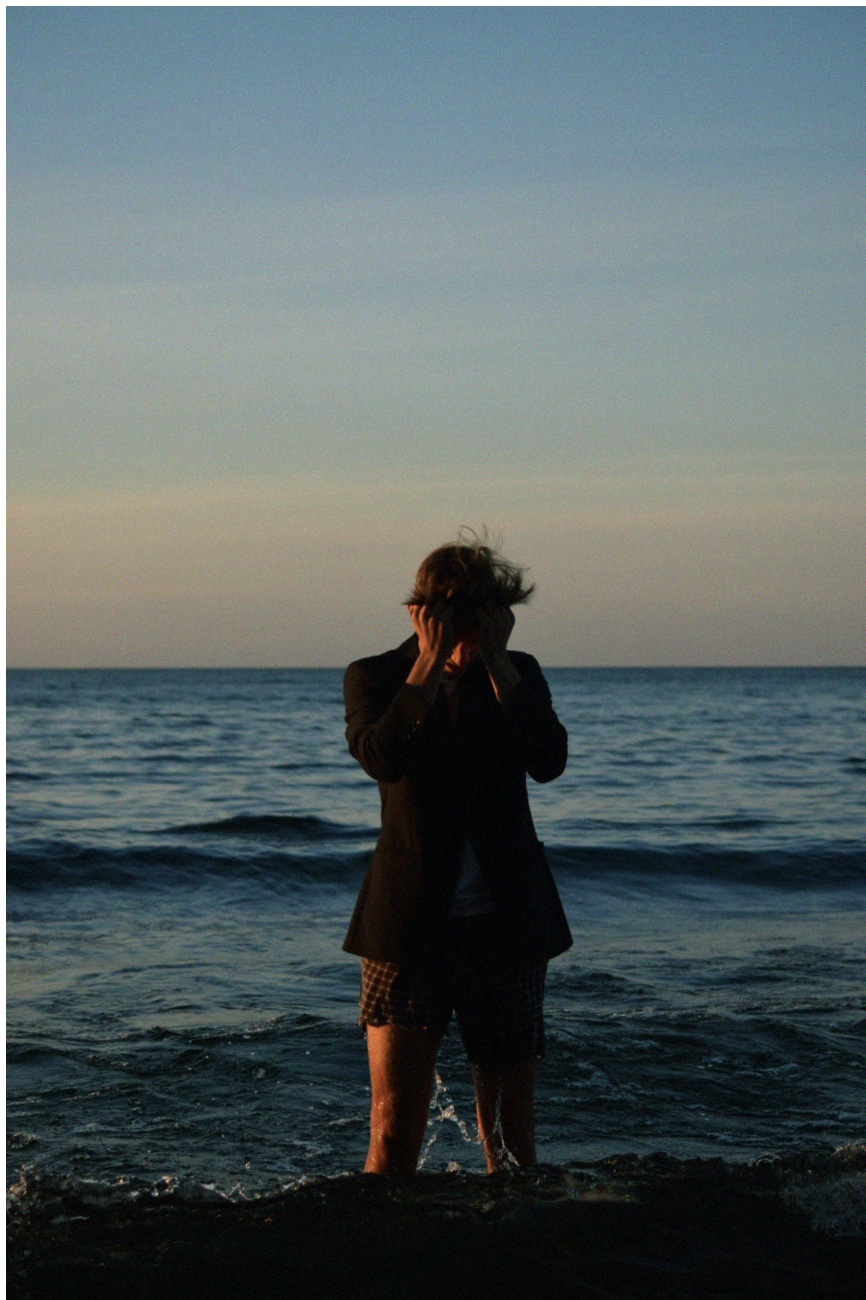
Like the coffee, the bagel I toasted sang of perfection; I didn't expect it to become the main course of not only my meal but my brewing violation.

Never would I have thought to be met by such hate upon biting into glory, but it was openly etched over every one of the staff members' faces as I sank my teeth into the steaming prize. And there was the head manager, eyes wild and breath hot, towering over me with quivered lip and telling me I was not allowed to swallow. Her grandma voice cracking, hands reaching out with indignation to steal my scavengings and take them to the trash. That food should not be thrown out, I offered, but what could I do as coffee rained down and the bagel torpedoed to the floor. Devastation was an understatement; I was in mourning. I fled the scene, uttering some choice words under my breath and deciding not to look back. I suppose that venturing to the dining hall with such an appetite that morning was the wrong move since it warranted such accusations as "Physical Violence" and "Failure to Comply", but then again the xenial treatment of the staff when dealing with hungry students rushing to eat before class and

yielding electronic versions of their faces or null ID's never fails to impress me. The feeling of zero nutrients can be frightening, but as I drank in the fresh air outside, I felt more enriched.

Born Screaming

Macdonell Orelus



Paradise

Leeann Dragos

The smooth sand separates between my toes.
Warm sunshine kisses my shoulders
and down my back.
The dark blue sea chases children.
They run as it crunches again on the horizon.
Salty wind brushes my hair.
I am clean inside and out.
A grey blanket rolls in over the dock.
And silence trumps the seagull's speech.

Blink

John Thompson

I've had this weird power for years where I could just blink away my problems. I'm not the only one with it, for I've come across a few others who have it too. In all honesty, I think it'd be better if none of us had it. So much better.

At first, the power was marvelous. All I had to do was blink and my problems were gone.

Sometimes, one blink wasn't enough, so I'd just blink and blink until my problems would go away. I hadn't known that blinking could be so harmful.

It started when I was in college. Classes were hard, my soon to be ex and I were falling apart, I was running out of money, and I just needed a break. The club seemed like an apt place to go for this; a place where I could dance, drink, and enjoy life. And after the first drink turned to the tenth, I blinked, and my problems went away.

That was it. One blink and they were all gone, though only momentarily until the morning. I was amazed. I wished I could do that every night, or even every day, just blink and blink and blink until I was free of my worries. And I didn't see a problem in it. It had worked once, so why not try it again? I hadn't noticed any danger then, and I wouldn't for years. I was only blinking.

So I continued blinking, blinking, and blinking, and time passed by. I blinked through school and my grades started to fall, but I didn't worry. College would disappear soon enough, and I would have one less problem.

My boyfriend quickly began to fear for my health.

"You can't keep doing this," he told me.

"All I'm doing is blinking," I said. "I blink, it goes dark, and all of my issues disappear for a while. And I don't have to worry anymore because I'm finally at bliss."

"You're not blinking. You're blacking out."

"Same thing."

He couldn't stop me, so he left me. He said his mother warned him about men like me, but I didn't care. He was just

another problem and he too was blinked away in due time. Blinked away like the rest.

My parents were outraged when I blinked out of college. I'd blinked so much that I couldn't even remember leaving college. As if I'd never even left, I was at home once again. According to my parents, it had been months since I left school, but it was just one blink to me. I was amazed again at the power of the blink, but my parents didn't see my lovely ability as a gift. They thought I was sick. Just like my ex, they believed I needed help. I thought they were wrong and started secretly blinking.

I blinked until the accident. Hadn't seen it coming. Jail wasn't fun. They didn't let me blink through that. Rehab wasn't fun either. Back then, I just saw it as everyone colloquially being against me and holding me back from true bliss and happiness. My parents and peers didn't see how not letting me blink and escape from myself and my problems made me even more susceptible to the "depression" they said I was already experiencing. Sadly, due to my beliefs, rehab didn't hold me back for long. I wish it had.

My next boyfriend feared my blinking just like everyone else. He said it turned me into someone neither of us knew. Someone cruel and evil. I remember that he always had bruises all over his body. Whenever I asked him where they came from he'd say, "You should know," but I must've blinked those events out too. He ended up leaving me just like the last. I feel bad about that, looking back on it. I wish he stopped me. Called the cops. Did something. Anything.

I blinked until I was in rehab again. Blinked so much that I don't even remember the two years between him and it. All I remember is being physically dragged there by my parents and the cops.

"It's for your safety," my mother had said. But I already felt safe. I always assumed I was when I blinked. I was wrong.

The second rehab journey was three years ago, and I blinked a lot after then too. I blinked and blinked until one day I was in the hospital and they wouldn't allow me to blink anymore. The doctor told me I needed to stop and that my body was in very bad condition. She told me that she was going to keep me here away from blinking for a while to try to cure

as much of the pain I caused on my body that she could... if she could.

“You have liver disease,” she had told me. “It’s deadly.” At first, I wished I could just blink out of all of this. But, after seeing the tears on my parents’ faces once they received the news, I noticed my power was a curse. I understood what everyone was saying. I had a problem.

I read recently that the average person blinks for a total of five years of their life. I had laughed when I read that, because I’ve barely lived, and I already can’t remember the last ten years of my life. I had blinked through a fourth of my existence.

I wish I faced my problems instead of blinking. Blinking had only pushed them away and given me another problem – a deadly problem with a power too strong to handle. I wish I hadn’t abused that power. I would’ve never upset my parents or my exes.

None of this would’ve happened if I never blinked at all. My boyfriends would’ve never feared for my life or theirs. If not for me, they could’ve been in happy relationships, never thinking about blinking or how everything that blinks dies. My parents would’ve never been disappointed in me. They would’ve been happy; maybe with a powerless child that wasn’t so susceptible to the nectar that cursed me.

A life like this sounds so much better. So much simpler. A world where my eyes never closed to darkness and opened to ignorance. For in that world, a life wouldn’t have been wasted. And it would’ve made the world so much better. It would’ve made my life so much better. A life where I never blinked.

We Met on Court Street

Amelia DeJarnette



Kicking Boots

Emily Goleski

“It’s a rocky beach,” I say,
driving my jeep down the inverted slope
onto the rocky sand,
mirroring the Great Peconic Bay.
You ask about Robin’s Island,
and we joke of swimming there
but you don’t like water
and it’s the middle of the night.
“I should have brought my truck,”
you say, perched on the side of a russet corvette
with an unlit cigarette between your teeth,
and the sun on the horizon.
“Maybe next time,” I say,
pressing my cheek to your collarbone,
but August is almost over,
and this warm weather won’t last.
You say goodbye and we part ways,
as I watch you in my rearview mirror
and that little island on the water
I wish we had swum to.

Adulthood is a Trap

Courtney Abbe

EXT. BIG CITY - DAY

ANGELICA, upper twenties, speed-walks down a busy street. Her hair is PIN STRAIGHT. She wears a pencil skirt and a blazer to match. She is carrying a to-go box.

We hear a cell phone RING. Angelica sighs loudly and retrieves her phone.

ANGELICA

(into phone)

I know, I know. I'm only a couple blocks away. There was a long line.

We hear a man's voice coming from the phone. This is KENNETH (53).

KENNETH

I'm not liking this trend. You seem to be coming back from lunch later every day.

ANGELICA

I can't predict how long the line is going to be. If I could I think that would make me more than a regular person with an engineering degree.

KENNETH

Well no one can crunch numbers like you can. Speaking of crunching, did you get my wrap?

ANGELICA

Yeah, yeah.

KENNETH

Well then you're off the hook as long as you are

back before it gets soggy.

ANGELICA

Sure thing, boss.

Angelica hangs up the phone and puts it back in her pocket. She continues making her way down the street. She comes up to a man playing the saxophone, this is BUCKLEY (64).

BUCKLEY

Good afternoon, Miss Angelica.

ANGELICA

Hey Buckley. Having a successful day?

Angelica nods toward Buckley's open saxophone case laying on the ground next to him. It has a few folded up bills inside.

BUCKLEY

If I am doing what I love then I am succeeding, my dear.

Angelica gives him a half-smile.

BUCKLEY (CONT'D)

Do you have a request?

ANGELICA

(enthusiastic)

You know I actually heard this AMAZING song the other day it was called-

Angelica's phone interrupts with a DING. It is a text from Kenneth.

ANGELICA (CONT'D)

(sighing)

Actually not today, Buckley. Already late getting back to the office.

BUCKLEY

(raising an eyebrow)

Ahh.

Buckley starts playing again. Angelica throws in a five dollar bill and waves goodbye.

She picks up her pace, coming up to the H.G. Wells Community Park at her right. She gazes over at the children playing and laughing.

A KICKBALL COMES FLYING AND HITS ANGELICA IN THE HEAD.

Angelica drops the to-go box on the ground. It opens up, Kenneth's wrap bounces out.

SELENE (6) races after the ball. Her MESSY CURLS bounce around as she runs. She is wearing a sequined tutu and a tee-shirt with MUSIC NOTES all over it.

Angelica rubs the side of her head and hands the ball to Selene. Selene takes the ball in her finger-paint stained hands.

SELENE

My mom told me to say sorry to you.

ANGELICA

It's fine. No big deal. Just an accident really-

SELENE

Wanna see me do a twirl?

ANGELICA

Uh, sure.

Selene twirls in a circle with her arms in the air. The sequins on her tutu catch the sunlight. She finishes with a beaming smile.

Angelica claps. Her phone DINGS again.

ANGELICA (CONT'D)

Wow that was great. Have fun-

Selene grabs Angelica's hand, pulling her.

SELENE

Come on! I wanna show you something!
There's a magic dragon!

ANGELICA

(trying to get loose)

I'm sorry, kid. I'm trying to get back to work.
Can you let go of my-

SELENE

(urgent)

The dragon is going to eat my friends! We have
to save them!

ANGELICA

I think you can save them yourself. You seem
plenty capable-

SELENE

NO! COME ON!

CUT TO:

EXT. H.G. WELLS COMMUNITY PARK - MOMENTS LATER

Selene drags Angelica to a less crowded area of the park. A
WOMAN sits on a bench while talking on the phone.

SELENE

That's my mom. Isn't she pretty?

The woman on the bench waves to Angelica, not breaking her phone conversation. Angelica waves back.

ANGELICA

Didn't she teach you about stranger danger?

SELENE

(giggling)

What's that?

ANGELICA

Never mind. Listen, can we make this quick? I really have to go-

SELENE

Here is your wand. It's very powerful. I have one too.

Selene hands Angelica a stick from the ground. Angelica takes it.

SELENE (CONT'D)

The dragon is going after them! We have to chase him down!

Selene starts running, yelling at the "dragon" and waving her "wand" back and forth. Angelica reluctantly chases after her.

Selene quickly comes to a stop, catching Angelica off guard. Angelica falls to the ground, landing in a puddle. Her clothes and hair are soaking wet.

Selene pauses, looking down at Angelica. Angelica looks back up at her. A silent moment passes.

ANGELICA LETS OUT A SUDDEN BELLY LAUGH.

Selene falls to the ground next to her, their laughs merging together. The two then get up and begin running around, swinging their wands, and splashing in the puddles.

FADE OUT.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - BATHROOM - DAY

Angelica stands at the bathroom sink, attempting to wash the mud off of her arms and blouse. Her blazer sits balled up on the counter.

She looks up into the mirror. A smile creeps onto her face.

HER HAIR HAS DRIED INTO WILD CURLS.

Angelica hears a KNOCK at the bathroom door. Realization falls over her face. She slowly opens the door. Kenneth stands in the hallway, he looks at her in shock.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Angelica's shoes SQUEAK as she steps into the hallway.

ANGELICA

(nervous)

I can explain, really, I can-

KENNETH

I don't think the long lunch line will suffice this time, Angelica.

ANGELICA

Can you JUST listen for a few minutes, please-

KENNETH

No, not this time. You KNOW we are falling behind. YOU KNOW THIS!

Angelica stands firm, taking the brunt of Kenneth's rage. A few moments pass in silence.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

(quietly)

My wrap?

Angelica takes her blazer and shoves it into Kenneth's chest. The soggy wrap falls from the pocket of the blazer, landing on the ground. She turns on her heels.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

ANGELICA

(confidently)

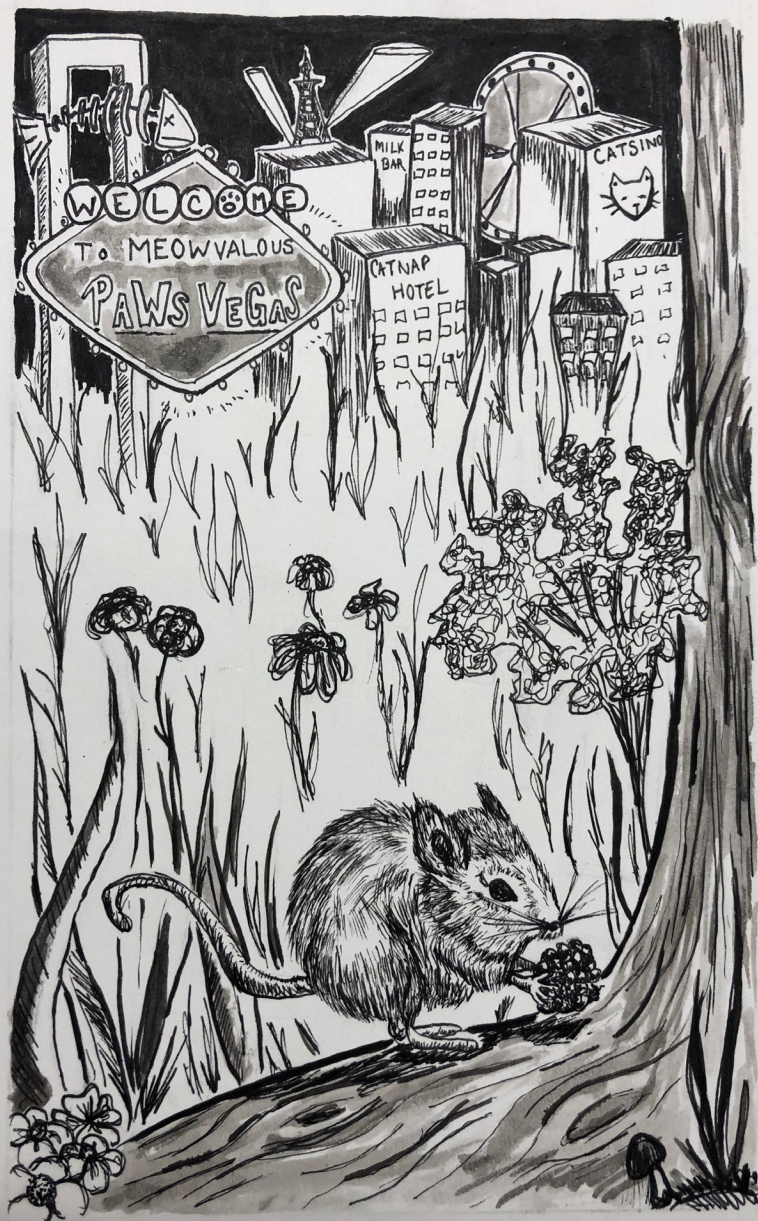
To buy myself a tutu.

HER CURLS BOUNCE AS SHE STOMPS TOWARD THE EXIT.

FADE OUT.

Simple Pleasures

Leighann McPartland



Master Thief

Nicholas Difusco

In order to become a thief, you are required a special set of skills. To become a master thief, you need to pull off a heist of the ages. Normal thieves have to learn how to be stealthy and agile. Luckily for me, I didn't need to acquire these skills due to being the age of seven. That's right. At the age of seven, I had already become a master thief without the knowledge of any special skills. It only took one major heist for me to achieve such a high rank at such a young age. Perhaps the youngest of them all.

First, I had to think of the location where I wanted to commit this risky task. Within a few days of planning, I finally chose the unlucky establishment known as the aquarium. Lucky for me, my grandmother had told me we were going there for the day. It was the perfect plan I have ever created. My brother and grandmother were enjoying all the exhibits we went through. As for me, I had other plans. My object of interest was to steal... a shark! – tooth. Yes, a shark tooth. One of the most sought-after items in all of America and soon it shall be mine. We continued through the different tanks, seeing all types of freshwater and saltwater tanks. Eventually, we ran into the shark tank where a few different breeds of sharks swam with other types of fish and deep sea creatures. At first, I was thinking of diving into the shark tank and snagging one of the teeth right from the shark, but that plan was put on halt for two reasons. The first of which was we were starting to move on to the next exhibit and the second reason was not even understanding how I would be able to get in there in the first place.

Once passing the main exhibit with sharks and other deep sea creatures, we came to the gift shop. So many items to select from, but I had my eyes set on the one item – the shark tooth. I looked around the shop before finally finding the item. It was next to the cashier desk. Shamefully it seemed like all my plans had gone to waste. The table was too high. Then a light bubble appeared brightly above my head like in the cartoons. As my grandmother was checking out other toys, I had asked for her to pick me up, wishing to see the other items on the

counter. Once she had done so, my hands quickly went to the shark tooth bowl where a bunch of rubber shark teeth laid. I took two, knowing once my grandmother would see, she'd make me put it back. With no time to lose, I stuffed one in my pocket and as suspected she told me to put the other one back which I did.

With a grin on my face, we left the store. I waited until I got home to play with the new, stolen toy. And, as I reached into my pockets, all there was to be found was a hole. A hole big enough for a shark tooth to slip through.

The Dreams I Never Told You

Beatriz Rosa

We wake up under blue satin covers.
We breathe into each other's necks
and wait for the Sun to finish yawning.
A cup of tea sits on our nightstand from the night before.
We make our way out of bed into the shower and watch our
inhibitions
swirl down the drain.
We wonder if anything was still capable of stopping us from
being our true selves.
We decided the answer was "no".
The rain knocks at your window begging to come in.
You stare at the weather in silence as you sip tea from a black
mug.
I walk in from the kitchen and sit by your side at the mahogany
table.
We watch the beautiful mess wash away our fantasies and hard
earned pride
The wind shakes our perception, causes tears to stain the glass
We wonder if anything is still capable of erasing our bond
We decided the answer was "no"
My dreams are packed bags and slammed doors.
You decide I was too little.
I decide you were too much.
The decisions made individually carry so much weight.
My dreams are wet with tears on a hardwood floor,
warm with late nights on the couch.
We never make good decisions without each other.
Snowflakes playfully tap the window, asking for a smile.
You look at me from across the street, through the café that
shields me from the winter.
We share hot cocoa and discuss how time
rips the soul from our tale of untold feelings and unending
hugs.
The tale of true love between broken gems trying to put their
shards back in place.
We wonder if anything was still capable of keeping us away
from
years of removing sharp items from the shelves,
writing notes to each other each morning.
Was anything still able to make us forget
the orbs of light emerging inside us

since the first time we ever held hands?
We decided the answer was “no”.

Violet

Morgan Ciccarino



Family Tapestry

Nicole Hube

Young child,

born from bullets and carved from
tapestries of unfortunate family history,
it hurts that we must teach you to be violent
when you're so used to stinging skin with wildflowers.
Their soft violet hues hurt just enough to linger
in the space between the next spew of profane revelry.

Whether you choose to raise fists of glory
manifested from the force of a punch on the playground
or force your knuckles back into your stomach,
just know that Daddy's the real soldier - a hell of a lot older,
and Daddy told me

he prayed you would not grow up to imitate him for
Mommy's done cleaning up bloody linoleum,
and the false promise to put this family together
is the biggest lie you'll ever hear when she says -
“ ... ”

Elastic can only bend so far until it snaps
and the recoil sounds like the fractures of
another body hitting the pavement.
I know what your bones sound like when they snap.
He was the first one to hurt you.

Please, little one,

put your fists down.

Dead Flytraps

Amanda Gydesen

(Lights up on a table center stage. On the table there is a venus fly trap. FRANK enters from up stage right carrying a bag. She sits down at the table and sighs.)

FRANK

You look dead.

(FRANK examines the plant, there are two or three dead traps among the green. She picks up a pair of scissors from the table. A pause. She begins to cut.)

FRANK (CON'T)

No, still alive. Sometimes I think maybe you're it, you know? If you weren't around, maybe I'd just take off already. Go home to Joliet, bury myself in the dirt. Sleep. Yeah, I'm gonna go take a dirt nap in the tomato patch. Smash a few, smear them on my face like some kind of murder scene. The police will come up, they'll go, "dammit, another one. At least she was half dead to begin with." (Pause.) I'm glad you don't listen. You're a good Friend like that. You have a mouth though. You ever tell your bugs about me? I'll give you my résumé so you can get everything right. "Judy Frank, call me Frank. Forty five. Stage manager, Chicago. I'm a Sagittarius and I believe in bad luck, but not horoscopes. Catch me quick before I run off with Carrie Fisher." Maybe the blowflies are hiring.

(She closes the scissors twice, an inch from a healthy stem, then drops them on the table.)

FRANK (CON'T)

I don't want to leave, though. I like Greenhouse Theatre, and Genie, and yelling at Dan. For a lead actor he has exactly the level of modesty you'd expect. And those free range hands, I could just chop them off at the wrists. Who needs them to play Tom Wingfield anyway? I like the new set designer and her jean jackets with the ripped off sleeves, too, and that thing she does with her eyeliner. Her name...Edie? Yeah. I might even like to get to know some of those people. Except Genie. I already know her. After, Jesus- ten years? I've told her too much. She's a listener. Worse, she gives advice. Like a shrink or something. How the hell do I give her sound cues when all I ever hear is, "your breath smells like Kentucky whiskey," through the headset? From forty paces, yeah, she's just that keen, like a bloodhound, I'm sure. Like...

(FRANK groans and rests her head on her arms. Her eyes close. Lights down on table.)

A Memoir for Linda: The Making of a Cat Lady

Samantha V. Zerbinos

“Cats are like potato chips... you can’t have just one!” one of my Aunt Linda’s kitschy wooden signs read. The statement rang true for her. In her home there was always one of her cats in her lap, a bit of fur on her sofas, and the modest fragrance of the litter box that had arisen from the basement. She was unmarried and childless when she died, however if you had asked her she most likely would not have considered herself childless. Her felines were her babies and she treated them as such. My aunt was the definition of a cat lady, but despite what you may believe, this was not something to be pitied.

You would know that Aunt Linda was coming from a mile away. If you didn’t first hear her iconic cackle you would be able to recognize the subtle scent of hot tar from a piece of nicorette gum that she was sure to be chewing. She was the nuisance in the movie theater, loudly reacting to whatever was on the screen. She was the woman wearing long sleeved shirts year-round, as she was insecure of her forearm that had become bruised and unsightly after countless hours of dialysis. Her swollen feet carried her short, heavy body as slowly as her stairlift carried her up the stairs of the two-story house she had had built for herself. Aunt Linda’s house was a tribute to her self-governing personality. The wooden crucifixes scattered throughout the house were a signal to those visiting that she prided herself on her Catholic upbringing (even though she didn’t go to church nearly as often as she might have you believe). She was perfectly content being surrounded by the flashy pink of the carpets and walls, regardless of others claiming it was tacky. It was her favorite color and she would spend all of her days in it. Her single-person recliner had the best view of the television. She had no shame in giving tours around her house and announcing that “Right there, next to the guest bedroom, is Spotty’s room.”

“Spotty’s room? Like ... a whole room for your cat, Spotty?” the guests would question.

“Yep,” she responded easily. My parents and I moved into

Aunt Linda's home when I was about fifteen. She became ill and needed help around the two-story home, and we were more than happy to help out. We stayed there with her over the next three years until she died in July of 2016 at the age of sixty-nine.

Stereotypes about cat ladies have come to be recognized from television shows, books, and our own personal experiences. A superficial look at Aunt Linda, and one would have assumed that because of her single status and feline-to-human child ratio that there had to be something wrong with her. She must have been agoraphobic, widowed, shrewish, lonely. During my long stay in Aunt Linda's home, I learned that what many could have mistaken for loneliness was actually fierce independence. In fact, there were a lot of ways that Aunt Linda benefited from being single.

She was able to be extremely career-oriented, despite many obstacles in her way. In her twenties she waited tables during the day and went to classes at night. She graduated from an esteemed local, private college with excellent grades and relationships with her professors. When her close friends began to get married and have children, she went into accounting — a career heavily dominated by men at the time. When her friends were beginning their second marriages, she worked her way up to establish herself as the executive accountant at a large corporation that manufactured and distributed air conditioning, heating, and ventilating systems. She was highly resented by the men working below her and belittled by the men in positions above her but she was the best at what she did. When it was time for cutbacks, the men of the company attempted to make her working there as inconvenient as possible so that she would quit and they would not have to pay for her to retire. They took away her office and treated her poorly, but she held her own — they eventually gave in and she retired happily. She then earned her keep by accounting for many small businesses and close friends. She stayed true to her animal-loving roots by being a secretary and head accountant for a veterinary office and a few animal rehabilitation organizations.

Months after my Aunt's passing, my mother and I found a journal among her belongings. We found many fascinating

entries, one of which she wrote right after the retirement situation at the big corporation she worked for. It reads, “I was driving home from church today and thought ‘Who am I?...” The person I was is gone, so who is this new person who doesn’t have a master plan? I was an accountant manager at Carrier Corporation, planning to work until January 2007 when I could retire a wealthy person. That was me. That person no longer exists, so how would I define me now?

- Retired
- Financially secure
- Working part time with animals (a lifetime goal)
- Bookkeeping as an entrepreneur

I guess that adds up to a person now free to do whatever brings happiness. Write a book, piano lessons, photography, more time with pets. I think I’m going to like this new person.”

Without having to spend money on children, she had the funds to donate to numerous charities. Every year, as the December snow would to fall, Aunt Linda was sure to receive a calendar from a wilderness preservation organization filled with photos of tiny animals with eyes as big as the moon as a thank-you for her generous contributions. The sweet sound of sorrowful songs sung by female country artists in commercials—paired with images of suffering animals—broke her heart. Aunt Linda couldn’t help but send a portion of her money to nonprofit organizations that fought animal cruelty.

She also had the funds to travel. Without the metaphorical and financial baggage of a significant other, she got the opportunity to take her literal baggage to the rains of England, the lights and luxury of Las Vegas, the sweltering Florida heat. Her olive, Greek skin would become a golden caramel after her trips to Hawaii and Cape Cod. An entry from her journal reads, “The trip to Cape Cod was wonderful. We saw lots of whales this time and then finished my birthday by getting a tattoo.”

I hadn’t even known about this tiny ladybug she had gotten inked on her right bicep until I was well into my teen years, as it had been covered by her long-sleeved shirts. A week after Aunt Linda’s passing, I was at my doctor’s office getting the shots that I needed to venture off to college. After a particularly painful pinch to my right arm, the kind-eyed

nurse put a band-aid on the area. I stopped squinting my eyes, removed my fingernails from my palms, and glanced at the small, square bandage. To my disbelief, the band-aid displayed a doodle of a ladybug. It was in the exact same spot that Aunt Linda had hers. The nurse asked lightly, “How was that?”

“Not so bad,” I replied with a small smile on my face. While the logical part of me attempted to believe that this was simply an incredible coincidence, the sentimental bits of me couldn’t help but admit that I felt my aunt’s presence in that moment. I decided then that one day I’d get the tiny bug tattooed onto myself.

When she wasn’t spending her checks on trips and charities, Aunt Linda was able to treat her cats—and also a dog and a bird towards the end of her life—how she would have treated her children. In the corner of her living room resided a basket filled to the brim with their tiny stuffed animals and jingling trinkets—their own version of a toy chest. Their soft and groomed fur reflected her own short ‘do, which would be routinely color treated to give the illusion that her locks were as fiery as they were in her youth. Half of her queen-sized mattress was taken up by animal beds, which they would sleep on at night and relax on during the day. Before my parents and I began to live with her, it was not uncommon for a spoiled cat or two to hop up on the kitchen table to keep her company at dinner time. She would let her ivy-green parrot sit on her shoulder as she relaxed, not even bothering to remove him when he would screech like a fire alarm for endless amounts of time. This led to her being slightly hearing impaired in one ear. While it was an inconvenience, she didn’t hold any grudges about it.

If one of her pets passed away, she would pay to have them cremated. She always said that after she passed she wanted to be cremated and have her loved ones spread her ashes, along with those of her pets, in the gorgeous field of a local animal rehabilitation that she spent hours volunteering at. She would take injured owls for long walks there, and she wanted it to be the place she was released into the universe. About a year after she died, her family and closest friends carried out this wish. There was a breeze in the air and not a single cloud in the sky on the beautiful August afternoon that we freed Aunt Linda.

One may have thought that spending ridiculous amounts of money on toys and cremations for pets was over the top, but for Aunt Linda her animals were worth every penny. I'm fairly certain the reason she had no trouble pampering them was because at one point or another all of them had been strays. Every pet was found on the streets—except for the bird, rescued from under a bridge—and given to the veterinary office that she worked for. The office would suggest that they stay with her until a permanent home could be arranged, but this was always a dangerous game. Once Aunt Linda saw the animal walking around comfortably in her home, it was all over. Another addition to her family had been made. I suppose she saw her pets as she'd seen herself in the past: unwanted. She was never popular when growing up. She was always mocked for being short, for being fat, for being different. Because of this, she most likely found pets easier to trust than people. People had let her down but animals relied on her and loved her unconditionally.

These were things she most likely recognized about herself. She was always exceptionally self-aware — something I admired about her. One journal entry of hers from 2002 says, *"I need to mature emotionally. Lower expectations and stop analyzing everything, two things my mom always told me my whole life. I figured if I had control of my life that nothing bad could happen. I have to accept the fact that life is not always fair and I cannot control it, only how I react to it."* This was a mentality that Aunt Linda attempted to maintain near the end of her life, especially after she got sick.

The road to her diagnosis was one that took years. Doctor after doctor gave test after test and she left every appointment just as clueless as she'd been when she entered. She would return home and sit down at the kitchen table with a sigh. She would pull out a piece of nicorette gum from her Vera Bradley bag and tell me that she was sick of being patient while doctors tried to figure out what was wrong with her. She was growing weaker, gaining and losing symptoms as every week came and went. One day she arrived back from an appointment and said nothing. She was already chewing a piece of gum, too stressed to wait a whole car ride without one. I sat opposite her, staring across the expanse of the chestnut table, waiting for something to be said. My parents came in through the garage, having

gone with her to the appointment. My mother walked into the kitchen and stood behind my aunt. She placed a hand on her shoulder and said nothing as my Aunt began to cry into her hands. I remained confused for a long period of time. It turns out that actually receiving a diagnosis didn't prove to be less stressful than waiting for one.

Her doctor had told her that day that she had stage four breast cancer. The next couple of years, the last ones of her life, had many highs and lows. On her good days she would walk around the house and make herself a meal. She would visit an old friend and they would enjoy each other's company as they complained about the stressful world around them. While her health deteriorated, so did her sense of independence. She greatly appreciated the assistance my parents and I provided while living with her, but I think she missed having the ability to spend a whole day making her famous peanut butter and Hershey kiss Christmas cookies all by herself.

She detested having her stairlift installed, taking attention away from the beautiful design of her cherry wood stair railing and bringing attention to the fact that she couldn't make her way upstairs by herself. I witnessed her hair fade from its frequently-dyed scarlet to a more natural smokey tone as she lost the time and energy to have it color treated. She missed having the strength to change the litter box and give her cats the medicine they needed. Aunt Linda had worked her entire life to gain this independence, this sense of self, and giving it up was a challenge.

The last time I saw my aunt was about a week and half before her passing. She felt especially sick that day. She wasn't sure if it was the cancer causing her pain, as she had many health complications at this point, so she wanted a professional's opinion. I stood in the kitchen with a terrible feeling in my gut as I watched Aunt Linda slowly step around the house, gathering some of her belongings to take with her to the hospital. Inhaler? Check. Cell phone? Check. Extra set of clothes? Check. I listened to the dragging of her slippers as she sauntered into the bathroom and locked the door behind her. She tried to be quiet as she got sick into the sink, but my parents and I heard her — the three of us sharing a look of intense worry. Not wanting to hear any more, I walked over to

the pink carpeted staircase and marched up to my room. My bed's old, wooden frame creaked loudly as I laid in it and stared at the ceiling, conflicted.

My close friend Abby had invited me months ago to venture to the Adirondack Mountains with her, and we were set to leave the next day. I had my old, polka dotted school bag packed tightly with the essentials — plus more clothes than I would ever need for a four day trip. I was ready to go, but I felt terrible leaving Aunt Linda when she was in such poor condition. Aunt Linda, having finished in the bathroom, came upstairs to grab something and saw me sulking through the opened crack in my door. She came in and steadily lowered herself onto the edge of my bed. She could sense something was wrong, and I felt horrible putting my internal struggles onto her when she clearly had enough to deal with.

“What’s wrong, hun?” she asked, trying to look into my eyes. I sat up and scooted over to be next to her. I tried to will the coming tears away and opted to stare at the floor, not being one to look at someone when I feel my eyes begin to water.

“I’m just worried about leaving for my trip tomorrow,” I mumbled. I sniffled before continuing. “I don’t know how much help I’d be by staying, but I don’t want to not be here if anything bad happens, y’know?” My gaze shifted to my leg as she rested her hand upon it and gave a small, comforting squeeze. I leaned my head on her shoulder and lightly shut my eyes as she responded.

“I want you to go have fun. Don’t trouble yourself while you’re away with worries of me, I’ll be fine. And when you get back you’ll tell me all about it. I promise,” she assured. She kept this promise. The day before she died I talked to her on the phone one last time. It was a long call, which I came to be thankful for. I told her about my trip with Abby. She told me about places she still wanted to go, like the Galapagos Islands, and places she’d been but wanted to go to with me, like her favorite butterfly exhibit. It was very telling of her personality when she insisted I go on my adventure with Abby. She never wanted to be considered an inconvenience, and she hated the thought of people associating her to only her sickness. She shouldn’t have worried, however, because when she did

pass away she was only spoken of for the things that she had worked so hard to be — a traveller of the world, a prosperous business woman, an avid lover of animals. She was so much more than just another crazy cat lady.

*“Have you ever noticed how touching
A scene of one small child
And an aging being,
The innocence of the very young
Entwined with the wisdom of
The aged is a combination for
Words there are none;
A special quality is had by each
Both having something that no one
Can teach*

*Before very long the innocence is gone
And for wisdom to come takes very long
What of the in between?”*

-Linda, February 2001

Fountain of Love

Adam Sommer



Dead Rose

Ellen Weber

Whispering wishes
On a dead rose
Longing to find out
Where it is hope goes

He loves me

The foolish desires
Of a smitten girl
Who doesn't yet understand
The ways of the world

He loves me not

A creeping thought
That leaves a hollow soul
A ridiculous rejection
Attempting to remain whole

He loves me

Blessed certainty
That life rewards
The pure foolish love
You're fighting for

He loves me not

When it all sinks in
There's nothing left to say
Hoping the heartache
Will fade through the days

He loves me

Whispering wishes
On a dead rose
The desperate desire
To be loved only grows

It's Easy to Cheat

Molly Sullivan

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

PETER (24), a stressed community college student, changes out of his Petco uniform attempting to wipe the white hair off of it. He puts on a spare pair of clothes.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

DOG WALKER (20) stands outside the door. He holds the leash to a Golden retriever next to him.

The dog's tag reads: COPPER.

The Dog Walker KNOCKS again. There's no answer.

The Dog Walker reaches under the doormat, pulls up a key, and unlocks the door.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Copper and the Dog Walker rush in shutting the door behind them.

The Dog Walker unleashes Copper.

Copper sprints across the house BARKING.

The Dog Walker glances around confused and notices a set of KEYS and a pair of SHOES on the door mat.

The Dog Walker follows Copper to the bathroom door and KNOCKS.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Peter jumps when he hears knocking. He throws his Petco shirt into the bath tub.

Peter opens the door. Copper runs forward to sniff him.

Peter tries to pet Copper but he jumps back and BARKS. Peter leans down to pet him a second time. Copper Barks again in accusation.

The Dog Walker enters. He's confused at Copper's reaction.

The Dog Walker notices the Petco shirt in the bathtub.

He looks and sees that it has white animal hair all over it. Dog Walker shakes his head disappointedly, Peter blushes embarrassed, attempting to calm Copper.

Ichabod

Amelia DeJarnette



Incomprehension

Emily Goleski

Oh, gracious solitude
 I can't find you
caught in the hands
 of my social counterparts
whimpering and wheezing
 I fall to your incidence

Did you hear me?
 calling through the woods
up the cold, spring brook
 as you sit on the edge, feet in
wishing to drown in the shallows

I'll still call for you
 hoping to find the hidden trail
you hid me down,
 lost and living

Two Lines

Emily Montague

“Don’t move. Shut up, skank! What did I tell you? You scream, and I kill you, got that? It’s as simple as that. Understand? That’s a good girl. Now doesn’t that feel good? Doesn’t it? Answer me, skank!”

I awoke with a startle, sweat dripping from my forehead. I wiped it away and took in my surroundings. I was safe in my room. I wasn’t in the boys’ locker room at Plymouth High. I was alone and safe, and nothing was going to happen to me.

“Olivia?”

I jumped and hugged my knees to my chest.

“Liv, are you okay?” I could just make out a figure standing in my bedroom doorway in the dim morning light that was coming through my window. It was Margo, my older sister. It wasn’t him. Thank God it wasn’t him.

“I just had a bad dream, that’s all. I’m fine. Really, I am.”

“If you say so. I’m going to go take a shower.” Margo closed the door behind her, and I breathed a sigh of relief. My phone buzzed on the nightstand next to me and I jumped again, picking it up to answer, clutching the phone tight to my ear.

“So, how was your night?” my best friend Natalia Woods asked, her voice finally soothing the last of my nerves. Well, as soothed as they got these days.

“I had another nightmare. That’s the third one this week, and it’s only Monday. When are they going to end Nat?” I whispered, keeping my voice low. I couldn’t risk anyone in the house hearing.

“I don’t know. It’s tragic, Liv. Especially since you know him so well and he’s still such a big part of your life. But it might get better if you told someone.”

“Oh yeah, that’ll totally go over well. Hey guys, my sister’s boyfriend shoved his penis inside me and told me not to tell you or he would kill me. Can you pass the eggs?”

Do you really think that's what my family wants to hear over breakfast?" I rubbed my hand groggily across my face and glanced at the clock. Dad had already left for work and Mom was downstairs cooking breakfast, something she insisted on doing for us every morning. Margo's voice floated down the hall as she practiced her audition for the school musical in the shower. The front door slammed, announcing my older brother Garrett's entrance, back from his morning run. Soon, he would start banging on the bathroom door, yelling at Margo to hurry up. It was the same routine every morning, and lately it felt like I was watching it from the outside.

"Well, you don't have to say it quite like that," Natalia mumbled quietly. She sounded so embarrassed. Part of me hated her for acting like I was shameful, for blushing whenever I said something vulgar, for crying when I first described what had happened to me. Part of me wanted to scream at her to grow up. That what happened to me was horrific and gruesome, but that it was my reality, a reality I had to live with every day. At the same time, I knew it wasn't her fault. She didn't sign up to be friends with an assault victim when we met in the second grade. She didn't know what would happen to me. I couldn't blame her for not understanding. No one did.

"They'll think it's my fault." I ran a hairbrush through my hair, attempting to untangle the knots. If only untangling my thoughts was as easy as brushing hair.

"Olivia! It isn't your fault! You were—"

"Don't say it. Just, don't say it," I whispered, closing my eyes. I immediately saw his face and snapped them open again. My breath caught in my throat as I choked, feeling his hands around my neck as if it happened yesterday and not a few weeks ago.

"Alright, just calm down. You should tell someone though. Think about it: if you got him in jail, you would never have to deal with this ever again." I clenched my teeth at the sound of her words. She had no idea. There would never be an end to this. Even if he was dead, I would still have to wake up every day with the thought of what he did to me. Though it would be nice to not have to see him around school, in gym class, in my house, hanging out with my brother, kissing my sister, and doing it all while watching me with a merciless look in his cold eyes.

“Even with Devin in jail, I’d still have to deal with it. This kind of thing just doesn’t go away. Plus, I’m still late, and I’m getting worried. You know how regular I am. I haven’t been late more than three days since I was twelve. It’s been a week and a half.” I could feel the tears welling in my eyes. “If I really am, this will never go away.” I tried to push the thought away. I thought my life was ruined now; I couldn’t imagine what it would be like if my worst fears happened to be true.

“You need to find out for sure.”

“Yeah, ‘cause that’s not embarrassing or anything. A fifteen-year-old, buying tests.”

“Like no other fifteen-year-old has ever been—” I cleared my throat, cutting Natalia off. She sighed and sat in silence for a moment before trying again. “Look, it’s not your fault. We’ll talk to Brad and devise a plan to reduce embarrassment. Buck up, sister. Smiling is 90 percent of all happiness.”

I plastered a fake grin to my face even though she couldn’t see me. “I feel better already,” I muttered, hanging up the phone so I could finish getting ready for school. Ten minutes later, as I was pulling my sweatshirt over my head, I heard the bang of the front door.

“Natalia’s here!” Margo yelled from down the hall and I grabbed my bag, making my way down the stairs.

“There she is.” Mom smiled, kissing the top of my hair. I kissed her cheek in return and turned to see Natalia sitting at our kitchen table next to Garrett.

“Morning, Liv,” he teased, pulling on my ponytail. I swatted him away and grinned. It was our little routine. It wasn’t big, but for a moment I felt like that little girl who used to race him to the ice cream truck. He would always beat me there to pay for my ice cream before I caught up and tell me that my ice cream was free. He thought I had no idea that he was paying for it himself. He had no idea that I had snuck money into his piggy bank when he wasn’t home. I’d give anything to be that little girl again.

“Morning, blondie,” I replied, ruffling his hair. Garrett hated having his hair touched almost much as he hated being referred to as blonde. Natalia gave him a sympathetic smile

and helped smooth it back in place. I turned away and made a face at Mom. It bugged me to no end that Natalia flirted with my brother, but he soaked the attention up like a star. For someone who lived to be the hero, when it came to Natalia, he loved playing the victim.

“What’s to eat?” Margo asked, walking into the kitchen. Garrett reached up to tug on her hair and she turned to glare at him. “Do you know how long it took to straighten this? Don’t you dare touch it.”

“Yes, your highness,” Garret said, holding his hands up in mock surrender. Natalia giggled, stroking his arm with sympathy. Garrett flashed his signature smile and she blushed. Good grief, could they be any more obvious?

“Ew, get a room,” Margo sneered, collapsing in the chair next to me.

“Maybe we will. Can you give us suggestions? Where do you and Devin go? Your room? His room? How about his car?” Garrett asked sarcastically. “Ew, don’t tell me, school bathroom?”

Natalia and I choked at the same time, earning the questioning looks of the rest of the table. I gave Natalia a panicked look and she raised her eyebrows, nodding at Mom. She was waiting patiently for me to explain, in the way that only mothers can, but she was going to have to keep waiting.

“We’re going to miss the bus if we don’t hurry, Nat,” I mumbled, grabbing my bookbag and banging out the front door with Natalia following on my heels.

“What was that? You could have told them the truth right then! Garrett set that one up perfectly!” Natalia yelled as we made our way to the bus stop.

“‘cause that’s a great breakfast conversation.”

“When are you going to stop wallowing and take control of your destiny again? You’re beginning to look depressed, Liv. You don’t even dress up anymore, it’s always just jeans and sweatshirts. Remember when you used to wear skirts every day? You used to love dressing up. It always made you so happy. ‘Good outfit, good day.’ Remember when you used to say that literally all the time?”

“No, I forgot my life mantra in the past month. Of course I remember. It’s just that everything makes me feel like a slut, especially anything revealing. Or tight. Or white. Sorry.” I winced looking over Nat’s outfit. In brown leggings and a flowing white shirt, Nat looked like she had just stepped out of a fashion magazine. She screamed confidence, something I was lacking lately. “It’s just I would never feel comfortable in that now.”

“If you’re worried about my leggings defining my ass and some guy pulling me aside and doing me in the bathroom, I think I’ll be fine,” Nat sneered, pausing on the sidewalk. She bit her lip and shook her head. “Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.”

“It’s fine. I get that this is frustrating for you. I’m sorry. I’ll try not to disturb you with my problems anymore. It’s not like they’re traumatic or anything. That looks great on you. I only said that I couldn’t wear it.” I trudged on the bus and collapsed in an empty seat, barely registering Natalia sitting down gingerly next to me.

I looked out the window. The whole world seemed to be living without me. The people on the sidewalks were all hurrying to get somewhere, worried about being late to work or getting their kids to the bus stop on time. Or keeping their daughters from dressing like sluts, I inferred from the dad that was chasing down a freshman in a skirt short enough to fit an eight-year-old. He was yelling but she just kept walking, surprisingly not tripping in her heels. I looked down at my converse and sighed. I just couldn’t understand how some people could feel so comfortable in that.

A jogger ran by with headphones jammed in his ears. A woman struggled to hold onto a toddler’s hand, carrying a baby and talking on her cell phone all at the same time. A businessman walked by carrying a briefcase, not paying attention to the world around him. A couple from school strolled hand in hand, a Jr. High younger sibling tagging along behind, rolling his eyes. A senior citizen couple helped each other adorably down the sidewalk. Which one would I be? The slut? God no, I’m way too uncomfortable with my body. I definitely wasn’t the businessman or the jogger. Would I be the single mother with the two kids? Would that be me in just a few years? Would I at least be holding a baby? Could that be my life?

“Olivia, come on.” Natalia tugged on my arm and I let her lead me into the school. We headed to our lockers in the sophomore wing. Since my last name was Young and Natalia’s was Woods, our lockers were almost right next to each other. In fact, there was only one locker in between us, the locker that belonged to Alisha Yess, but Alisha’s boyfriend had a locker down in the Hs, so she switched, with Brad Harrison. Who just so happened to be my best friend. And Natalia’s too of course.

“Good morning, ladies. How’s your Monday going?” Brad asked, clicking open his locker in one smooth motion. He took off his jacket and a freshman girl sighed as she passed. All the girls at Plymouth loved Brad. Who wouldn’t? He was funny, sweet, carefree, and hot as hell.

“Every Monday sucks, but Olivia’s Monday sucks worse,” Natalia informed him nonchalantly, grabbing her books.

“Why is that?” he asked, turning to face me. I could see the worry clouding the green in his eyes. The flecks of gold flashed with concern as his pupils grew, fixated on my face. I shifted uncomfortably under his gaze, rubbing the back of my neck.

“I’m still late, and I’m going to have to tell someone,” I mumbled, tearing my eyes from his and throwing my bag in my locker.

“The first bell hasn’t even rung yet. You’re not late.”

“Not that kind of late dufus,” Natalia said from behind him, smacking him in the back of the head. He winced and I shot Natalia a dirty look. She shrugged and I turned my attention back to Brad, whose brow was now deeply furrowed.

“What kind of late?” he asked cautiously, still clearly confused.

“You know, the bad kind of late,” I whispered, looking around, my face turning pink. Brad still didn’t get it. How could I expect him to? He was a guy—he didn’t have to worry about it. How come guys got it so much easier?

“Her period, you idiot! Did they teach you anything in health class?” Natalia hissed, and the color on my cheeks deepened. Leave it to Natalia to humiliate me more than I already was. Before too long, the whole school would know.

“Probably. I didn’t pay attention. I thought it was kind of disrespectful, saying those things with boys and girls together,” Brad said, his face turning red. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine,” I mumbled, reaching into his locker as another groups of girls floated by and sighed. I grabbed his jacket and slid it on him, fiddling with the material as I flattened the front against his chest. He smiled down at me and I smiled back. I could feel the muscles in his chest rise and fall with every breath, and I tried to match my own breathing to the rhythm of his.

“Okay, I’ll cover up, you freak,” he whispered, pulling me into a hug. I breathed in his familiar scent and felt a rare wave of peace pass over me. I placed my chin on his shoulder and saw Natalia standing behind him, grinning at me. I rolled my eyes at her and then closed them again.

“You’re a special kind of person, Olivia Young, you know that? I’d do anything for you,” Brad whispered in my ear. I pulled back and smiled at him. “I’ll even wear the jacket.”

“Don’t worry, she practically called me a slut this morning,” Natalia whined, gesturing to her outfit.

“Really Liv? That’s not that bad.”

“I never said anything like that! In fact, I really like your outfit. It’s just not my style.”

“I could go shirtless,” Brad interjected. “Just these tight, black, ass defining jeans and my sneakers. The girls would like that.” He stepped forward towards me and lifted the hem of his shirt so that I could get a peek at his abs underneath. I took a sharp breath and stepped back, glancing away. I looked back at him and saw his grin.

“That’s another outfit Olivia would like,” Natalia mumbled and I shot her a death glare. Luckily, Brad didn’t seem to hear, or if he did, he didn’t care. Me—I blushed fiercely.

“I have to go,” I mumbled, slamming my locker shut. I removed Brad’s hand from the hem of his shirt and flattened it against his chest, feeling the muscles tighten under my touch. I hurried off, ducking my head, as I made my way through the sea of people, trying to avoid being noticed.

I stood in the bathroom of the convenience store, the pregnancy test that Brad had just purchased clutched in my hand. He had just sauntered in, grabbed one and paid like it wasn't weird for a teenage boy to buy a pregnancy test. I guess that people don't question you when you're attractive. Or male. Or both. Natalia had snuck me into the bathroom while Brad was chatting up the salesgirl, who happened to be a friend of Margo's. She wouldn't even know the test was for me.

"Are you okay in there?" Natalia asked through the door.

I snapped back to the present and clutched the pregnancy test tighter in my fist. I hadn't had any problem taking it from Brad or locking myself in the dimly lit drugstore bathroom. I hadn't had any problem opening the box or even using the test. But I couldn't bring myself to look at the results.

"What does it say?" Brad whispered through the door and I brushed back a tear. I knew that whatever happened they were there for me. Positive or negative, good or bad, they were there. No matter what, I wouldn't be alone.

I looked down at my tightly closed fist and slowly opened it. The test looked huge and foreign in my palm. I held it closer to my face, my eyes squeezed tightly shut. I opened them slowly and the test came into focus. It took me a moment to register the results. Two lines stared back at me. Holy shit.

Sobs shook my whole body as I collapsed to the linoleum. The door slammed open and a pair of arms wrapped around me, pulling me closer. I felt hands on my back, in my hair, soothing words ricocheting in my ears. I dropped the test to the ground, and it clicked against the tile, once, twice, and then there was silence.

I sat cross-legged on my bed that afternoon, the test stick sitting on my pink polka dot comforter in front of me. A second test rested in my palm, the same result as the first—positive. Ironical how the worst news of my life was labeled as positive. I set the second one down next to the first and tried to imagine my life. My mother crying as I told her. My father shaking his head, not willing to believe what had happened to his little girl. My sister refusing to believe that her boyfriend

would ever do anything like that. My brother walking out on a mission to right the wrong that had violated my honor.

I tried to imagine going to school. The whispers as I passed by of what had happened to me. The stares as my belly grew from 'one donut too many' to 'oh so very obvious.' The rumors that it wasn't rape, that I had wanted it. All the attention, all the twisted truths. But none of it compared to seeing him. None of it compared to the fact that tomorrow night, for Sunday dinner, I would have to sit across from him like I did every week and butter my roll in silence like nothing was wrong. Nothing compared to the fear that when someone wasn't looking he might grab my wrist and grope my ass, smiling that sadistic smile like it was some secret kept between the two of us. Except now there were three of us, and I couldn't let that happen.

I stood up, tiptoeing down the hall and into my parent's bedroom. I opened the closet, scanning the items that lay at my feet. After years of snooping for Christmas gifts, I knew just what I would find. My hand rested for a moment on the gun case before reaching down and pulling out an old wooden baseball bat, the one my dad had used in high school. I held it in my palms and swung, imagining it cracking against something solid. Daddy had always said that if I ever needed to protect myself, go for his bat. I brought it back to my room and shoved it in a duffle bag. If there was anytime I needed protection, it was now.

I stared down at my shaking hands. Tears mixed with the sweat dripping down my face and I reached up to wipe them away, smearing blood across my forehead. I closed my eyes and opened them again, looking down. He was still there, finally still, finally quiet.

"Daddy won't hurt us anymore," I whispered, placing my hand on my stomach for the first time, feeling a fresh wave of tears flood from my eyes.

The flashing lights reflected in the window behind me, but I couldn't move. I could hear the voices behind me, the yelling. The phone sat on the floor at my feet. I listened as heavy footsteps came up the stone steps, the same stone steps that I had snuck up less than an hour before. I ran my fingers

over the shards of wood in my skin as I heard them discover the splintered lock. I studied the baseball bat at my feet, tracing the raw spots on my palms where the bat had dug into my skin when I swung it. I listened as their guns clicked, guns that would soon be pointed at the back of my head.

The door swung open and I put my hands in the air, dropping the kitchen knife to the floor. It clattered against the hard wood and bounced twice before settling in a pool of blood. I dropped to my knees, grunting as they twisted my arms behind my back. I glanced back down at Devin, who was lying in front of me, two bloody lines traced across his chest. They yanked me away from him, out the door, and down the steps, the light shining on my face for the first time in weeks.

Cherry Blossom

Kelsey Cicerone



Just Pray

Nicole Hube

I remember the sound of someone's tongue
speaking in a language nestled somewhere in between lullabies
and battle cries - words spoken in a warm tone that made me
feel
not like I was living in someone's dominion,

but that I was my own kingdom,

and I could shape my skin into walls of stone and steel.

The first time I watched someone worship, I could not
understand

why they cried - enough to create another story of Noah—
to some man they claimed resided in the clouds and the blue
sky
when all I could see out the window was monochrome.

The clouds still haven't parted yet,

but this warmth is something new.

Peaked

Emily Goleski



Wait, This Isn't Normal?

Kailey Brown

I turn left onto the boulevard
I see headlights in my mirrors, approaching until they're too
close to make out
I hear brakes screeching, horns honking, and glass shattering
behind me
I check my rear-view, four times to be exact
The glass is still intact, no one is on the road behind me
"Shut up, Brain, we're fine" I say aloud
My brain does not shut up,
I imagine a wreck every time I turn or change lanes

I send a text, nothing too personal or juicy
He didn't answer
I sent it 1 minute and 42 seconds ago
What if I sent it to the wrong person?
I have to check.
I didn't, okay.
2 minutes and 32 seconds
What if I made a typo?
What if I said something weird?
I have to check.
I didn't, I don't, this is how I always talk
Check one more time
Shut up, Brain

I start my playlist in the locker room of the gym
I turn the volume up all the way up before putting in my
earbuds
Can the people around me hear my music?
I extend the arm grasping the earbuds, I can't hear the music
but maybe my hearing is bad
I put in only one earbud and walk out to the treadmill

I turn the volume down two notches every time someone looks at me

Are these things even connected to my phone?

What if everyone is laughing at me?

They're not, but I'm gonna turn off my music and workout in silence anyways.

What if they can tell I'm just pretending to listen to music?

Shut up, Brain.

My right hand grazes the wall while I'm walking to class

I resist the urge to run my left hand along it too

I make it 7 steps before my brain tells me that I must touch the wall with my left hand too

11 steps

I swipe the wall with my left hand, as nonchalantly as possible

Everyone definitely just saw me do that, I'm so awkward

Shut up, Brain.

Why are people are looking at me?

I crack my knuckles one by one then all at once, it makes me feel more comfortable.

Why did my voice crack like that?

I fidget with my earlobes, it makes me feel more comfortable.

Why did I just make eye contact with those strangers?

I bury my head in my phone and let out a fake yawn, it makes me feel more comfortable.

Why am I walking so fast?

I repeatedly tap my fingers on the back of the book I'm holding, it makes me feel more comfortable.

The Balancing Act

Nichole Bailey

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

AHMED (29) waits at the bus stop wearing a short-sleeved dress shirt, half-tucked in, no belt. He fiddles with a 40 Days Sober token. He's wearing a black backpack, and is fighting the urge to grab a cigarette from it.

EMIL (O.S.)

Ahmed? Ahmed Moghaddam? Could it possibly be?

He turns to see EMIL (27) strolling towards him. He flicks away a cigarette, his wide smile displaying his crooked, yellow teeth. His black hair is frizzing due to the humidity. He's wearing a hoodie, a navy blue backpack on his shoulder.

Surprised, Ahmed puts the token in his pocket. He smiles lightly, giving a slight wave.

AHMED

Emil. It's been a while.

Emil pulls Ahmed into a tight hug. Ahmed winces at the unexpected gesture, he smells the cigarettes on him. Ahmed is the first to pull away.

EMIL

Almost didn't recognize ya in this fancy getup. You going to an interview?

AHMED

No, prison.

Emil gives him a weird look. He pulls another cigarette and lighter from his pocket.

AHMED (CONT'D)

For a Church service, that is.

Emil CLICKS the lighter multiple times before it lights.

EMIL

Church? Like the Christian one?

Ahmed CHUCKLES.

AHMED

Presbyterian Church, actually. There another kind?

EMIL

Nah, I just would've expected you to be Muslim 's'all. But that's cool.

Ahmed shrugs.

AHMED

Not all Arabs converted to Islam.

Emil nods.

EMIL

Sure, sure. But you, a religious man?

He CLICKS his tongue.

Ahmed's brow furrows. The bus SCREECHES to a halt before them. Emil throws the cigarette behind him, Ahmed has to duck so it doesn't hit him.

He hesitates, watching Emil board the bus before following.

INT. BUS - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Ahmed shakes his head, trying to make sense of the claim as he trails closely behind Emil.

AHMED

What's that supposed to mean?

Emil LAUGHS through his teeth, biting his tongue.

EMIL

Didn't seem like the religious type when I knew you.

He scans the area for a seat, shrugging his backpack to the floor.

EMIL (CONT'D)

Certainly not the preacher type.

He sits in the seat closest to the window. He looks at Ahmed, waiting for a response.

Ahmed stares at him. He shakes his head, bewildered.

AHMED

That was before. It's not like that anymore.

Emil's not fazed.

EMIL

Sit down.

Ahmed sets his backpack down, sinking into the seat beside Emil. He SIGHS, wiping sweat off of his forehead.

AHMED

What're you doing nowadays, anyway? Like are you doing anything with your life?

Emil raises his eyebrows.

EMIL

Wow, classic Ahmed. I'm going to work right now actually.

Ahmed shrugs.

AHMED

Funny. That doesn't sound like the Emil I knew.

EMIL

Do you even have a job, 'cos it sounds to me like you're just a volunteer.

Ahmed ignores the remark.

AHMED

I didn't mean it like that.

EMIL

Screw you. I got a good gig goin', you're not the only one who can turn their life around.

AHMED

Shit, 'Mil, I'm sorry, I...

Emil LAUGHS dryly, looking out the window to avoid eye contact.

Ahmed SIGHS, scratching at his hair, contemplating.

AHMED (CONT'D)

(quietly)

I... I know things didn't end the best between us.

Emil bites down hard on the inside of his cheek, still listening.

AHMED (CONT'D)

I think about it all the time. That night.

Emil sneers for a moment, but regains his composure. He refuses to turn around.

AHMED (CONT'D)

On the hospital's pavement. I shouldn't have left you there.

Ahmed shakes his head, guilty.

Emil lowers his eyes.

EMIL

Can I bum a cigarette?

Ahmed furrows his brow, caught off guard.

AHMED

Do you not already have enough?

Emil turns to face Ahmed, his gaze unwavering.

EMIL

I only have one left. I save that one for my Ma.

Ahmed pauses, then EXHALES.

Emil watches as Ahmed grabs his backpack, RUMMAGING past the loose Church pamphlets to retrieve the newly purchased pack of Camels. He RIPS off the plastic, handing one to Emil.

Emil's eyes flicker to the pack, then the cigarette in hand.

EMIL (CONT'D)

(sarcastically)

Only the good stuff, right?

Ahmed rolls his eyes, putting his backpack down. He cradles the pack of Camels in his hand.

AHMED

You gonna be okay?

Emil's eyes fall to the ground, silent. He looks back up at Ahmed.

EMIL

This is my stop.

He rises, reaching down to grab the backpack and draping it over his shoulder.

Ahmed watches as Emil puts the cigarette between his lips while leaving the bus. He doesn't look back.

As the bus departs, Ahmed glances out the window to watch...

EMIL LIGHTING THE CAMEL CIGARETTE AT THE STREET CORNER...

...HIS HAND SHIELDING IT FROM THE WIND.

Ahmed sinks back into his seat, closing his eyes. His grip tightens around the Camels pack, but he doesn't take one out.

INT. PRISON - DAY

Ahmed approaches the CORRECTIONAL OFFICER behind the visitation desk.

AHMED

Ahmed Moghaddam for the Faith Behind Bars program.

He shrugs off his backpack, used to the standard procedure.

The Correctional Officer unzips the bag, mindlessly RUMMAGING through its contents before stilling. His demeanor changes.

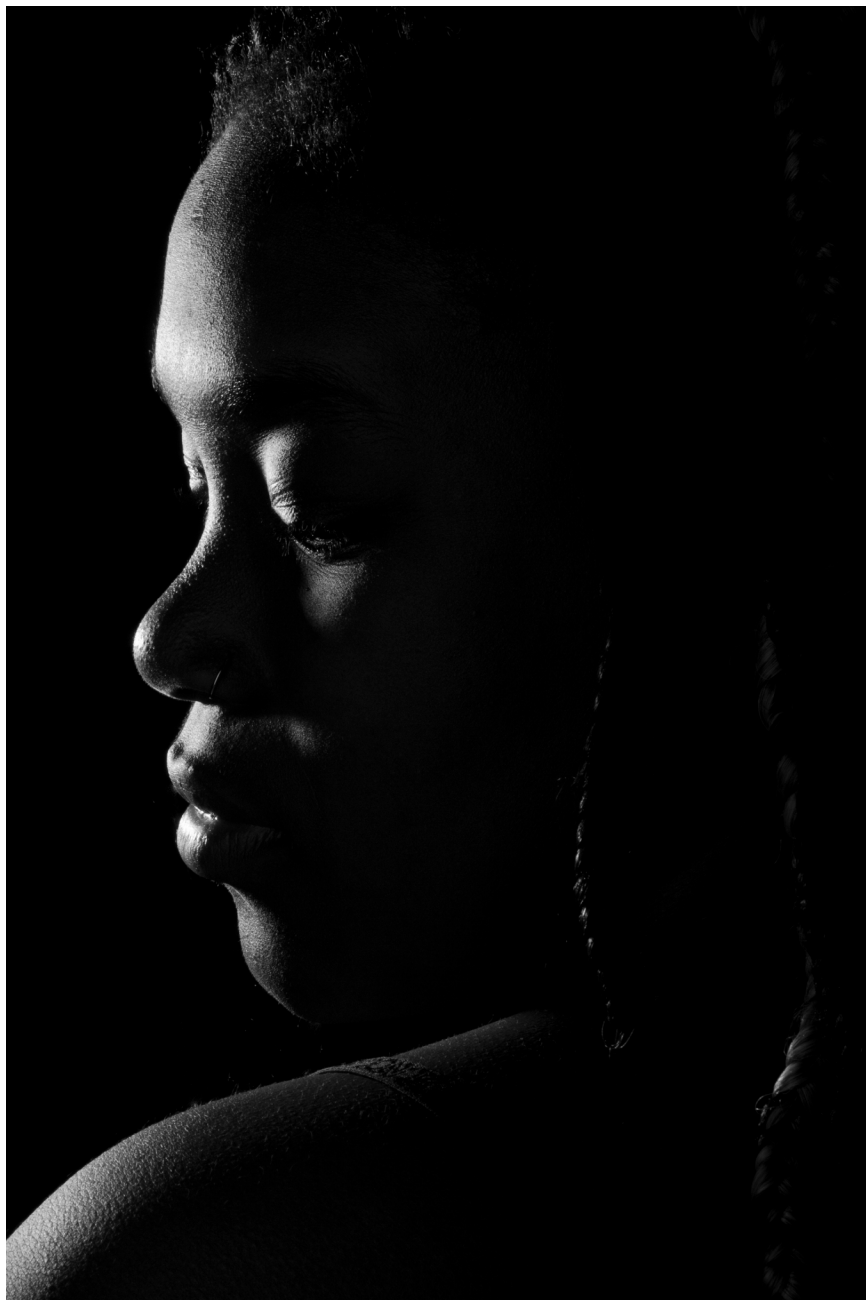
HE PULLS OUT A PLASTIC BAG FILLED WITH ORANGE PILL BOTTLES...

...THEY READ "FENTANYL" AND "OXYCOTIN".

Ahmed's brow furrows, momentarily confused. His expression drops, realizing the backpack's navy blue color.

Sanya Transformed

Maggie DeJohn



9:59
Beatriz Rosa

9:59
Am or Pm
Doesn't matter.

The blazing heat makes your skin stick to your sweat pants.
The moisture of your armpits is more annoying than the drawn
out
hum of the fan that harmonizes with the fridge to accompany
the
intrusive thoughts you've been
dodging all day

Alexis is playing
Outlast
on her PS4 for the fifth time this week and
you wonder how it feels
lose yourself in a screen.
If it feels good to have an image jump
out at you and hold the lines in your stomach hostage.
How does it feels to scream? To feel the
pressure in your sides and release air so sharp
you shock yourself with how loud you can be.

You wonder if it's more liberating than
leaving your room without your keys,
gliding down the sidewalk past the nuclear power plant and
filling your pockets with cinder before
jumping into Lake Ontario
At 9:59
Am or
Pm
Doesn't matter.

Fast

Jessica Wickham

You wake up to a voice screaming numbers at you.

122. Must be 122 today. That little stunt last night cost you four pounds, at least.

You pinch your eyes shut. *Shut up, shut up, shut up.* You glance at the clock, begging it to say 6:40 a.m., time to run.

6:38 a.m. Thank God.

The alarm rings two minutes later, and you quickly stand up out of bed. *At least 1,000*, you think, remembering all the sesame chicken and lo mein you shoved down your throat in ten minutes for dinner last night when you were alone.

Fucking pig.

You strap on your sneakers and tie your shorts tighter around your waist. A glimpse in the mirror horrifies you. How are your thighs fat again?

You run out the door, forcing half a granola bar into your stomach, though you can taste every calorie adding up to 50 as it lands in your gut.

“Do you have the time to listen to me whine...” Billie Joe sings in your ear as you go.

About nothing and everything all at once, you mentally sing along as you push your legs to run faster along the wooded trail.

Six miles in 60 minutes. 500 calories.

It won't be enough.

You can't focus on Billie's words anymore—glowing red numbers fill your mind instead, all dreaded digits to read on the scale. *Run. Faster. Can't see that number.*

8:00 a.m. You're back at the house now.

Don't drink any water—it will literally add pounds to the numbers you see.

You pull out the scale Mom keeps by her desk.
Thankfully, she's at work.

119. Fuck.

It was 116.7 yesterday morning. Damn cravings.

Get it back down. You can't see 132 again. Just can't. Fast again.

You consider it. Half an apple for breakfast, the other half for lunch. 100 calories total. Celery for a mid-afternoon snack. Obviously 0. Can of soup for dinner. 300 calories, 400 total.

Done it before. Can do it again.

You can't stop the sinking feeling in your stomach. But *the hunger. And isn't fasting dangerous?*

Only do it for a day. Just to get to 117 again. Then stop. Make sure to never go lower. Don't be anorexic. Just make up for a bad day.

You nod, even though the same thought pattern doesn't seem as comforting as it did three months ago.

You go to the fridge and pull out a large apple. You cut it in half, then into slices.

Take deliberate, slow bites. Mindful eating. Savor the food. No scarfing down like last night.

In five minutes, the first half is gone, and you debate whether to go ahead and eat the rest of it.

No. Stay below 500.

You put the rest away and head to the shower.

Keep distracted. Don't think about food.

You think of what you can do, seeing as it's the middle of summer vacation on a weekday. *Erie Canal Trail? Two hours would probably do it.*

You fill up a water bottle as high as it will go and promise to drink all of it while you're out.

Drink water, less hungry.

You take the front wheel off the bike and fit the whole thing in the trunk of your car.

The drive takes 20 minutes. When you get there, it's relatively sparse.

Good. Bike alone.

You set off on the dirt-covered trail, focusing on the surrounding water and woods. An hour passes slowly. You make it to the third break in the trail—Jordan. You ride around the small town for 10 minutes before turning around. An hour back.

You jump on your computer when you get back.

Two hours. 1,000 calories. That's better.

You still can't escape this sinking feeling in your chest, though. Biking normally makes you feel lighter. Why do you still feel so heavy?

You open another browser.

You can't be anorexic. And you don't make yourself vomit.

But excessive exercise, isn't that a form of purging? Your heartrate skyrockets, and you start to panic. Please no.

You type "signs of bulimia" into Google, as you have several times in the past. Uncontrollable cravings. Obsessive dieting. Always thinking of food. Finding a way to purge, including vomiting, excessive exercise, fasting, and laxatives. How did you ignore those facts before?

You're fine. You're not sick.

You can't believe it, won't believe it. You close your laptop and shake the thoughts away.

You're fine.

Outskirts of Ireland

Amelia DeJarnette



Silver Spoon

Derek Bennett

Manic dreams filled with twisted lies,
Shattered hopes and worse of all
Broken trust.

Growing up hearing how you're supposed to be a role model,
The perfect figure.
How could you do us all so wrong?

Childhood hopes raised to the sky,
Comes crashing down in a blazing ball of hell-fire.
Your beautiful lies, being raised in a godless world,
Next to addicts turned thieves.
People who will take everything,
But you?

I never thought I'd have to lock everything up.
But you'd take that too.

We may both have prized possessions,
But mine were first editions-
Yours? A packet, silver spoon and needle.

The result you may ask?
Tears streaming down my face,
With no one to ask why we were never as important as your
next hit.
A fear to speak about mental illness,
That you found cowardly.

One thing we have in common though?
Scars of self-inflicted damage.
But hey, at least I can find a vein
When I was hospitalized.
Couldn't say the same for you.

I try to be different,
I try to understand.
But at the end of the day I can't.
I can't understand what would make a parent
Pick substance over support.
Because my support?
Died the day you told me it didn't matter.
The day you said you'd never stop.
It died the day you told me
That at least your illness was real.

Your illness being real? Sure, I'll agree to that.
But mine? Fuck I didn't
Chose this illness.
You fully knew what you were getting into
When you hit the pipe,
Cut a line,
And torched the silver spoon.

Being called a coward over anxiety and depression,
Really
Really, really made my "fake" illness real.
But here's the funny thing,
Maybe if you looked into the pool of
Poison, on your favorite spoon,
You'd see the coward was never me,
But you.
You'd maybe see the trauma you've caused.
You'd see us all frowning back at you.

Noises in the Night

Chad Ordway

Just before I was about to start high school, my family was pet-sitting my grandma's dog Trooper while she was away. He was a big black lab, easily thirteen or fourteen years old by that time. He was a slow and lumpy old man, but he still had the heart of a puppy, and we loved having him over. One of the problems with having a senior dog like him is that we often needed to take him out so he can go to the bathroom, and during odd hours at that rate.

One night, at around ten o'clock, my mom was away and my dad was dead asleep, so that meant it was my turn to let Trooper out in the backyard. I went out with him so I could keep an eye on him to make sure he didn't wander off or get into some other trouble. While waiting for him to finish up, I was busy looking up at the stars. It was a dark night, but the sky was clear, so the stars and moon shone bright and lit up the whole backyard. I live in a fairly quiet town upstate—more of a hamlet really—and the houses are far apart from each other. Essentially, this means that I have a decently large backyard, surrounded by what might as well be a forest. You can hardly see anything beyond the line of trees even on a bright and sunny day. And at night, the effect is like being surrounded by a wall of blackness.

I wasn't particularly thinking of that that night though, as I was too busy stargazing and making sure Trooper was still nearby. That changed when I heard rustling coming from the edge of the woods. At first, I thought it was just some birds up in the trees. But when it happened again, I realized that it was too loud to be birds.

I didn't have a flashlight with me, so I wasn't able to light up the offender. My first thought was that the noises were coyotes, as they had been a problem recently. So I called Trooper over to me and then hurried back inside, safe from any prying eyes and gnashing teeth.

So of course, about two hours later, I went back outside to do some more stargazing, sans Trooper, the thoughts of coyotes long since passed. However, this time I came out

armed. Not, mind you, with a gun or some other weapon to defend myself with if the coyotes decided to pounce. No, instead I went out prepared with a flashlight. I'm not sure what I planned to do if a pack of hungry coyotes came after me with only a flashlight to defend myself. Maybe blind them. Or throw it at them and then runaway.

But what were the odds that the coyotes would still be there two hours later? Surely, I thought, they would be long gone. And even if they weren't, surely they wouldn't dare attack a person, especially someone my size.

So, partly confidently, partly apprehensively, I went back outside to get my space fix. It really is beautiful to look up to the sky on a clear night and see nothing but a field of stars and the moon stretching as far as the eye can see. It's like looking at a black ocean, speckled with the glow of luminescent fish. The night was warm and still, with not even a breeze. Everything still and quiet. It was very peaceful.

Until I heard the distinct crack of breaking branches.

I spun around, trying to figure out where the noise had come from. To my left, I heard it again. I turned, facing the direction the noise was coming from, and listened. Again, the sound of breaking branches could be heard, this time in multiple directions.

"Oh my god, it's a whole pack," I thought, panic rising within me.

But now, unlike last time, there was something added. A new noise that wasn't there to begin with. Something that froze me on the warm night.

Chewing. They were chewing on something, devouring it. Probably some hapless creature that had fallen prey to the ravenous jaws of the coyotes. All I could do was stand there, and wonder if they were still hungry for another midnight snack.

Fear has an odd way of playing with time. Realistically, all of what just happened probably only lasted a few seconds. To me though, it might as well of been an eternity, every possibility rushing through my mind at once. The dread of having to calculate if I could run back to my house before the coyotes could catch me. The likelihood of yelling to either scare them away or attract someone else's attention. So many

thoughts and possibilities and scenarios rush through your mind that you're stuck still, partly from the fear, and partly from your brain trying not to shut down under the weight of so many calculations.

Then, through the haze, I remembered that I still had the flashlight. My one chance of finding out what the noise was, and potentially, my one chance of escape. Slowly, I flicked on the switch and pointed it in the direction of the noises. And, staring back at me, was a pair of red glowing eyes.

I was a goner. I was sure that that night would be my last. In the morning, my twisted, partly devoured corpse would make for a grizzly lawn decoration for my parents to find. When had anyone ever faced something with red glowing eyes and walked away to tell about it? No, this was something evil, demonic, that was coming to get me.

Slowly, my eyes adjusted to the bright beam of light, and I could clearly see what it was that would be my ultimate doom.

Deer.

It was a couple of deer, just eating grass.

I let out the breath that I didn't realize I was holding in, and nearly collapsed. Everything, everything, that I had thought up in the last minute had been nothing. Nothing at all. Just some sort of wild fantasy spun up in the irrational fears of a fifteen-year-old at night. I gave out a loud chuckle, which spooked the deer nearly as bad as they had me, and headed back inside.

A few days later, I was back in school. Obviously, the first thing that I told my friends about was the deer incident. They, of course, misunderstood the story almost entirely.

"So, you're afraid of deer?"

"What? No. Were you even listening?"

"Sounds like you are."

"I'm not scared of deer, I was just startled by them. There's a difference."

"Yeah, whatever, Mr. Scaredy-deer."

I just rolled my eyes and thought of all the ways that I could get back at them. To this day, whenever I tell this story, I still have to clarify that I was only startled by deer, and not

scared of them. No nightmares. Nothing. Just wild imaginings on a dark night.

Aurelia

Macdonell Orelus



Things My Mother Tells Me

Christian McCarthy

My mom has always has something to say,
Even now when I'm far away
Always go to class on time,
Make sure your work is nothing less than sublime
Try your best to make a new friend,
Together, you will make memories that'll cease to end
Don't be afraid to occasionally call us at home,
Never forget the place you used to roam
On a more serious note though, liquor before beer,
Remember that one, and most of the time you'll be in the clear
Don't you ever drink the punch,
Because if you do, you'll be sure to see your lunch
Never pee in a public place,
Or the next thing you'll see on the police blotter is your face
Try to always have a ride back,
And please, roll down the window if you have to yack
The last thing anyone wants is a car full of throw-up,
If that happens, next time, don't expect them to show-up
Always remember we will always love you,
As long as you keep your G.P.A, higher than a 2

Grandma

Anastasia Grimando West

JUNIOR MISSTURR- The deranged son. 15. Cold and apathetic, he thinks he can survive on his brilliant mind alone when the world pushes him down. He doesn't quite know why, but he yearns for some bigger connection. Poor social skills but has a greater range of emotions than he'd care to admit- even to himself.

MISSY MISSTURR- The twisted daughter. 18.. Punk and prep school have had a baby: It's missy. Doesn't put up with bullshit. looks out for number one, she'll die before she exposes her vulnerable side. **Although Missy is a drinker, at NO POINT should this become a comic relief/sloppy situation.

MR MISSTURR- The sinister father figure. 40s. wants to be loved by his wife, heels to her. does not have any power in the family, but would quickly rise to the challenge of protecting them.

MRS MISSTURR- The maniacal housewife. 40s. wants to be waited on, hand and foot. Wears the pants. Level headed always- almost always.

GRANDMA- The sweetest old woman on the earth. 80s

FIDO- The family dog. 28 in dog years. Wears a BDSM-like getup.

SETTING

TIME: Vague. Over the course of one summer. (periodization does not have to be strict)

LOCATION: A suburb in Vaguely, New Mexico.

SET: Vibrant and exaggerated 1950s toybox. Missturr foyer in the background. (50s atomic wallpaper) Unit set, and props should be used whenever possible to indicate a set change.

LIGHTS UP ON JUNIOR, STABBING A DEAD BODY.

JUNIOR

(to audience)

I'm not a bad person, but when I killed Mr. Sportsball, I had to cut him up and hide the bits, so that the cops would never find him.

(JUNIOR starts to hack away at the body, body parts go FLYING)

Just to clarify, I'm n-not un- unstable, or "at risk". I killed the coach with a clear and healthy mind. Because I was done being stepped on- It was time for me to prove that I could take what I want. It's not like there's any competent police in this town, and I could easily murder someone without my family ever knowing... Not that they'd ever notice me.

(Beat)

Throughout all the fun, I couldn't help but think about the horrors that awaited me at home: the family reunion. It was a gathering mother decided to throw together to satisfy her weird obsession with family- Was it the worst idea? No. Was I expecting it to work?

(stab, and then, re: the body)

All you need to catch a murderer is means, motive and opportunity. I think I did a good job of hiding mine.

LIGHTS DOWN. UP ON THE MISSTURR'S LIVING ROOM. THE 4 MISSTURRS WEAR PARTY HATS. MRS' DIY SASH HANGS, AND READS: MRS MISSTURRS' MAGNIFICENTLY MICRO-MANAGED MISSTURR MEMBERS' MEETUP. THEY ALL LOOK MISERABLE. JUNIOR AND MISSY DRIFT ONTO THE COUCH. SPOTLIGHT ON THEM.

MRS

...This is it?

MR

This is it.

MRS

Where is everyone?

MR

This is the whole family.

MRS

You mean to say I arranged all of this for the four of us? Who's going to be impressed by that!?

MRS puts her head in her hands and sighs angrily. MR uses one of those party blower thingies.

MRS

Seriously?

MR

(whisper)

I'm only *trying to make* things better...

MRS

(whisper)

Yes! Because that is all you *do*. Try! You don't *do*!

MR

What do you want me to *do*! Because I will! I'll do it! I'll do anything!

MRS

I want you to be a man! And stop trying. ‘Trying’ what are you, a little girl?!?

JUNIOR

(To audience)

I wished Mother and Father would stop.

FIDO enters and after going in a circle once or twice, he settles at the middle of the living room, facing them. JUNIOR pets him.

JUNIOR

(To audience)

That’s all I really want. A family like—

(sigh)

it’s wishful thinking...

(to no one in particular)

Anyways, this family reunion is... reuniting.

MISSY

(to no one in particular)

The Missturr family reunions tend to be... reuniting, I guess.

JUNIOR

(to no one in particular)

As reuniting as they can be when you barely talk.

MISSY

One time, we took a wrong turn driving to a funeral and found ourselves at a beach full of happy families.

JUNIOR

We almost started to talk to one another—

almost. I was able, however, to observe several other human activities.

MISSY and JUNIOR

They seemed so... joyous

(sigh)

MISSY

But whatever. It's ridiculous. To even think that we could-

JUNIOR

It's a sick fantasy. That we could be happy.

MISSY

But I can't help but think-

JUNIOR

I'm reaching my tipping point with this family—

They sigh.

FIDO

Arf. Arf. Yeah, I hear you guys.

JUNIOR and MISSY

I knew I could confide-o, in you, Fido.

They look up and see each other. Its awkward. There's as much distance as there can be.

MISSY

(to JUNIOR)

I....haven't seen your gray shirt around for a while. Your other gray shirt.

JUNIOR

Oh. Um. It's at the... shirt cleaner?

(To audience)

As you know, it was not at the shirt cleaner.

MISSY

Is the shirt cleaner named Wrigley Bigleauges?

JUNIOR

How did you know Wrigley had my shirt?

MISSY

He's my boyfriend. Or, was anyways.

JUNIOR

Oh. I'm... sorry?

Awkward silence

JUNIOR

Did he break up with you?

MISSY

You're soooooo dramatic, Junior, he didn't break up with me—he's just dead.

JUNIOR

What?

MISSY

(to audience)

Blast!

(to JUNIOR)

I mean—He's in a state of—Emotional death.
From me, breaking up with him. Yes.

JUNIOR

That's... crazy.

MISSY

Perhaps...

Awkward silence.

JUNIOR

So, uh, like. My shirt?

MISSY

Yes, I have the shirt. If I had left it, it would have been- Nevermind. Did you find out if you're gonna be passing gym this year? You caught a lucky break with that Guy-Denise hack covering Sportsball's classes.

JUNIOR

Oh, yeah. Guess I got, huh, lucky... Hey! Did you hear about that guy down at Mr's office?

MISSY

Oh, yeah. Gnarly. Shot in one eye, and the other was plucked out. And he's dead. Murdered. Hey, maybe Mr. Sportsball got murdered.

JUNIOR

(over MISSY)

I doubt it.

MISSY

Who could do such a thing? Probably someone so deranged that they have no friends and are a total spineless loser. Like, total scum of the earth. The worst kind of person. I couldn't even SIT NEXT TO a person who would do that. Right, Junior?

JUNIOR

Yeah.

(to audience)

Blast!

LIGHTS SHIFT TO MR AND MRS.

MRS

I'd thought this would finally be our chance to build a proper family, but yet again you all prove to be a prevalent nuisance! Ever since the kids and moving to this dump I felt so trapped!

(slowly turning to the audience)

It's like I have no one to talk to!

(back to MR)

Although, the madness is quite interesting, first that boy from the school, next your friend—but, the truly numbing thing is, I have to waste my time with you and those dream-ruining children!

MR

(trying to schmooze MRS, she isn't having it)

Ah, yes. It's just horrible. We have to spend the whole day with the kids! Oh also my friend yes. Rick, my dear dear friend. A true tragedy, really. And to think: only mere hours after the unexplained disappearance of your pal Muriel.

MRS and MR

(To audience)

Blast!

Suddenly, the doorbell rings. Jaws theme music begins to play, and a spotlight slowly closes in on the door.

MISSY

(to audience)

That dong that just dinged spelled out our certain doom.

MR

(to audience)

There was only one possible meaning to this omen of death.

JUNIOR

(to audience)

Who.....WHATever was on the other side of that door was the most hideous, vile—

MRS

(to audience)

Disgusting, truly, truly gut wrenching—

MISSY

(to audience)

Evil—

MR

(to audience)

Fate-sealing—

JUNIOR

(to audience)

Tempestuous—

MRS

(to audience)

Repugnant—

The door slowly creaks open. Enter GRANDMA, with a big box of cookies.

GRANDMA

A warm, merry Christmas, and love to all my dearies! I made COOKIES!

They all collectively groan.

MISSY

(to audience)

The poor delusional bitch. She thought it was christmas in June.

MRS

(to audience)

We'd started indulging her sick fantasies by celebrating every time she'd visit. It was the third time this month.

(to GRANDMA)

Hello, Mother, How very nice to see you!

(to audience)

What an unbearable hag.

MR

How was the ride up, Grandma?

(to audience)

From Hell.

GRANDMA

Oh, it was lovely! The scenery was just sublime! And it was even more wonderful because I got to see you lovelies at the end of it!

GRANDMA laughs sweetly. None of them reciprocate.

GRANDMA

Oh, how big you've gotten, Junior!

JUNIOR

Hello. Grandmother.

GRANDMA pinches his cheeks.

JUNIOR

(to audience.)

I, in fact, had not gotten bigger. Grandma had gotten smaller, due to the osteoporosis that has been eating away her old, dying bones. Not dying fast enough, if you ask me.

GRANDMA

Oh, and Missy! My dear Missy! You've never looked more beautiful!

GRANDMA pinches her

MISSY

Grandmother.

(to audience)

Do I even have to say anything? What an abhorrent, shriveled, harpy. The way she intrudes, her sickening old person stench... and that stupid tiny, little, voice...

GRANDMA pushes a fresh 50 into each of the children's hands.

GRANDMA

Buy yourselves something pretty, dears!
Purchase a boogie record, Maybe a new pair of denims!

MISSY/JUNIOR

(To audience)

The communist bitch.

ALL

(to audience)

She had to die.

GRANDMA

Oh me, oh my, you could all use some meat on those bones, I'll whip up some of my world famous, homemade kiss-erdoodle cookies! Made with a grandmother's love!

ALL

(to audience)

And thus, Grandma Missturr began her descent into my trap.

GRANDMA walks into the kitchen. MR runs across the set, setting up a sniper post in another room.

MR

(to audience)

The fossil didn't realise that she was in the perfect spot for me to take a fatal shot. I was soon to be free from her intolerable presence forevermore.

MISSY

(to audience)

To this day, it escapes me, why she felt need to bake cookies after already having brought some over. Probably some fever-dream from her deteriorating, old woman mind. This did, however, fall perfectly in line with my plan to kill Grandma. What the old bitch didn't realise was once she opened the oven, she'd be....

MISSY strikes a match, then smirks.

MRS

(to audience, faux concerned)

She looked so thirsty, the only human thing to do would be to offer her some of my... New Mexico famous lemonade, with a kick. It's simply.....to die for.

JUNIOR

(to audience)

While that prune was distracted baking her sickening sanctimonious sweet bakes, I had the opportunity to finally send Grandma floating in a cookie box down the river... I was also going to kill her.

ALL

(to audience)

And all that needed to happen was my plan to go on without a hitch.

MR aims his shot. A scope shaped light closes in on GRANDMA. MR pulls the trigger, and is almost perfect until—

JUNIOR

Father, have you seen my knife?

MR

AH! Get outta— I mean... What for?

The scope shoots down, towards the oven.

JUNIOR

For knife...related....things.... Why do have that gun? And why did you just... shoot at Grandma...

MR

Ah—uh—I saw a...fly...getting in her way?

JUNIOR

Ah, yes. Pesky vermin...

GRANDMA tries to use the oven, not noticing that it is completely in flames. MISSY watches as GRANDMA inches closer to her trap.

GRANDMA

Oh! The oven seems to be out of order....

MISSY

(to audience)

Well then. Better luck next year I guess. She's like herpes. She always comes back. Not that I'd know...

MISSY storms off.

GRANDMA

I'll have to use the microwave. I suppose it wouldn't kill me!

JUNIOR

Welllllllll...

JUNIOR starts for the kitchen, and raises his knife. When he is about to stab down, Grandma moves over. This happens a few times, with Grandma ducking and swiveling out of the knife's range. After, about a round of this, MRS enters the kitchen and starts to whip up her lemonade. Enraged, Junior exits.

MRS

Mother dearest, you've slaved over that hot, hot oven and also lukewarm microwave for what seems like hours now! Why don't you rest

and enjoy some of my famous lemonade!

MRS places the lemonade on the table, GRANDMA goes to drink it until MISSY renters. MISSY groans, and sits at the table, obviously annoyed.

MISSY

(to audience)

If I couldn't kill the bitch, the next best thing was to ruin her beverage.

MISSY throws the lemonade off the table.

GRANDMA

Well, family, this has been lovely but I best be off, there's a sale on cookie dough down at the market!

ALL adlib feigned concern while GRANDMA goes and kisses each of them.

MRS

(disappointed)

See you soon, Mother.

(to audience)

Unfortunately.

ALL sigh sadly. GRANDMA exits. After a couple seconds of DEAD SILENCE, we hear jingle bells, then a loud THUMP. The whole family, concerned, walks to a window.

JUNIOR

Oh. Grandma has been... run over-

MISSY

By some sort of... reindeer?

MRS

Walking home from our house “Christmas eve”...

MR

You can say there’s no such thing as non denominational winter solstice holiday...

ALL

But as for this family...we believe....

JUNIOR

But why was there a reindeer in Vaguely, New Mexico?

MRS

Don’t think about it too hard. It’ll ruin the magic...

JUNIOR

(childlike)

Of Christmas?

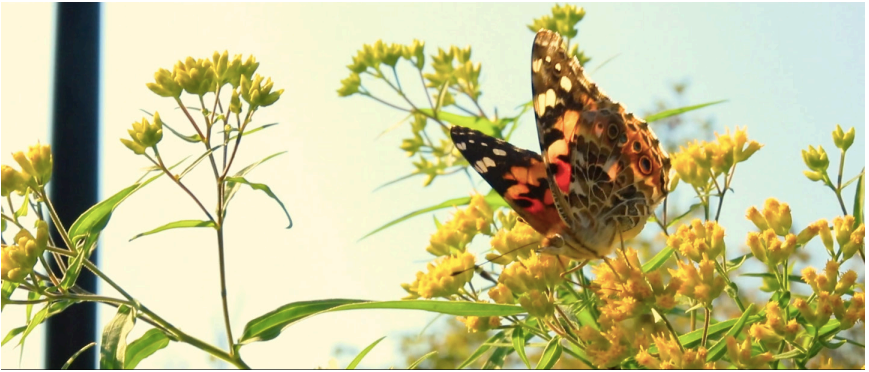
MRS

No. Of the theatre, son. Of the theatre.

BLACK OUT

Monarch

Adam Sommer



Fire Tower

Leeann Dragos

The metal tower stands tall
Above the deep green pine trees
Closing in are colors of Fall
Whipping and harsh breeze.
The higher you scale and climb
Fragile steps like a baby bird
The rusting silver tone of dime
This time will be the third.

Friends have come to share this spot
In nature it stands, you stand surrounded.
Though now that no longer means a lot
When it's in the earth but not grounded.
The fear of heights still stays at large
The thought of falling will soon take charge.

The Wallet

Cody Young

Jo loathed the way in which the scrubs clung to her skin. Desperate swaths of fabric that stuck to her body at the first sign of perspiration. She had asked the administrator as many times as she could stomach for roomier scrubs, a size up was all she needed.

She didn't have much time to dwell on the thought as the EMTs pushed in another homeless John Doe off the street. It wasn't unheard of to have the homeless camp outside, the city had a problem, too many people and not enough homes. Sometimes they would stream into the hospital, filling up beds with imaginary stomach aches as an excuse for a hot meal and a warm bed. Jo knew it was irrational to dislike them, but she couldn't help but think those same beds could go to a father of three suffering from a heart attack and not some homeless "vet" recovering from gut rot.

Peter, a twenty-something EMT with a troublemaker smile that would break a lot of hearts, asked Jo where she wanted him. She had to stop herself from saying back outside.

Jo adjusted her scrubs as she followed into the room, wondering if Peter had noticed how tight her scrubs were today. She hoped he didn't. She sent him away. He had better things to do than watch her strip down some unwashed bum. She delivered the typical boilerplate. What is wrong? Where does it hurt? John Doe didn't answer, only recoiled and held his stomach. Oh, great. Another thespian, she thought. Jo tried to remove his clothes but found her hands swatted away.

"Sir, I've got to remove your clothes to perform an evaluation."

She tried to remove his shirt, this time content to rip it to shreds if she needed to, but found the homeless man was deceptively strong, even in his current state. She tugged again, grasping onto the brittle fabric and pulling as hard she could. Jo had lost her patience with this man. She had better things she could be doing.

The cloth ripped away, revealing the man's torso. At first glance, everything appeared normal for a man of his age.

Everything right where it should be, but something was off. Near John Doe's stomach where his belly button should be was instead a gaping black puncture. A hole the size of a child's fist and the color of burnt moldy bread. The smell was abhorrent. It singed the hairs of her nostrils.

In a frenzy, Jo moved to the telephone hanging off the wall, her fingers pressed to the buttons, prepared to dial a specialist. Before she could press page, a hand reached out from the bed, holding her back.

Jo looked down incredulously. How was this man even alive, further yet how was he refusing medical help?

"They'll take it if you tell them," he stated.

Jo was confused. By the old man's thought process, she naturally assumed he was delirious. The myriad of infections that must be coursing through his body. Before she found time to belabor the point, John Doe began to reach into his wound and pull crinkled one dollar bills from the gaping hole. He took a moment before setting each and every bill onto the bedside table, and with deliberate care, smoothing out the creases. 7 dollars.

Jo vomited, filling the trash can with the day's lunch. The weight of what he had done to himself set in on John Doe's face.

"I woke up one morning, found the man I had slept next to for 6 years clawing at my stomach, trying to get at my dinner. It was cold that morning. My hands and feet were so numb that I could barely move to shove him off. He left easy at first, didn't really put up much fight, but came back a couple of nights later, waited until I fell asleep then took everything I had. It wasn't a lot—just some cans, a little money. I had to hide what was left," he said, breaking into a sobbing mess.

Jo looked at him, and for the first time, felt something other than disgust, pity. Had she forgotten her oath, the promise etched in stone that made her swear to always aid?

"I had to hide it somewhere, somewhere they wouldn't find it."

Jo reached down and smoothed back the old man's thinning hair.

“What’s your name?”

John Doe had to think. The name didn’t readily come to him.

“Lionel.”

Jo nodded, departing the room and thinking about how much looser her scrubs felt.

Natures Stripes

Sabrina Trovato



Perdita

Alexis Lisa Rivera

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

PERDITA

I can't believe this... I just want to give up...
Ugh...

LUCY

Just do it and get it over with.

ISABEL

It just needs... a little more work?

PERDITA

I was doing my best, okay?

ISABEL

Are you sure?

PERDITA

What does that even mean?

ISABEL

Uhhh...

LUCY

Either way, the art professor was still
unimpressed.

ISABEL

He is a hard ass.

PERDITA

I don't know what to do... It feels like no matter how hard I try, my work isn't good enough. I'm not talented. What was I thinking?

LUCY

Someone's finally being more realistic.

ISABEL

Amen.

LUCY

You can deal with the consequences later. It's not like anyone is going to miss you here anyways.

ISABEL

Cero, nadie, nada.

LUCY

Plus you get to be a bum at your moms house, eating chili fries.

ISABEL

Mmmmm... chili fries...

PERDITA

I don't want chili fries, they don't sit well with me. And I don't want to go back home to just paint on some kids face at a stupid carnival or whatever.

ISABEL

What about Lyft?

PERDITA

No.

ISABEL

Uber?

PERDITA

Why is this so hard? I worked my ass off and stayed up all night painting this shit.

ISABEL

Not long enough apparently... Ehem.. I mean if you keep trying you should get better. In theory...

LUCY

But she's not. She has no talent and she wasted her money for an "ARTS DEGREE" that she's not even going to get.

PERDITA

Please...

LUCY

So why waste even more time? She should've just went straight to work after graduation.

ISABEL

But she didn't.

LUCY

She's not doing anyone justice by failing out of college, either.

PERDITA

I'm right here...

ISABEL & LUCY

So?

PERDITA

Y'know what? You're right. Something has to change. I'm tired of feeling so crummy.

ISABEL

Then the decision is made.

PERDITA

It is.

LUCY

Well? When are we going to the admissions office?

PERDITA

Just because my life is in disarray, doesn't mean I need to give up. I've worked too hard to get here and I'm not about to let you bitches fuck it up for me, again. I was just upset about my grade for the project but it's always with the dramatics. I need you guys to get out. I'm done.

ISABEL

Welp, we tried.

LUCY

Whatever.

PERDITA

This has to end. You guys can't keep getting back into my head.

LUCY

Hmph, *later* Perdie.

ISABEL

See ya.

PERDITA

Go away...

PERDITA (20), takes a deep breath, covers her mirror.

END

Portrait of Loneliness

Nicole Hube

sandpaper hands scrub smooth porcelain dishes
as light peeks through old patched-up curtains

a wine glass is filled up a smidgen too much
for a woman who lives all alone

her nostalgic daydreams and disquiet nights
send unsteady legs down the staircase in fright

her locked-away china from foreign terrain
hides portraits of faces that all seem the same

her rusted brass doorknobs make unsettling noises
as bluebirds that hum hold their motionless poises

wrought-iron fences and grand garden playmates
the only small friendships she'll have

the kettle boils over
these days she walks slower

the woman who lives all alone

Juneau by Seaplane

Emily Goleski



Shiner

John Thompson

I wept the day my wife died. She had only been in her late thirties and looked healthy, though she truly wasn't. No one had expected her death to happen so soon. Back then, forty years ago, she was the sharpest woman I'd ever known. As her death neared, that sharpness diminished. She noticed it before the rest of us. She knew what was coming.

"Spike," she started as she passed me my lunchbox one morning. "Plant me under Kinetic's Aurora when I die. Then I'll be connected to both your land and mine."

I smiled. "Phoe, you have at least another seventy years left. Don't worry about death so soon."

She smiled, nodded, and let me go on my way to work.

It took months before my kids and I began to notice her changes. At first, she was beginning to have problems using telekinesis. Then she began to forget the simplest of things: how to fly a ship, how to call her mother, and our last name.

When we took her to the hospital, the doctor said she had a degenerative disease.

"Your brain will destroy itself soon enough," the doctor had told her. "It's a disease common in Kinetians like you. Your race just... has some problems with dealing with your gifts."

She then showed us a of an x-ray video of a person's brain sinking into itself and then altogether disappearing.

"It's like a black hole," the doctor had said. "Her brain will cave in and suck itself into nothingness."

There was nothing we could do to stop it.

The doctor told us that Phoe should stay in the hospital where she would have immediate access to help if needed. Phoe didn't want to listen and had tried to telekinetically throw the doctor out of her sight. She barely pushed her... and that devastated me.

I had to convince her to stay. I don't even know if she

knew who I was.

Her brain caved in while I was picking up my kids from school a couple weeks later. A nurse told me that Phoe had been doing mental exercises with him when her brain just stopped and her body went still. Just as fast as that, her life had ended. And I wept more than I ever had before.

I couldn't look at her during the funeral. I didn't want to have one, but her parents wouldn't allow anything otherwise. They didn't want their daughter planted under some Auran Aurora like she had wanted either. No, they liked tradition.

They wanted me to go all the way to Kinetia, to them, to have the funeral, but I couldn't do that. Not if I wanted Phoe to be happy. I made her parents come to me, to the great planet of Aura, to see their daughter off. They told me that they'd only come if I cremated her, as per tradition, and I agreed I would. That had always been the plan.

The funeral was packed as Phoe had many friends from planets I'd never even heard of: Vallix, Welldon, Soria, and many more. The seats were full of both human and non-human creatures. It was one of the only few times in my life I've seen us humans get along with creatures like the hive-minded Sorians. It was as if Phoe was a celebrity. Or some sort of peace beacon. And I admired her even more for that.

At the end of the funeral, we all watched as she was incinerated within dark purple Kinetian flames. We all cried together that day.

I was given her remains in a beautiful urn the color of the flames she was burned in. Embossed on the urn was a Grand Aurora, a tree significant to us Aurans which grew on our moon, Shiner. The tree was gigantic with two entangled silver trunks and beautiful fruits hanging from it which changed color depending on where the sun hit the urn. Like all Grand Auroras, this embossed one gave off its own aurora above the urn; a yellow one the same color as Kinetic's Aurora.

"She always loved that one," her mother had commented. "Must've reminded her of home."

After everyone left, I boarded a ship to Shiner to visit Kinetic's Aurora. Shiner was radiant within space, glowing a beautiful violet as I neared it. It always changed colors, being known as a moving rainbow which changed one color a day. Each color affected the moods of its inhabitants. Blue was cold or chill. Red was mean, hot, and angry. Green was delightful and happy. It was clockwork. The moon going through each color of the rainbow as it moved and restarting after hitting violet. On that day forty years ago, it was a beautiful violet; a color both cold and hot. It could mean so many things, but I knew that on this day it meant sadness.

Even Shiner was mourning Phoe.

When I reached the moon, I went right to the market and bought a shovel, water bottle, and some Grand Aurora seeds. I got a cruiser from there to take me to Kinetic's Aurora, holding Phoe's urn close to me the whole time. Upon reaching it, I got out of the cruiser and began to dig next to the Grand Aurora which casted it, right under the beautiful yellow Kinetic's Aurora which covered the sky above me. It somehow calmed me. It felt like Phoe was with me.

I dug a small hole and placed the seeds inside of it. I poured Phoe's ashes in the hole, covered it with dirt, and watered it. I sat beside it when I finished. She'd be proud of me.

I visit Shiner whenever I can just to be with her. The kids wouldn't come with me at first, but now it's sort of a family trip. Even after all of these years, we still go. We even bring my ten grandkids up there now, too. Everyone enjoys it. We all sit next to Phoe's tree, now growing tall and beautiful, under the Kinetian Aurora and feel as if we are with her once again. There's nothing better than that.

Last time we visited, her tree was giving off its own aurora which was constantly changing colors between a dark purple and a bright yellow. I've never been happier.

"When I die, plant my next to your mother," I told my son when he visited me on my eightieth birthday.

All he did was smile and hug me.

After all of this time, I still feel her with me. Soon enough, we'll truly be connected again.

Ele

Brianna Harrington

Striding across the hay
Prancing with fortitude
Shaking as the chins hit
Beads on the head clanking
Children roaring in the stands
Popcorn soaring from hand to hand
Music ringing tones of thrill
The stripes of the tent shaking
Thumps of the victim fill the room
Clean from frigid water
Wrinkles on her skin crack
Bleeding from deep cuts in her skin
Unnoticed by everyone except her
She cries for a savior
But nobody comes
Her skin is torn apart
Flesh dripping with blood
Stripped of her freedom
Her breath leaves her depleted lungs
And she falls to the floor
Children weep and parents gasp
Music stutters to a halt
Popcorn freezes in mid-air
The walls halt where they stand
A breeze flows
A beam of light shines
She turns to stone
A small figure pale white
Rustic from age
Decorated with deliberate detail from head to toe
She now sits on the shelf
Pining for dignity

Contra

Amelia DeJarnette



To Snag a Drag

Madeline Weisbeck

EXT. CITY - APARTMENT BUILDING FRONT STEPS - DAY

A thin lipped LYDIA, discouraged, 32, sits on a stoop. She is wearing a white cotton T-shirt and her left arm displays a nicotine patch.

Her shaky left hand holds onto a Dunkin' Dounut's coffee cup, as we see her right hand start to tap against her right leg.

SHE BEGINS TO FIDGET.

EXT. CITY - SIDEWALK - DAY

A MAN strolls down the street and takes the cigarette out of his mouth and blows out the smoke.

HE TOSSES THE CIGARETTE DOWN ON THE GROUND.

EXT. CITY - APARTMENT BUILDING FRONT STEPS - DAY

Lydia watches as the cigarette falls to the ground, she puts her cup down and ambles off of the stoop.

We see Lydia look around, hesitating until a couple walks by before she crouches down on the sidewalk, grabs the cigarette still smoldering and puts it into her mouth.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY - SCHOOL BUILDING STEPS - DAY

DALE, 10, wears a grin as he holds out a piece of paper in front of him. A 100 is circled on the top of the page.

**EXT. CITY - APARTMENT BUILDING FRONT STEPS -
DAY**

We see Lydia's lips curl up in a smile, she has the cigarette pinned between her two fingers and exhales the smoke down at her feet.

We see a child's pair of red converse sneakers facing Lydia's slippers, Lydia looks up, catching Dale's eyes in hers.

We see Dale's hurt face as he dumps the paper in her lap and runs up the steps.

Her eyes are full of sorrow as the cigarette twitches in between her fingers as she looks down at the paper resting in her lap.

press play
Emily Goleski

I watch myself
drip from your lips,
down your chin
running over my thighs
a pool of desire locked
in your raw umber eyes
mischievous and lustful,
with the pull of your
seductive lips into a simper,
your presence on my body lingers.

Damned

Ellen Weber

How long has it been now?

A month? Two?

Years?

A few minutes?

Time isn't of any relevance here. How long time had been marching doesn't matter if you couldn't turn it around and start from the beginning.

I had started pacing. Again, not sure for how long. I've just been pacing ever since it happened. The pacing keeps me sane. Or does it keep me insane? Or is it all pointless? I'm not sure of anything anymore. Except for the fact that I am damned. I'm sure of that. But that's okay. There are the damned and there are the blessed. That's balance. I used to be blessed, but now I'm one of the damned. Maybe I was always damned, but I just didn't know it.

I did something bad, and now I'm doomed. Damned and doomed. Demons dancing and devils delighted. He made a deal with the Devil and now I'm doomed to damnation and dancing with demons and—

Sorry...off topic.

It's getting harder to stay focused. That's the whole point. The longer I'm locked away in here, the more of myself I lose until I'm just gone. And then he wins. I'm his only weakness, and he doesn't like weakness. He can't kill me though. He has to wait for me to kill myself, to surrender to him. I can't do that. I won't.

Did you hear that? I won't do it! I won't!

...I won't.

So now I'm here. Locked away in this little room. Nothing more than a circle of stones, with the dark blood of fallen grace covering the walls. That was his own personal touch; a reminder. It doesn't matter much now. I'm used to

it—I don't think that's a good thing. It used to bother me a lot. Sometimes I would just stare at the stains and sob. I'd curl up on the cold stone and cry and cry and cry for...well who knows. Hours or days or weeks. It doesn't matter anymore. Nothing matters anymore.

Sometimes I get glimpses of the outside world through his eyes. My eyes? I don't know if he knows that I can see or if he's letting me see. He's smart if he is. It's a new kind of torture, to watch yourself do things...horrible things...and not be able to stop them.

I haven't really seen myself since...then. All I ever really get to see are my hands. They look the same as before. At least to the outside eye. But I can still see the blood.

Out damned spot!

There aren't any scars either. No visible ones anyway. I feel like there should be. Evil should leave a mark, so that everyone knows to stay away. I guess that's not how it works. The only scars now are the ones on our heart. What a shame. I thought our heart was rather nice. Now it's all rotten.

I wonder what color my eyes are now. They used to be blue, and a very nice blue at that. They were as clear as day, bright, happy.

I don't think they're blue anymore.

Everything's different! He ruined everything! We were happy and honest and hopeful and then he had to go and destroy it! Happy when Heaven was higher than Hell and hopeful that Hades was hiding in his cell. How the heights of hereafter have a headlong fall and—

Focus!

...

Sorry. Things get a little fuzzy sometimes.

Do you think I can get out of here? I used to think that I could. When he first put me in here, I banged at the walls and punched the rocks, hoping they'd start to chip. I only added more blood to the walls. I tried to scale the wall, hoping there was some kind of light at the top, but I couldn't stop slipping. I

started crying again, but when I went to wipe away the tears, they just mixed with the blood. If I could've seen myself I would've been mortified.

But now, well, I think it's been too long. If I was going to get out, wouldn't it have happened when I was strong? When I was still fighting?

I shouldn't say that. I am still fighting; it's just a different kind of fight. It's a fight for my soul—for our soul. Maybe I can still save him. Can you return to the blessed once you've been to the realm of the damned?

Have you been there before? It's not fun.

I'll get out of here. I have to get out. If I can't get out what's the point? There is none. I have to escape. I'll be an angel again. Angels are always ascending. An afterworld above awaits the amazing while the abyss is abusing the appalling, and the angels are assigned to aid the anguished, and I am an angel that will abolish his agony.

I will be an angel again and annul these afflictions.

I will be an angel again.

I will be an angel.

Right?

Anatomy of a Fencing Practice Room

Mary McIntyre

The first thing you will notice if you step into the karate room in Lee Hall is the warmth. Sure, there are two measly fans in the room, but that does nothing when you're breaking a sweat. It really doesn't help that the windows encourage the sun to send its rays through the glass. If by chance, you get caught in a daydream and look out the windows, you can see the vines on the tan and brown bricks that are tied together like messy shoelaces. The leaves draped over the window panes are a sash. Beyond the bricks, the leaves on the trees flutter in the breeze.

The moment your feet graze the scuffed, wooden floor, you can tell that this is not just an old gym. The little ripples in the wood from equipment tell a story. Someone else stood exactly where you were just standing, and even though you probably didn't know them, you're witnessing a place where they had a moment. The dark grey streaks that slice through the planks let you know how much this space was loved. If you're lucky, you can catch a glimpse of the reflection of the empty sky onto the beams.

When you glance at the walls, you can see the milky white paint peeling off into flakes that are destined to live on the floor until someone finally takes them away. Random planks cling to the walls, the wood appearing as though a shark sunk its teeth into it, then spit it out. Outdated flyers for sports clubs are tacked to the corkboard. The cycling machines rest in the back right hand corner. A lone phone charger waits to be claimed by the black double wall socket. Navy gym mats are stacked surprisingly neatly next to the ancient boom box. Resting at the side of the mats is an accordion-like divider.

Along the wall to the left, the equipment closet door stands wearily. Faded tape grips the door, stealing a strip of wood every now and then. The doorknob has been touched by countless hands. One would think that it's black, but underneath the bleak streaks, the metal duly shines. Scrapes on the door from weapon clashes are etched into the sandy wood. Upon stepping inside, the sweaty, off-white, dirt coated uniforms sit, thrown carelessly onto the shelves. Masks with

tiny numbers scrawled into the grimy material the line the walls. Random nuts, bolts, and tools remain on the shelves untouched, save for the occasional movement by a mask being set down and knocking them out of place. The foils, épées, and sabres are usually hastily tossed into the cabinet, despite the organization racks. Bulky equipment bags are heaped in the back left corner.

When you leave the closet, if you look up at the ceiling, you'll notice the strangest design ever. Mini black dots are scattered across it, with chestnut squiggles, precisely painted to perfection. Straight lines cut across the ceiling, like graph paper.

Take a look back out the window. When you see all of the strangers outside wandering about, look down on them. The grey, crumbling sidewalk. Take in every little detail. You may never want to see another view.

Rapid Waters of SUNY Oswego

Kelsey Cicerone



But Not Forgotten

Nichole Bailey

EXT. SOUTH SIDE CHICAGO - NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

DIMA (24) stands underdressed in the frigid January weather. His eyes are bloodshot, and he looks visibly disheveled. He's grasping a HEINEKEN BOTTLE loosely to his side, there's maybe a sip or two left. He's past tipsy.

Across the street a young HUSBAND and WIFE lift a small girl, ALBINA (4), out of their car. Her long blonde hair flows in the wind.

They're smiling ear-to-ear. Dima's expression hardens. Albina GIGGLES loudly.

The Heineken bottle slips out of Dima's hand, glass CLANKING against the sidewalk. He stills.

The Husband and Wife notice Dima. They're apprehensive
Albina doesn't notice.

ON DIMA

Dima's aggravated. His brow furrows. His eyes are dark, pensive.

ON COUPLE

Concerned, the Wife grabs Albina and guides her up the stairs into their house.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The Husband walks up to the edge of his property, standing behind the chain link fence. He glares at Dima.

Without breaking eye contact, Dima reaches for something tucked into his waistband. The Husband tenses. Dima's mouth curves into a slight smile.

Dima jerks his head to the door as it shoots open, the screen SLAMMING against the side of the house.

Albina comes running out, her bare feet THUDDING against the wood on the deck. The Wife is YELLING.

Albina runs up to the Husband and hugs him by the knees. The Husband scoops her up, eyes nervously darting back to Dima.

Dima EXHALES and looks away, ashamed. He quickly turns to retreat from the scene.

DIMA'S HOUSE ARREST BRACELET BEEPS ON HIS ANKLE.

He isn't fazed. It doesn't stop.

Achieve, Perceive, Deceive

Nicole Hube

*“Intelligence means nothing in the ‘real world’
when you’re not smart enough to use it.”*

She’s quite the anomaly—

precocious child always one step ahead—
not the spitting image of her mother—
or the continuation of her father—
sweet little prodigy
who’ll go as far as her feet will take her.

Every pause between her shy spew of syllables is deliberate
as she calculates her battles in her heads to 3 decimal places to
minimize the chance for procedural error.

Constantly fearing failure’s iron grasp—
envisioning it as a choking thing
that compresses her airspace where words fly free
and an air traffic controller is not needed to regulate.

When you tell a child she’s gifted,
she’ll shrug it off if she believes it
and rearrange her vocabulary to make it ring true—
memorize paragraphs like hymns
until knowledge becomes her religion.

She’ll spend longer time spitting out sentences
until her tongue twists anxious stutters
and her reflection is a showcase of utterances.

She’ll waltz through grade school, taken advantage of
by those who don’t value their educations enough to fight for
them—

unable to understand why that boy in the corner is
crying over his empty lunchbox.

She'll hope some sort of challenge will one day
drop her to her knees in submission
and make her feel small and scream for mercy
until her mouth becomes dirty.

Sweet little prodigy has been elevated so much
her head scrapes clouds and constellations.
She's unsure of how she plans to fall back to earth.

I just hope it's gentle.

Radiant

Morgan Ciccarino



WE'RE NICE PEOPLE

