



GREAT LAKE REVIEW
SPRING 2021

GREAT LAKE REVIEW

SUNY OSWEGO'S LITERARY MAGAZINE

SPRING 2021

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We publish a new edition each Fall and Spring semester.

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THE GREAT LAKE REVIEW

SUNY Oswego's Literary Magazine

Spring 2021

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NOTE: some of the pieces might have different font sizes to account for artistic integrity of the pieces. In order to keep some lines all together due to the size of the book, we needed to make some poetry pieces have smaller fonts.

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Interior Design: Marissa Specioso
Publisher: Great Lake Review
Printed in Syracuse, New York
90th 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, Mindy, Emil, and Megan.

THANK YOU RIVER'S END!

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colorful

Julia Browne

red

blush covers my cheeks/ the heat heavy and a curse/ it starts on
my face and reaches down to my legs/ god the scarlet skin hurts

blue

tears dripping down/warm and salty when it hits my mouth/wip-
ing them away but more comes out/ too emotional to speak with
nothing to speak about

green

he said jealousy wasn't a good look on me/ i decided i didn't like it
either/ i can't help it though/ every time i see him i fall deeper/

purple

i'm bruised and beaten/ knocked down by my false intuition/ any
thoughts i had couldn't be less true/ dumbly mistaken and stupid
remarks beat me down until i'm black and blue

Colors

Maggie DeJohn



The Cloud Salesman

Matt Kensek

No one in the town of Westfield could entirely explain his arrival. One day he wasn't there; the next he was, standing casually behind a beat-up folding table that displayed his product.

The Cloud Salesman was not a con-man by any means... at least that was what he told himself. Was it true that what drifted and flowed in the small alcohol bottles he sold was not actually a cloud? It's possible, but no one would ever hear him admit such a thing. However, in the eye of the beholder, what the Cloud Salesman possessed was nothing short of extraordinary.

A cloud in a bottle. One that you could touch with your own two hands. They were a hit among the children – weary fathers always looked at the bottles with uncertain eyes as they fished through their wallets for a five, but their doubts soon were cast aside to fulfil their child's wishes. Children were the Cloud Salesman's best customers.

Desires often lie in corners that are just out of reach, and the Cloud Salesman understood the hidden desire to touch the clouds with one's hand. It was, in fact, something that humanity always longed to do, was it not? Although scientific and engineering advancements allowed human beings to shoot themselves into the skies and gaze at the clouds at eye-level, the hard metal tube (of sorts) that encapsulated them only brought them a window closer to something that was just out of their grasp. The hobby of skydiving was the closest that any person ever came to “touching” a cloud, though most would argue it was simply the act of falling through one. Some scientists eventually gave up fantasizing over the puff balls in the sky, instead pursuing new heights, propelling themselves up-up-and-away as they waved goodbye to the clouds and sought new wonders in the stars.

One bright morning a young boy and girl were pacing the sidewalk in front of the Westfield General Store, waiting for their mother to finish her errands. Head to the ground, the boy kept himself occupied by counting how many steps he was taking. He

was reaching the number eighty when his sister tugged on his arm.

“I’m concentrating, Alice!” the ten year old said, taking a few more steps.

“What’s that man doing over there?” his six year old sister prompted.

The boy stopped. What number was he on? Eighty three? Eighty five? He huffed, forgetting about his pacing and turning to his sister.

“What man, Alice? There’s loads of mans around here. They’re probably shopping for their kids or moms or getting their clothes cleaned.”

“Nu-uh. You’re wrong, Dewey. That man isn’t cleaning his clothes,” Alice replied. She pointed towards a man a few shops down from them, standing behind a folding table at the corner of an intersection.

Dewey—who went by Andrew or Drew to everyone but his sister—glanced down the street and scratched his chin with intrigue. “Maybe he’s providing directions, Alice... I don’t know.” He began pacing again.

“It doesn’t look like anyone is asking him for directions. Let’s go talk to him.” Alice felt her brother’s hand wrap around her forearm.

“Alice!” he hissed. “We can’t just go up to strangers! You know that.”

“But I’m boooored, Dew, let’s just go quickly. We’ll be right back. I won’t tell if you don’t.”

Dewey thought for a moment. The man’s table wasn’t that far, probably eighty paces maybe one hundred. They wouldn’t be that far from the General Store, and their mother was a slow shopper. He let out a huff again.

“Alright, Alice, but we go quickly,” he emphasized. He took her hand and began counting his paces towards the man. It wasn’t that far off from what he suspected, only 88 paces from the General Store.

The man behind the table (who looked pretty old to the children) didn’t say anything as they approached the table. He had a short white beard and a few gray hairs poking out from under-

neath a brown bowler hat, and a dusty brown frockcoat that made him look out of place given the day's fashion. Some might say he looked dapper, but dapper was a word that neither child knew of.

He smiled a patient smile at the children, as if waiting for them to make the first move in a chess match. Dewey and Alice glanced at the objects on the table. An assortment of small clear bottles with red caps with something hard to make out inside were displayed neatly in front of them. It took Dewey a moment to recognize the bottles; they were the same ones that their aunt kept in the back of her fridge. "Auntie's medicine," she called them.

"These aren't for us, Alice," Dewey whispered a bit too loudly.

"They're perfectly safe, children," the man spoke. His voice sounded like he spoke with a wheeze, but the man seemed to be in fine health. "Five dollars and you can take one home."

"Um...uh...sorry, mister. My aunt has these...they're not for kids."

The man laughed. "Ah I see. A misunderstanding, my boy. Your aunt may have these bottles, but she certainly doesn't have what's inside them."

"What... what is inside them?" Alice wondered.

The man pointed upwards.

Alice frowned. "The sky?"

"Close. But there isn't any blue, is there?"

"No..."

"They're clouds, children. Clouds in a bottle. I call them 'bottled clouds'."

Dewey frowned. How did this man get clouds from the sky? "Clouds, you say?"

"That's right. Perhaps I should introduce myself. I'm the Cloud Salesman, of course."

"The Cloud Salesman?"

"Someone who sells clouds."

"But how did you get them?" Alice asked, flabbergasted.

The man put a finger to his lips, a twinkle in his eyes.

"Wouldn't want to reveal my secret, would I?"

"I suppose not," Dewey concluded.

“Have a look,” the Cloud Salesman replied, picking up two bottles and handing them to the pair.

Dewey hesitantly took the bottle and squinted his eyes at it. His father squinted his eyes when he looked at things up close. Dewey figured it helped you see things better.

Alice turned the bottle up and down and on its side, before freezing in place and looking back to the man.

“You can do whatever you want to the bottle, my dear. It won’t hurt it.”

She looked at the white wisps inside, and proceeded to shake the bottle with vigor.

The contents inside swirled a bit, yet remained unchanged.

“Well...it looks like a cloud.”

You can touch it too,” the Cloud Salesman added. “Have a feel.”

Dewey helped Alice unscrew the cap. He watched her stick a finger into the bottle and ponder. “Well?”

“It feels...cold. Are clouds cold, Dew?”

“Cold? Well I suppose they are. Let me see.”

Alice removed her finger and Dewey stuck his in. He was expecting it to feel like a cotton ball, but there wasn’t much physicality to the cloud at all. His fingers felt cool, and he could feel the receding movements of the cloud from being shaken. Satisfied, yet still a bit confused, he removed his finger and quickly placed the cap back on the bottle. It would be a shame for the cloud to escape back into the sky. The cloud soon returned to form, a thin white transparency.

“Five dollars and you can take one home,” the Cloud Salesman prompted.

“Do you have money, Dew?” Alice asked.

Dewey felt around in his pockets. He didn’t have any money. “I think I gave Mom the five dollars I had so she could buy me a candy bar.”

“Drat,” Alice said.

“Sorry...I was hungry this morning.”

“My piggy has some quarters at home.”

“Probably not five dollars.”

“Yeah...”

The two suppressed their disappointment and set the bottled clouds back on the table. The Cloud Salesman watched them step back from the table, failing to resist feigning another look. He clasped his hands together with a profound clap, making the pair look up at him.

“Tell you what...I’m feeling a bit hungry myself. If you do get that candy bar and are coming this way, why don’t you leave it here and take one of my bottles? No money needed.”

Alice shot a surprised look at Dewey, as if the offer was the greatest in the world.

“Really?” Dewey asked, his disappointment diminishing.

“Well...thanks, mister. You’ve got a deal.”

“And don’t worry if you don’t happen this way,” the Cloud Salesman added. “I’m sure we’ll cross paths again sometime.”

“Oh don’t worry,” Alice piped up. “I think we’ll make it happen.”

“Well run along now. We haven’t met,” the man replied, tapping his nose, as if they were sharing a secret.

Dewey and Alice nodded in acknowledgement and hurried back towards the General Store. It only took sixty paces, according to Dewey. Alice did her best not to keep looking towards the Cloud Salesman and his table. Dewey assured her that a crowd of people would not buy all of the bottles before they returned.

“You don’t know that!” Alice squeaked.

“Don’t know what, dear?” their mother asked, coming out of the store with a few bags in her hand.

“Alice doesn’t believe that this part is eighty paces long,” Dewey spoke up. He gestured to the stretch of sidewalk they were on.

“Alice, I’m sure Drew counted correctly,” their mother replied. “You haven’t been wandering too far, have you?”

“No, Mom,” the pair replied.

“Good. Oh, Dewey, here’s your candy bar.” Dewey watched his mother fish out the chocolate bar from one of her bags and hand it to him.

“Thanks Mom!” Dewey exclaimed, perhaps a bit too enthusiastically.

“Now remember, you can’t skip on any of your dinner tonight if you eat that.”

“Yes Mom...”

“Well come on you two, I need to pick up one thing from the lady who sews my clothes.” Their mother began walking in the opposite direction of the Cloud Salesman.

“Wait, Mom!” Alice said.

“What is it, Alice?”

“You’re going the wrong way.”

“Alice, her shop is this way.”

“I think you got turned around coming out of the store,” Dewey said.

The two watched their mother think for a moment. “Oh... did I? You may be right, children. Look at you remembering the store fronts. Maybe when you’re older I can send you to run my errands!” She changed direction and began walking down the sidewalk.

Alice and Dewey followed, trying not to act unusual. Dewey turned the chocolate bar over and over in his hands, counting the paces as they neared the Cloud Salesman’s table.

“Did you find everything at the store, Mom?” Alice asked loudly.

A distraction. Good job Alice, Dewey thought. His mother passed by the man’s table, hardly glancing in his direction. Dewey saw that one of the bottles had been left towards the edge of the table. The perfect setup. He glanced once at the man as he walked by, setting the candy bar down and swiping the bottle from the table.

“Good afternoon,” he heard the Cloud Salesman say.

Without replying, Dewey continued walking. Alice had fallen back to join Dewey, watching eagerly as he held the bottle up so it could catch the light.

Realizing they were falling behind, their mother turned to call them to catch up.

“What’s that, Drew?” his mother asked.

“Uh...I found it on the ground Mom, I think I’ll keep it.”

“Oh Andrew, how many times have I told you not to pick up garbage?”

Dewey didn’t reply.

“Make sure you wash your hands when you get home. Now hurry along.” With that his mother turned and continued walking.

Alice and Dewey looked at each other, failing to hide their grins.

“I want to have it first when we get home,” Alice whispered.

“Rock, paper, scissors,” Dewey offered.

They shook fists while they walked, throwing their choice into the air. Dewey chose scissors. Alice chose rock.

Dewey scrunched up his face and handed over the bottle. Clutching her spoils, Alice stuck her tongue out and giggled. She pocketed the bottled cloud and quickened her pace to catch up with her mother.

“Drat,” Dewey said, shaking his head. He followed behind, beginning to count his steps.

The Fire Passes By

Harrison Richardson

Drink from the kettle that pours out flames
Pink and blue and orange
Spotting the edges of the rim
Before spilling out of your palms onto the saucer below
The colors dance hand in hand
Throwing each other to another partner
I can see that same passion in your eyes
Subtle, but bold

What does the fire bring to your chest?
Does it burn or tickle your throat
So much so that you can't even sing
"Oh darling, oh darling,
Each day passes on
And the tea that you gave me was drunk by the stars.
You held me and swayed to the tunes of the bard
Yet you lost me at sea, afraid of the gods."
I cry from laughing, at what nonsense it seems
But you stare at me, gaping
That I couldn't feel what you see

a promise

Therese Temitayo

i told myself
that i would leave a legacy
not one for my kids, per say
and not for anyone specific but
i would leave a trail to follow back on
something to look back at how far ive gone and
see how big my footprints have grown
how green the crevices in the ground have gotten and
how familiar the ground has gotten with my sweat
how big my flowers have bloomed
with the blood and tears i watered them with
how far
i have to look to see the ground
on this tall hill i am climbing
i bet the view is beautiful
i promise to see it one day

Regal Cat

Jay D'Agostino



Resurrection

Kyra Sobiegraj

An empty shell clings to the wood, its existence proof of a stronger future. A hum fills the air, as if to make sure you know that it's true. A perfect, intact, empty shell holding no life, and yet it clings to something as if its life depends on it. What lays after? Why leave behind such a thing? Cicadas come every year and every year they leave behind beautiful reminders around my grandmother's backyard.

The grass dances in the wind and the clouds glide along the sky, dragging their form on the ground as they go. They leave nothing behind and nothing to prove that they ever existed. The old apple tree, twisted from years of abuse, throws its apples, not ripe or safe enough to eat. Bees swarm the area under its umbrella to feast on the bitterness of them. But behind it all, covering the space and time in between all these things, is the song of the cicadas.

Although never having seen a live one and thank God for that their shells can be found around the area on the tree, the garden fence, the pool deck. Larger than my thumbnail sit these reminders of life. We are always told that we grow stronger as we age, as we experience life. It's hard to believe and it's more so hard to see. Yet here are these little shells of proof that even a singing bug has to grow. That in order to become more, they shed the weight of their past and just keep climbing, singing their song of life.

My sister sits besides me, fascinated over it, but for different reasons. She's still young, not having realized that life is about growing and overcoming. For her the world is just wonder and new. She plucks it off of the wood on which it sits and runs to my grandmother, eager to share her discovery. It's a miracle she doesn't crush the fragile evidence on her way.

The hum picks up where the wind cuts off. The grass is soft under my skin and ants run their paths within. They run with purpose and fear. They make no noise on their way. Is it worth it.

All the running?

The shell runs through my head. How many lives do they go through? How many times do they shed their past and move on? How many times have I done so? How many more times will I?

There is no answer within their song that I can make sense of, but a comfort is hidden there. A secret knowing.

The Bamboo-Cutter and the Moon-Child

Kayla Elfers

Based on the Japanese fairy tale of the same name.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

THE OLD MAN, a poor and disconsolate wood-cutter chops bamboo with an ax.

NARETA (V.O.)

Every day The Old Man goes forth into the woods to cut the bamboo. One morning he had gone to work and suddenly the bamboos were filled with a bright soft light.

The bamboos radiate a beautiful illumination.

NARETA (V.O.)

The Old Man, full of wonder, dropped his ax and went towards the light. Moving closer, The Old Man noticed a beautiful TINY GIRL in the illumination.

THE OLD MAN

You must be sent to be my child.

NARETA (V.O.)

The Old Man took The Tiny Girl's hand and took her home.

INT. THE OLD MAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The Old Man and The Tiny Girl saunter to his home.

NARETA (V.O.)

The Tiny Girl was so beautiful, he

put her into a basket to protect
her from being hurt in any way.

The Old Man swaddles The Tiny Girl into a basket.

NARETA (V.O.)

The Tiny Girl then transformed into a
young woman.

The Tiny Girl outgrows the basket. She illuminates the whole
house with her presence.

NARETA (V.O.)

When The Old Man felt sad, he
would look upon his radiant child and
his sorrow vanished.

THE OLD MAN

I shall name her Princess
Moonlight. She gives forth such
soft bright light that she might be a
child of the Moon God.

An illuminated PRINCESS MOONLIGHT stands on a veranda.

EXT. THE OLD MAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

FIVE KNIGHTS stumble upon Princess Moonlight's radiant beau-
ty.

NARETA (V.O.)

Five Knights stayed in front of The
Old Man's house, writing poems and
songs, in hopes of winning the heart
of the beautiful Princess.

The Old Man comes out of his house.

NARETA (V.O.)

The Five Knights implored The Old
Man to speak to The Princess and tell
her the greatness of their love, and
how long they've waited. The Old

Man felt sorry for them and would like to see his daughter marry one of them.

INT. THE OLD MAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The Old Man pulls Princess Moonlight aside.

THE OLD MAN

There are five knights waiting for your hand in marriage.

PRINCESS MOONLIGHT

Oh why must I do this? I don't wish to marry.

THE OLD MAN

Some day I shall cease to be and who will take care of you then? I pray you to meet these five brave men and marry one of them.

NARETA (V.O.)

Princess Moonlight agreed to do as The Old Man pleased.

PRINCESS MOONLIGHT

Fine. But they must prove their love to me by traveling to distant countries and returning with gifts, then will I marry one of them.

EXT. THE OLD MAN'S HOUSE - DAY

The Old Man stands next to The Five Knights.

NARETA (V.O.)

The Old Man gave The Five Knights The Princess' message. They all agreed to The Princess' requests and embarked on their quests.

The Five Knights leave.

NARETA (V.O.)

Unfortunately all Five Knights gave up on their quests, and never saw The Princess again.

INT. THE OLD MAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

THE EMPEROR goes up to Princess Moonlight.

NARETA (V.O.)

The Emperor heard of Princess Moonlight's beauty and had to see her for himself. He fell in love with her beauty and was determined to have her fall in love with him.

THE EMPEROR

I'm afraid I cannot stay any longer tonight, but I will be back for your hand soon.

The Emperor leaves the house.

NARETA (V.O.)

The Princess received many poems from The Emperor, outpouring his love for her. She wrote back to him and gently told him she cannot marry anyone on Earth.

INT. THE OLD MAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The Old Man finds Princess Moonlight weeping.

THE OLD MAN

What's wrong my child?

PRINCESS MOONLIGHT

I am indeed a child of the moon. My time on Earth is up.

A chariot filled with COSMIC BEINGS enter the house.

NARETA (V.O.)

And just like that, a chariot was ready for Princess Moonlight. The Cosmic Beings thanked The Old Man for taking such good care of her and as a reward, they put gold in the bamboos for him to find.

The Old Man looks at the floor.

PRINCESS MOONLIGHT

Please give The Emperor my sincerest regards.

THE OLD MAN

Please stay.

The Princess shakes her head.

PRINCESS MOONLIGHT

I can't. I have to go back to my home, but I am grateful for all you have done for me on Earth. When you look up to the moon, always think of me.

Princess Moonlight steps into the chariot and the chariot floats off towards the moon.

NARETA (V.O.)

The Old Man waved his daughter good bye and watched the chariot disappear amongst the fleecy clouds.

FADE TO BLACK.

Breathing Exercises: How to Calm the Chaos

Libby Morel

Big breath in, choke on what it feels like to be alive.

This sorry excuse for an existence burns your throat on its way down, whiskey on the rocks chased after by pessimistic positives to keep the demons on their toes. It's so good to be alive when one exists in exhaustion, fingertips brushing against the sun until red welts sear like memories into your skin. You reach further in hopes of feeling something other than hollow.

Big breath out, surrender the last line of the poem in your head.

You won't want it anymore when the letters forget how to tie themselves together, alphabet soup sitting heavy in an empty stomach. You can't write a happy ending if you don't want one, it's the beauty of being a writer; kill off a character when you know they've had enough. Discarded metaphors become a second tongue, coated in molasses until it doesn't taste so
hopeless.

Big breath in, backtrack through ideas crossed out and tossed to the floor.

It's lonely in this bottle of ink, swimming slowly to the surface to choke on the fresh air, relying on characters when you can't rely on yourself. Stacking stories atop each other like bricks, building staircases with synecdoches and tripping up the steps until you can't see yourself from the bottom. You dig a moat around your castle and fill it to the brim with stanzas that pinch and
sting

Big breath out, convince yourself that it's fine.

Isn't it? This half-assed existence? Where you can bury yourself under piles of poorly-written prose, where trains of thought crash and burn on battered rails, where stories are filled with characters that want to grow old and poems follow love on her way into town. Where it's not

enough just to breathe or to write yourself a happy ending. Where it's easy to forget that sometimes writing feels like a thunderstorm in the middle of the ocean, desperate and chaotic.

On Trying

Emma Morisette

*Shoot for the moon,
if you miss, you will land among the stars,
they tell us when we're little.
It gives us so much hope:
the thought of a backup plan.
So we hide dreams as secrets.
Whispering wishes into our pillows.
Planting them like seeds,
kneading them deeper with every squeeze.
We claim to shout them to the stars
but, the only celestial things that hear us
are the fluorescent replicas
stuck to our bedroom ceilings.
The words muffled by four walls.
We stand on beds,
on tiptoes,
touch the ceiling
and still come nowhere near our shiny back up plans.
But I am trying, we say.
Yet, seldom do we stand in Times Square,
where the stars aren't at arm's length,
and howl
like breaking through the light barrier
with our sound.
Seldom do we actually
shoot for the moon.*

Oh Pretty Girl

Shannon Sutorius

I was a drunken, drowned girl
lost in the sea
of plush pink pillows and white sheets
staring at you with my eyes lidded.
I only washed my face because
you told me not to
sleep in my makeup
that you loved so much.

How does your shirt fit me?
You press your hand into mine
as I reach out to you:
“Stay with me”
I slur,
and I can see the side of your lip turn upward
as your brows knit together
(I’m not that drunk).

The weeknd of poetry,
and I wonder if you know
the ocean of liquor
holds innumerable secrets
as we breathe onto each other.

An Adventure

Anthony Santos Leverich



Cold Blooded

Brendan Lentini

Six worn out legs marched down a dimly lit street in Brooklyn, tired from hours of standing and jumping with fists aimed towards the ceiling. Six strained eardrums picked up the soothing hum of streetlights and the pitter patter of shoes scraping against concrete. Six eyelids, previously blinded by the flashing of red and white lights, were now fixed on one singular figure up ahead.

Guarding a wall was the bust of a seven-foot-tall lizard. It stood proudly in front of me with a toothless smile that took up the entire width of its face. Green scales wrap around gazing eyes the size of my head. It stands valiantly on a bridge, a stone arch sewing it to the building. Nobody spoke, though the words, “Fifteen minutes could save you fifteen percent or more on car insurance” rattled through my brain.

I approached the mural, putting my black Adidas hat on backwards. A hair tie suffocated my wrist, conjoined to two protruding fingers crafting a makeshift peace sign. I looked over to my friend, Andrew, who was shrouded in black cloth that masked his whole body, cloning my gesture. My shadow and I, with mirrored poses surrounding our Gecko companion, decided to take another photo with an ever-bigger celebrity.

“Yo Philip,” we say in accidental unison, with a brief pause and exchange of glances between Andrew and me before I pull out my phone and aim it at Philip, “Take a photo of us real quick.”

Philip complies, taking my phone and framing me, Andrew, and a 7-foot lizard into one squared off border, making it look as though we were on the bridge. The familiar flash I’ve been exposed to all night repeats. My eyelids tense up, a burning streak digging into my skull. I don’t look away. Instead, I face the camera head on. I’m nearly forced to open the floodgates to alleviate the overbearing tingling sensation my eyes face. The result is one cold-blooded, thousand-yard stare, with a fatigued expression contrasting with the tranquility I preached.

“Yo, hurry up and let me get a photo,” Philip says, jamming my phone into my abdomen. I rub my knuckles into my closed eyes, a futile attempt to remove the squiggly lines floating all around me that only I can see. A rapid series of hard blinks followed by a quick wiping of the subsequent tears and my eyes are re-adjusted to the night engulfing us.

Andrew snaps Philip’s photo while I remain staring at the warped byproduct of our quick pitstop. I look down at the phone and see the product of our excursion. Two pale, empty expressions are eclipsed by the looming scaly figure between them. Three sets of cold-blooded eyes encase soulless gazes. Andrew and I, both adorning peace signs, look equally appalled, the photo sour with warped smiles. Half satisfied with the end result and too tired to try again, I slide my phone into my pocket.

“You ready to go?” I asked the group. With a quick nod and a grunt, we begin to march down the dimly lit street we came in on. We leave, drained of energy, yet ecstatic from the night we had. I crane my neck around, giving one final exchange to my good reptilian friend before leaving for good.

I smile, and for a brief moment, he smiles back at me.

Table for Two

Libby Morel

Time passes easy on cobblestone roads,
but where this patio begins is wooden
planks and iron chairs paired with
creaky tables for two. The lanterns pool
light onto happy faces like honey, the
sweet and easy joy of coffee and friends
late into the evening. Slowly, night
crawls up behind her, whispering sweet
nothings of cool breezes and goosebumps.
She sees the constellations in the eyes of
the others, wonders if she has them too.
She doesn't look into his eyes.

The overpriced coffee in her mug burns her tongue,
coats her throat with thoughts she wishes
she could say aloud. Sugar becomes salt,
waiting for her to reach it at the bottom.
She wishes she could bite her tongue, tell her
tastebuds to swallow it. Bitter coffee soothes
the sweetness in her stomach, forces her to
open her eyes a little wider and stare him
down. His mug is empty, his hands are
in his pockets, his eyes are on the table.
There's no moon in the sky, only stars, but
even those feel darker than usual.

She wishes the light of the lanterns would
reach her, warm her bones and spin gold
from the straw inside her lungs. When he gets up
and leaves, she doesn't question it. She wonders
when exactly did the stars in his eyes burn out? And when,
as a last resort, had she given him hers, only for
those to die too? Time passes easy on cobblestone roads,
and his footsteps carry him farther and farther away.
But where this patio begins is wooden planks and
iron chairs paired with tables for two, and she sits alone,
waiting for the stars in the sky to burn out.

FOOTNOTES

Cameron Drummond

the sword that talked to me, an average mercenary

that night¹ was no jesting evening

slash

slice

stab

the sword cut through enemy waves smoother than warm bread²
got paid extra for the heads that rolled right onto the
ground

when Lord Gwatkin³ faced off against the castle's leader-there was
a tick in my wrist

you slash

slice him

silence your foe

morale was flipped favoring a new side-if only for fleeting moment
the tides had changed

we were alive

breathing

the archers stopped firing-waitnotheyweremisleadtheyareshoot-
ingfirenowfindcover

split the arrows in two

stow away all fear

find a pathetic *serf* to kill

similar to a mythical creature⁴-another had graced the instincts of
men with heavenly light

the blade had more encounters than usual-which side of the hilt
was the hunter and which the prey-they flew onto the sharp end
one after another without any semblance of completion

severe the one who calls themselves

champion

select them on boisterous claims

alone

and *smile* when their blood spills

Mother Morrison

Evelyn Frederiksen



All My Loving

Samantha Keaney

Half of a century worth of her clothes were limited to just a few boxes.

Their home was as colorful as Ellie. She wanted yellow and he wanted blue; they compromised for yellow walls and blue curtains. He insisted that they buy real furniture, but Ellie saved her money for weeks to buy a tv. Together, they watched The Beatles' first performance on the Ed Sullivan show in an empty house on top of a bare mattress. Her pearl nightgown twirled as she sang and danced to "All My Loving" by herself because he could admire her much better from where he was sitting.

He packed the white gown and sealed the top of the first box.

*** **

When Ellie's mom passed, they drove several hours for the funeral. He held her hand in silence for the first hour.

"You know, she told me on our wedding day," he smiled--second-guessing whether he should continue. "She said when you were nine, you punched a boy's face for calling you four-eyes." He looked over to her blank gaze out the car window. "She gave you a big talk afterwards, grounded you, took away your allowance." Ellie's eyes left the window.

He continued, "When she went to the boy's house to apologize to his mother, she stole a porcelain dove from their fireplace mantel. She gifted it to you two months later for your birthday. She was so proud of you."

She looked over to him, shaking her head with teary eyes. With a smile she uttered, "I never knew that. She never told me that."

For the remainder of the ride, Ellie told him stories of her mother and although he had heard most of them before, he listened with admiration.

The reception was at her family home. She saved her

childhood bedroom for last on the tour. She stood in the room and looked silently for a few moments before breaking down. He instinctively held her and caressed her back, covered by her plaid black dress. As she cried into his shoulder, he noticed a shelf with a small porcelain dove sitting sincerely, ardently.

“She was so proud of you,” he whispered. With a warm exhale, she smiled softly in his chest.

He packed her black dress and sealed the second box.

*** **

“Dear, are you ready?”

“I know, I know. I’m sorry, my love,” he said as he was fumbling with his tie in the mirror.

“Oh! Let me!” she said eagerly with a big smile.

After she effortlessly fastened his tie, he tucked her white hair behind her ear and kissed her thank-you. He followed her into the kitchen where she had prepared his favorite meal. This was her gift to him. As they ate, they laughed and reminisced of their years together.

“50 years huh? You’ve endured me for 50 years,” he said with a laugh. Her laugh was followed by a cough. He began introducing her gift by giving her a card which read, “Happy Anniversary, four-eyes.” He left the kitchen and returned with a canvas. The back read, “For my Ellie”. She shed happy tears at the beautiful white dove he had painted. They ended dinner by dancing to the “oldies” channel. She wore a yellow dress with blue stripes. She was still the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

He placed her dress in the final box and sealed it forever.

*** **

Close your eyes

And I’ll kiss you

Tomorrow

I’ll miss you.

Palm Reader

Leihana Abu-Sbaih

Vines of handlines gently deepen
as the years progress,
wisdom embedding in the creases while
echoing new experiences and understanding.

An oracle looks gently at these lines,
predicting future events and
uprooting unique aspects of personalities
belonging to those who dare request their expertise.

A hand is a clamshell,
harboring pearls of wisdom deep
within the grooves of the palm;
scintillating, radiant, and special.

Mirror Man

Nathalie Sciacca

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

There aren't any posters on the bland walls, nor any valuables left on top of the dresser and desk, and only a pair of slippers in front of a cracked open closet door.

There on the bed lying awake and staring at the ceiling in despair is ANA (19). She has visible bags under her eyes, knuckles white from the tight grip she has on her blanket covering her body from the stomach down.

With a sigh, Ana swings her legs out from under the blanket and onto the hardwood floor. She stands, dressed in a tanktop and shorts.

Ana pads softly across the floor, looking pained every time it creaks. She opens her closet door all the way and reveals a full length mirror hanging on the now opened part of the door. Ana stares into the mirror.

A SHADOW PERSON stands directly behind Ana's reflection. Ana doesn't even spare it a second glance, instead frowning at herself. She runs her hands over her stomach and cringes.

SHADOW PERSON

Um? Hello?

ANA

(distracted)

What?

SHADOW PERSON

I'm feeling a little ignored here, lady. Usually people see me out of the corner of their eye and freak out. What gives?

Ana shrugs halfheartedly. She lifts up her tank top and squeezes her exposed flesh, purposely expanding it.

ANA

I've got a lot more on my mind than to question the existence of the supernatural, thanks.

The Shadow Person ponders this, then tilts its head down to glance at her hand movement.

SHADOW PERSON

You can always talk to me.

Ana shoots it a bewildered look. It shrugs.

SHADOW PERSON

(CONT'D)

Hey, I happen to be an excellent listener.

Ana laughs humorlessly and shakes her head. This is the point she's at in her life right now? Jesus.

ANA

You know what? Fine. I've gained enough weight that it's noticeable to everyone. My boyfriend told me "you look huge" the other day, and now I can't stand to look at myself.

Ana is visibly getting more upset as she continues speaking. The Shadow Person looks at her, visibly confused.

SHADOW PERSON

Why does it matter?

ANA

(shocked)
Huh?

SHADOW PERSON

Who cares? So you added a couple of

pounds. Had a McDouble when you should've had a McSingle. Why does it matter?

ANA

But... But my boyfriend said-

SHADOW PERSON

Fuck him. It's your body, not his.
Do you feel happier?

Ana contemplates this. She looks at herself in the mirror once more, breaking eye contact with the Shadow Person. She runs her fingers along her body, as careful as one would touch a delicate art piece. Finally, she nods.

SHADOW PERSON

(CONT'D)

Then that's all that matters. For what it's worth, I think you look great.

Ana smiles slightly.

ANA

(bashful)

Really?

SHADOW

A hundred percent! Darling, look at your figure. Marilyn Monroe who?

Ana giggles, playfully trying to bat the Shadow Person away.

ANA

Oh, stop it.

They're both quiet for a beat, Ana still beaming though she's actively trying to fight the smile back. The Shadow Person places a casual arm around her reflection's shoulders.

SHADOW PERSON

Now, in order to make sure you stop

putting yourself down, I think I better
stay here a while.

Ana snorts and rolls her eyes, giving it an unimpressed look. It
grins sheepishly in response.

ANA

Please don't mess with my lights. I pay
the electricity bill.

SHADOW PERSON

Yes!

The Shadow Person hugs Ana's reflection, and she feels an odd
sense of comfort.

FADE TO BLACK.

Avid

Jade Giuga

one squeaky black leather severed;
one guilty oak wood chipped

entryway release

Two.

entryway restrain

I unsettle I tune in
I find the zone, now I
 am in

the door's lock clicks and licks toward the
bricks the spun fiber slips as her slender
limb lifts

I divert the
attention to satiate
desire

the figures intertwining his mouth
immersing in snake and her lips
cannot help but to part ever so
subtly an ethereal gasp rushes out

the tension is gliding and whispers arise

door slips open and
good-bye

Bluffs

Liam Morgenstern



Near Opposites

Ethan Semeraro

I waved at the older man driving the Mustang as if he were an old friend of mine. His bright red ride sparkled in the early March chill, and quietly slipped past, down the road. It was a '65 or a '66, I guessed, and it was a 6-cylinder; I knew based off the gentle tinny rattle. It was a muscle car if only in spirit, just like mine.

When he waved back, he looked surprised to see me driving; he probably saw my car from a distance. It stands out on the road: a Pontiac, it looks fast but isn't, a little too loud for a 6-cylinder, with many miles under its belt.

I don't like Fords, but the moment stands out to me; our cars are only separated by 20 years, one driver somewhere around 60, one just 19, one car a sparkling factory-fresh red, the other a deep black with pin-striping that showed its age; the Mustang has clearly led a cherished life, its miles numbered maybe 20,000, mine 120,000. It has probably sat in a garage except for weekends, whereas mine has seen April snow storms, dirt roads, trips to the beach, spirited drives home from high school dances, driven daily no matter the weather.

Maybe this moment wouldn't have mattered much were it not for the stories my father would tell me in childhood about his father, about his cherished red Ford that swooned my grandmother while they were in high school. Maybe that's why a red Ford and an older gentleman stood out to someone his near opposite- myself, a young man in an '80s Pontiac left with the familiarity found in strangers in classic cars.

Ghostly Adventures

Julia Zinszer

The semi haunted house
upon a ship sloshing
along the waves of the nearby sea.
No one can see it,
but the balconies are soaring.
With ocean air filtering through the three stories,
the window kept agape.
A man and wife once lived a life
within those walls now creaking.
The ship will rock,
it will sway with weight atop.
A sailor or two watch in astonishment
as they pass the monstrosity.
Needing to stare
but not being able to look for long.
It's magnificent
yet it's mysterious.
It's true no one knows how it got there
no one knows the logistics.
It's been out at sea forever.
No captain or owner.
Just a hardy boat
and a sturdy structure.
They sail as one
on this afterlife adventure.

Old Friends

Abby Blamowski

A chill so cold it courses through bones,
tall stalks of pine towering far above.

They become friends with the clouds.

Cobblestone arching over a rushing stream,
flowing with graceful ease. Like a helpful hand,

It shares dreams with the sun.

A breath of wind rustles the leaves,
the breeze passes between branches,

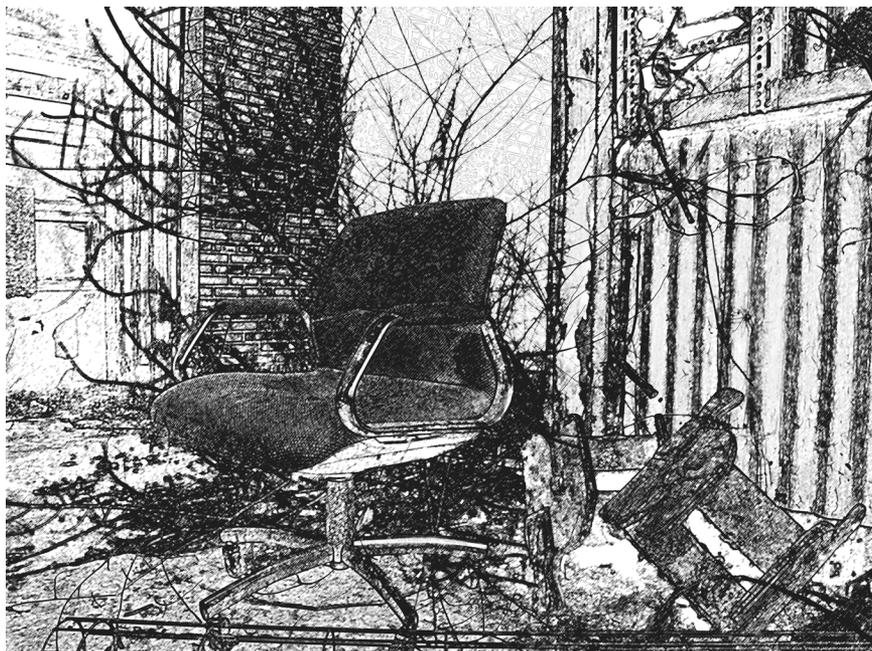
Carefully greeting old acquaintances.

Peeking through the browning leaves,
the sun ducks behind clouds of grey,

“Don’t worry, I’ll see you again soon.”

Creeping Vines

Jagen Mount



And The Stars Were Static Hymns

Remmington Johnson

There have been many nights after that night. I think often of it. When I watched friends and enemies die in Afghanistan, when I watched the glow of C-RAM rounds arcing across the night sky amidst the whistle of incoming artillery fire, when I wondered if I would make it home alive or if I even want to, when the smoke from burning villages in the Tagab Valley rose to my window seat, I would think of that night in Nebraska when I watched a little boy whimpering at my feet, surrounded by cornstalks and stars.

Out there on the Great Plains, there is a titanic force that lives forever just under the corn and grazing lands - and all across it - covering every square mile of every section of land. It is a force that is bursting with life and legacy, a grand history that adopts anyone who lives or passes under its sky.

There was once a farm out there, one of many, just south of the gurgling North Platte River, through a small grove of trees whose roots drank deep from those old waters. Tom's old farm, which he nicknamed the Popcorn 'n Pumpkin Patch, the place where me and Jason spent our childhood.

I was younger then, but I don't remember how young. Some details are lost forever. I know I was old enough to know some things, old enough now to know what I should have known back then but didn't. The sunset was apricot over the Popcorn 'n Pumpkin Patch. It sank in so many ways behind the A-MAIZE-ING Maze. Sometimes I remember that it had already set: an orange glow thrown into the sky, mingling with emerging stars and a red harvest moon. Sometimes I remember that sunset had only just begun, and the whole wide evening was there in front of us.

The corn had been harvested, most of the pumpkins sold. It was time to celebrate. It was time for friends and family and neighbors and neighbors' friends, time for anyone who wanted to celebrate this year's harvest to come and celebrate. There was cider in the barn with electric heaters, music, dancing. There was a bon-

fire off in some dirt patch by the field. Children chased each other, ate marshmallows, rolled in the dirt. Me and Jason were only just kids, but we were older than most of the other kids. This meant that the grown-ups expected us to perform that most annoying and dreadful responsibility: watch the other children. The grown-ups had better things to do.

And so we watched, but it was a stupid responsibility, not to be taken seriously. There wasn't much to watch for. Tonight was a night for fun and leniency. Tonight was a night of bent rules. Tonight was the hayrack ride. We all looked forward to it, kids and grown-ups alike. Who knew why the adults liked it so much, but us kids...we could finally be away from the adults, sitting by ourselves in a lone wagon under the stars as it plodded through empty fields. We would bundle beneath blankets and drink hot chocolate and watch the stars. I wouldn't miss it for anything in the world. Beyond this night, there was only the tedium of long, dark months. Howling arctic winds racing down the Midwest corridor, brutal ice storms, maintaining the farm, and preparing to start it all again with next year's growing season.

Tom pulled his tractor to the barn's entrance. Jason and I did seasonal work for him around harvest time, so we were enlisted to huck haybails into the wagons so people could have somewhere to sit. Except we weren't getting paid tonight, of course. Tonight was all for fun, nobody paid to get in, and apparently nobody got paid to work. So anyway, that's what we did, one of us slinging the hooks into the sides of the haybails and chucking them into the back of the wagon, while the other arranged them neatly inside. We switched when one of us got too tired hucking. Tom leaned against one of the wagon's rails, chattering and commenting. The rail groaned, protesting Tom's weight.

"Cold tonight, huh"? he said, white clouds of air puffed from his mouth with every word. "Great night for it!"

Jason and I just nodded, maybe one of us grunted out a "yep." Not much in the way of conversation because what were you supposed to say when you were hucking hay in the freezing cold and someone was stating the obvious?

After a few minutes of him watching us work and he an-

nounced that we were done, that it was time to start the hayrack ride.

“Kids first!” he shouted. Some of the grown-ups in the barn whooped. Others left to herd their children to the wagons.

“You boys mind keeping an eye on ‘em for me?” Tom asked.

We didn’t mind. That meant we might actually get to ride twice: once to watch the kids, and once with the grown-ups (we figured we might be old enough to make a compelling case that we were grown-ups, too, and so should ride with the grown-ups).

We helped to organize the kids in the back, lifted up the smaller ones that couldn’t climb in themselves.

“Please keep your arms and legs inside the ride at all times,” Jason said, in a mock-monotonous voice. Some of the kids snickered.

This is where some of those details, the ones that are lost forever, stop being lost. It’s some kind of after-image you see in a white-hot light. Every time you close your eyes, you can see the ghost of that image dancing in your eyelids.

Tom watched us load all the kids, watched us get them sat down and settled a bit, at least so they weren’t jumping around inside the wagon. There were so many kids, we had to hitch two wagons together. Jason and I took a seat at the back right corner of the front wagon, a good place to keep an eye on all the kids. Tom, apparently satisfied with the seating arrangement, turned around in his seat, and started the tractor. It grumbled to life, unhappy to be working at this time of night, coughed out some black smoke, then pulled forward with a jolt. The children laughed.

We plodded off away from the barn, away from people, into the endless silent fields, one of the thousands that pepper the Great Plains in unbroken patches. There we were, a lumbering train of dual wagons, each filled to the brim with kids and ungodly heavy haybails. The wagons were so heavy, the wheels sank into an already compacted dirt road, plowing aside a deep, fresh trail of dirt. Soon, he took us off road, sinking even deeper into the soil as we cut across the land. Tom’s tractor could pull the weight, but he’d feel it up there. The lights of the barn and the glow of the bon-

fire dimmed while the music and laughter faded into nothingness. Out here, in the Nebraska countryside, so far out from town, there is the great silence and great darkness. We were swallowed by it, and even the children understood that there is something ancient surrounding them that should not be broken.

That is, until one of the kids said something, and then they all said something. Their chatter flooding the countryside, an isolated pocket of restlessness slowly moving across fields of harvested cornstalks, broken at the base and drying brown.

“Nancy was talking to my mom the other night,” said Jason, slightly lower than the murmur of the kids. I leaned in to hear him better. “Well,” he continued, “when she was a kid, some girl fell out of the wagon, hit her head on a rock. Killed her.”

“Jesus,” I said. “When Nancy was a kid? Surprised she can even remember that far back. Probably still used horses or something for the wagons.”

Jason nodded. “Yeah, that’s what they had, I think. Actually, I don’t know what they used, but their family didn’t have a tractor back then. Still got all that old stuff in the barn.”

I looked around at where we sat. “You know,” I said. “Speaking of which, is this really the greatest spot to be? We could fall off, too. Like Nancy’s friend.”

Jason nodded, and we moved to the front of the wagon, right behind Tom. The ride wore on, the bumpy fields jolting us back and forth. We chattered at Tom, who barely acknowledged what we said. He stared mindlessly out into his fields. Probably bored out of his mind.

“All gone, one day,” Tom said, talking more to his fields than to us. “All of it. Socony bought most of the corn this year for the ethanol. Wouldn’t pay hardly nothin’ for it. Next year, who knows.”

Jason and I looked at each other, Jason shrugged. We didn’t know what he meant by all that, but it sounded like his usual prattle. Tom was always going on about stuff like that, how the farms were going away or something. I never believed him about all that. Me and Jason didn’t know anyone who gave up their farm.

We went to stargazing. It was easy to see the stars and the

milky way out here. I couldn't really stargaze much at home, because I lived up in a small town nearby called North Platte. It was a railroad town that would be dead without the Union Pacific. It was small, getting bigger all the time. Sometimes dad took me out by Lee Bird Field to look at the stars. From just outside town, my dad and I could see the stars and the meteor showers.

"That one is Cassiopeia," I said to Jason, pointing at a W-formation nestled amongst the stars. I'd been reading up on my stars to impress a girl in the next grade up from me. She seemed the smart type, so she'd obviously be impressed with my knowledge of astronomy.

"And that one is Draco." I traced my finger along Draco's winding path through the sky. "Or wait," I said. My path hadn't led to Draco's head. "Maybe it's the other way..." Still no head. There was a brouhaha near the back of our wagon, one of the kids was getting rowdy. "Hmm," I tried to ignore the commotion, but it was obvious by the shouting that the kids were starting to get bored. "Maybe Draco is actually there, and runs this way?" I tried to follow the stars, but had some trouble remembering where the constellation really was.

"Stop!" One of the kid's voices was suddenly sharp against the background shouting. "Stop the ride!"

"Hey," I said to Tom. "Hey, I think we need to stop."

The kids in the back of the train were standing up. Then I noticed some were even off the wagon, running alongside us, waving at Tom.

Jason and I hopped off the wagon, jogged towards the rear of the wagons where the rumpus was happening.

"Stay there," we told the kids, running by. We didn't know what was back there.

"He fell under the wagon!" shouted one kid.

"Get back in," I said. "Just sit tight."

I saw, some distance away, a woman kneeling over a boy. One of the kid's moms had joined us on the ride. I knew her name then, I don't know it now. She was a nurse. She might still be one. The boy's legs were twisted oddly, and he was moaning softly. It struck me then: the wagon must have broken his legs. If the wheels

are what got him, they would have snapped his legs like little twigs. But he'd be screaming if that happened. Unless he passed out. In any case, he wasn't making a big deal out of it.

More kids were following us. Jason stopped to corral them back to the wagons, to stop them from crowding the boy. I approached the boy and the woman in the dark. It was only the three of us there, the boy, someone's mom, and me. I recognized him. His name was Matthew. He was someone's friend of a friend, or some tenuous connection like that. He'd come that night because his parents were out of state visiting family. He and his brother had been staying with friends for the week, and tonight, they decided the Hayrack Ride would be a fun time.

"His legs get crushed?" I asked her.

She looked up at me. "His chest," she said.

The nausea hit me like the swing of a hammer. I only stared, then staggered back toward Jason. Suddenly the whole world was like a dream. I wasn't so much a participant in the dream as I was a witness. Everything was now out of control.

"What happened?" Jason asked.

"Ran over his chest," I said.

It was then we heard Matthew gurgling. His crying got louder, but only for a short bit. It returned to a whimper after a few seconds. We walked over to Matthew. The ground around him was soft, wet. Spongy. He coughed, and even in the darkness, I could see black blood fling out of his mouth, splattering onto a broken cornstalk by his head. There were cornstalks all around us, I noticed, broken at the base, about six inches from the ground. He'd laid down in that field, brown cornstalks like railroad spikes sticking out of the earth.

Matthew started crying again. Tom ran up to us then, asked what happened. Jason explained. Tom nodded, then shouted for Sammy, a kid slightly younger than me.

"Sammy!" said Tom. "Go back to the house. Fast as you can, now. Call 911. When they get here, take the jeep. Show 'em how to get here."

Sammy nodded, no questions asked, and sprinted towards the house.

Unbearably close by, a wild animal howled. I'd never heard a sound quite like it, and I haven't since. Even when I think back on that night, I always hear the howling. I remember it by the agony in its voice.

"What's that sound?" I asked.

"His brother," said Tom, shaking his head. "Dumbasses over there tellin' his brother about it. I'll be back."

Tom marched off towards Matthew's brother.

"Okay," said Jason. He seemed lucid, more lucid than me. "Okay, let's pray."

It seemed a sensible thing to do. This was God's business now. The long-odds, the life-saving business. *This* is when God cracked his knuckles really got to work. This is when you walked away with one hell of a miracle to share with the world. I saw a child that should have died. His chest was crushed and there was no hope. But God saved that child.

Of course, there are no miracles. Watching over us that night, there was only a silent, dead universe spread out over the final and most significant moment in Matthew's life. At least a mom was there, brushing his hair, holding his hand. I stood there like an idiot: dumb, quiet, a pathetic witness to the end of a life.

He died, and I don't know when it happened. He cried and cried, he moaned, he whimpered. Finally, he stopped. And I just stared.

Once he was gone, I knew I was living in a different world. This would always be a world where Matthew died. His final moments were agony. We were both just kids. He died in pain, and that will have always happened, will always be happening in my memory. This was death, and it would be with me now forever.

Later that night, we learned that Matthew had fallen because he moved to the seats that me and Jason had vacated, vacated because we'd decided those seats were too unsafe for us to sit in. There was a job we were supposed to do, and we didn't do it. Nobody would blame anyone for that night, everyone could agree that it was the most freak of accidents. But in the years between, I recognized that there is a simple fact that cannot be evaded no matter how many platitudes you try to pile on top of it: if Jason

and I had been more faithful to our responsibilities, Matthew would still live. Had we considered the consequences of moving from that seat, a place we realized was a weak point of the wagon, disaster would have been averted. Had we kept one eye on that spot...

Tom's farm is long gone now, bought out and consolidated by the Lays potato chip company. Tom still works it, but Lays owns the land. Family farms are a dying thing, owned by banks, corporations, and housing development magnates. Maybe that's what Tom meant that night. Those old farms died and are buried under a land that has many names and many caretakers. Megacorporations are simply the latest in an antediluvian line of stewards stretching back even further than the German homesteaders before Tom, and the Great Sioux Nation before them. We are children and adopted children of Nebraska. Some of us grow old on this soil, some of us die in this soil, and we are all buried beneath it.

For myself, I have wandered far from the Great Plains and its shallow, gurgling rivers. I have wandered to Alaska, down to the deep south and sweating bayous, and returned north to a forested New York, rich with history and life and little unexpected opportunities that dance out at you from quieter places. But there are many nights when I think of a boy named Matthew, and do not forget the lifelong consequences for those of us who abandoned our responsibilities that night.

The Last Happy Death

Anton Porcari

“The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness.”

—Vladimir Nabokov

Ouroboros sheds its skin,
Empires fall to rebuild. Cells replace themselves.
What we are terrified of losing is within!
Not the body, for that decays,
nor the brain, which we never had awareness of.
What disappears are ideas—lost belief highways.
Those reckless defining thoughts. Oh, the places
the mind goes. Returning from whence it came, the dark.
Oblivion swallows every beloved face, all of the human race.
Knees bury in dirt with outstretched hands, Why is
society plagued by immortality, forced to despair at *Ozymandias*
‘I am somebody,’ the ego cries. ‘I AM,’ the egoless says.
Animals are given ideologies, fallacious hope. We are each a devotee
to self-consciousness, preservers of self-deception and self-persuasion.
Eyes to the sky we caterwaul to Yahweh, “Not now! Not me!”
Eternal life, for Socrates and Hegel, will never be put to rest.
Philosophy is “learning how to die.” History is “what man does with death.”
Permeance has been fought for since the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Obsessed
with protecting our self-esteem we steamroll
other groups to assert our superiority. Wrangling herds
to rein in the cosmic joke out of our control.
Clinging to the precipice of fame, we war
on *The Bachelor*, all across TV, inside of the Middle East
to avoid the invisible worm at the core.
“Too deep for tears” was Wordsworth purview
on the macabre handmaiden, with beak mask and scythe.
Death will happen to everyone, including me & you.
“Cast a cold eye...on death” for Ireland’s Yeats.
“Here lies one whose name was writ in water,”
the epitaph for London’s Poet, Keats.
The last of the human freedoms, Victor Frankl
asserted was “to choose one’s attitude...one’s own way.”
Of your own death knell, grasp the handle.
Tolstoy asserted, “If you want to be happy, be.”

The physical act of smiling actually makes you feel happier,
not a souls exempt from this accessible, everpresent, key.
To think of flames extinguished leaves a bitter piquancy.
Every known reaches nevermore. How do we console ourselves?
The solution is to ponder our demise with frequency.
Not to drive us closer to morticians or the ones in the dirt, lost,
but to overcome the terrifying with courage and compassion.
For when it's our time for such a burden we wouldn't be crossed.
"Rage, Rage, against the dying of the light" with a smile.
Dread lies beneath the surface springloaded to erupt with a single breath,
but even without us, *it's a wonderful life*, worthwhile. Smile! Smile!
For when Rigor Mortis wields its wrath, you'll be The Last Happy Death!

The Gap Between

Eliana Horning

there is a gap between the gray leather armchair and
the sticky white windowsill—
sticky because the paint was cheap and never really dried—
my cats stretch over it luxuriously,
three comfortably full bellies hanging down
in the gap between.

they stare out of the window, down to the pavement,
where a mouse,
belly distended with the poison it swallowed—
the poison we put there—
lay prone and dying.

the cats run in circles, first around the couch
then back to the gap, unable to stand
the sight of a potential victim so close
but too far to touch,
to taste,
to pounce.

canned cat food, despite the liberal amount of delicious gravy,
has nothing on the flavor
of mouse, freshly slaughtered,
or so they've heard.
just one taste would be enough.

they slap their tails against the cheerful yellow wall,
hunter's instinct screaming at them to act
but the glass pane is too solid,
too thick.

three cats,
watching longingly out
at the prey they can never have
stretched over
the gap between.

Confront

Sophie Infarinato



Bullet

Madalyn Herron

I had a dream the other night, just like this one. I sat on this rickety, old, wooden dock, three beer bottles opened to my right, and the sun setting right in front of me, turning the sky this exact pink and purple heaven. I'm alone. But when am I not? I suppose this is all I need in my life. I put my hands in my lap, and watched them. The water beneath me reflected the sun and stung my eyes, but I didn't care. Beautiful things tend to hurt. That is the beauty of life.

A little metal bullet reflected the sun, catching my eye. I lifted it into the sky, holding it by my fingertips. 'Cherish.' I smiled, letting my fingers run over the engraved words. I placed the bullet back down next to me on the dock, and leaned back onto my elbows. What do I cherish? Too much, and yet not enough. I reach into my shorts pocket and pull out a small piece of paper, my daughter's stick figure drawings scribbled across it. They were all labeled, making me laugh over the misspelled 'Daddy' and messy looking five year old handwriting. I press the paper to my chest, almost feeling the heartbeat of my family. Almost, but not quite. I fold the drawing and place it in my pocket again.

I struggle to stand onto the dock, my shoes getting stuck in the gaps. I knock over a beer bottle, the remnants dripping into the water. The bullet rolls into the sea, and suddenly I feel more alone than usual. I want to wake up now. I want to go visit her mother. I want to live. The sun finally dips beneath the waves, the sky turning a deep purple. My light is gone.

I pat the drawing in my pocket and stand on the edge of the wood, looking down into the water. I smile a bit, seeing her reflection next to me. I reach into the sea, reaching out for her, and I fall. I fall deeper and deeper, sinking into the ocean, letting my body weigh itself down. I'm ready for a bigger and better dream. I love the sun and the sky and the sea, but I'm done here, I think.

I'll see you soon, love.

Damien

Ginger Van Allen

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

DAMIEN HALLOWAY (18) is a transgender male high school student. He often goes unnoticed by most people, and doesn't smile much. As he walks down the hallway, he stares at the ground, avoiding eye contact with anyone. He is carrying BOOKS and has his BACKPACK on.

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

He turns and walks through an open door into a classroom. There is a COLORFUL SIGN on the door that reads, "Mrs. Teniem's Class, All are Welcome." AUBREY TENIEM (30's), stands up from her DESK as soon as she sees Damien. She wears a COLORFUL SKIRT and a PUFFY-SLEEVE BLOUSE. Her smile is wide and she has kind eyes.

AUBREY

Damien! You look so handsome! I love what you've done with your hair.

Aubrey walks over to meet Damien, and she wraps him in a welcomed embrace. Damien cracks a smile.

DAMIEN

Hi, Mrs. Teniem.

AUBREY

(whispering)
Have you eaten today?

DAMIEN

Not yet, I didn't feel good this morning.

Aubrey walks over to her desk and opens a drawer that's

filled with GRANOLA BARS and OTHER SNACKS. There are SEVERAL FRAMED PHOTOS of her and a WOMAN, about her age. One frame has a photo of the woman and TWO YOUNG GIRLS. The frame has an embellishment that says, "family." She grabs a GRANOLA BAR and brings it over to Damien.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

Thanks.

Damien finds an open STUDENT DESK and sits down.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

KATIE FARLOE (17) is eating her LUNCH with THREE FRIENDS in a CROWDED CAFETERIA. She is the type of girl that everyone loves. She is kind and easy to talk to, and never turns down the opportunity to make a new friend. She wears a CROSS NECKLACE.

KATIE

That's what I told her! If you put kindness out into the world, it's gonna come back to you!

FRIEND 1

Amen, sis!

Damien walks by the table, scouting out a place to sit. He's carrying his LUNCH ON A TRAY. Every table is full, except for a seat next to Katie. She notices him and waves to him.

KATIE

You can sit with us, if you want.

Katie smiles with sincerity. Damien breaks a shy smile and sits down.

DAMIEN

Great, thanks.

KATIE

My name's Katie, it's nice to meet
you.

DAMIEN

Damien.

Katie notices the TAYLOR SWIFT BAND TEE Damien is wearing.

KATIE

(singing)

We are never, ever, ever, getting
back together!

Damien looks up, a little confused at first, then he figures it out.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I know it's one of her old songs,
but it's still my favorite.

Damien smiles, then notices Katie's CROSS NECKLACE as he looks back down at his food.

FADE TO:

INT. DAMIEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

CLARA HALLOWAY (40's), is sitting in a BARSTOOL next to the counter, reading news on her LAPTOP. She ignores Damien as he walks through the front door.

DAMIEN

Hey, mom.

She doesn't respond.

There is a WOODEN CROSS hanging on one of the walls. Damien looks right at it before leaving the room.

INT. DAMIEN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Damien sets his BACKPACK down on his BED. He takes off his t-

shirt to reveal his BINDER. He looks himself up and down in the MIRROR before laying down on his bed, staring at the ceiling for a few moments.

There is a PHOTO OF DAMIEN AND HIS MOM sitting on the NIGHTSTAND next to his bed. It is from a few years ago before his transition. His hair is long and he has a prom dress on.

Damien picks up the photo. He flips it over, and written on the back of the frame is a note that reads, "I LOVE YOU MORE EVERYDAY. I'M SO PROUD OF THE WOMAN YOU'VE BECOME. LOVE, MOM."

He throws the photo on the bed as he stands up. He looks at himself again in the mirror, tears forming in his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

JORDAN KEMPLER (18) is sitting in her CAR using her PHONE. Katie runs up and gets into the passenger's seat. She sets her BACKPACK down next to her feet.

KATIE

Thanks for taking me home, my dad's working late tonight.

JORDAN

Of course! Can't have my baby sister walking home.

Jordan puts the car into drive and they start moving.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

So, I saw you met a new friend today.

KATIE

Who, Damien?

JORDAN

Her name's Danielle.

Katie looks offended.

KATIE

But he prefers Damien. You have to respect that.

JORDAN

It's a sin, and it's gross. She was born a female.

KATIE

Yeah? And now he's found himself.

JORDAN

How are you not put off by it? She has a vagina, Katie. She can't be a man.

KATIE

Pull over.

Jordan slows the car down to a stop. Katie picks her backpack up and gets out of the car onto the sidewalk.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I'm gonna walk home. I can't believe that you would judge someone like that, Jordan.

Katie slams the car door and starts walking down the sidewalk. Jordan sits silently in her car.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Katie walks down the hallway, carrying BOOKS. She is in deep thought.

Damien runs up behind her and taps her shoulder.

DAMIEN

Hey, Katie!

Katie looks at him and smiles wide.

KATIE

Hi! How are you?

DAMIEN

I'm great! I wanted to ask if you wanted to go to the mall with me today.

KATIE

What, really? Sure! I would love that!

Katie stops in front of a classroom door.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I just have a club meeting to go to, then we can leave right after, okay?

DAMIEN

Cool! I'll meet you out front!

Damien walks away, almost skipping with excitement. Katie smiles as he walks away, then ducks into the classroom.

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

As Katie enters, she is greeted with an excited cheer from SEVERAL STUDENTS. She sets her books down at an empty desk and goes up to the front of the room.

KATIE

Hey, everyone! Welcome back to Bible Club! I see a couple of new faces.

Everyone looks at her.

KATIE (CONT'D)

So, I'll introduce myself. My name is Katie, I am a senior and I am the president of this club.

Katie looks around the room. She plays with her CROSS NECKLACE as she speaks.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I don't think Jordan is here today, she's our vice president... Anyway, we've been studying the book of John, does anyone have questions from our last meeting?

CUT TO:

INT. DAMIEN'S CAR - DAY

Damien drives with Katie in the passenger's seat. There is MUSIC PLAYING on the radio. Katie looks over at Damien while he's singing along to the song.

KATIE

Hey.

She turns the music down.

DAMIEN

Hey.

KATIE

I really like hanging out with you. You're a really fun person.

DAMIEN

I like hanging out with you, too. I've never had an instant friend like you, you're really genuine.

Katie smiles, then turns the music up loud. Damien sings louder, and Katie starts laughing.

KATIE

(shouting over the music)
Fake friends are a waste of time!

DAMIEN

Amen!

Katie smiles, content and happy. She relaxes in her seat.

CUT TO:

INT. DAMIEN'S CAR - NIGHT

Damien laughs as he slows the car down in front of KATIE'S HOUSE. There are SHOPPING BAGS filling the backseat.

They pause for a moment, Damien looks like he wants to say something.

DAMIEN

Can I tell you something?

KATIE

Yeah, for sure!

Damien takes in a deep breath.

DAMIEN

I'm trans. I was born a women. But I still like men.

Katie looks at him and smiles the way a mother does when her child does something amazing.

She opens the door and goes around the car to Damien's side. He gets out and Katie hugs him.

KATIE

Thank you for sharing that with me.

DAMIEN

I feel like I can trust you with my feelings.

KATIE

That means the world to me.

They pull away, and Katie takes her bags from the back of the car. She starts to walk up the driveway to her house, then turns back

for a moment.

KATIE (CONT'D)

If no one else says this to you,
I'm really proud of you, Damien.

Damien smiles at her, so happy that she said that to him.

DAMIEN

Thanks.

KATIE

Goodnight!

DAMIEN

Goodnight.

Katie runs into the house, and Damien watches the door close. He sits in his car for a few moments, unable to hold back a beaming smile.

FADE TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Damien is taking a BOOK out of his LOCKER when Jordan sees him. He doesn't notice her at first.

Jordan clears her throat. Damien turns abruptly.

DAMIEN

Hey, what's up?

JORDAN

Katie asked me to come talk to you.

Damien starts to look worried.

DAMIEN

Really... why?

JORDAN

She can't hang out with you
anymore.

DAMIEN

And you're coming to tell me that instead of her? She couldn't come tell me that?

JORDAN

You're damaging to her reputation. She's going to Bible college in a few months to become a preacher, she doesn't have time for someone like you.

Damien is crushed. He loses eye contact with Jordan. She continues to look at him, waiting for him to crack.

DAMIEN

'kay. Can you tell her something for me?

JORDAN

Sure, what is it?

Damien contemplates for a few moments, holding back tears.

DAMIEN

You know what? Never mind. If she couldn't come talk to me herself, she doesn't deserve to hear it.

Damien slams his locker shut before storming off. Jordan turns the other way and cracks an evil smile.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Katie smiles brightly as she skips over to sit next to Damien. She is carrying a LUNCH TRAY. She sits down beside him. The hood of his SWEATSHIRT is up and he ignores her. She places her hand gently on his shoulder so he knows she's there.

KATIE

Hey, what's wrong?

Damien doesn't respond. Katie looks around. There are a FEW STUDENTS staring.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Damien, are you alright? Did something happen?

Katie makes eye contact with Jordan, who is just leaving the lunch line. Jordan quickly breaks gaze.

Katie puts her hand on Damien's back. He shrugs it off.

KATIE (CONT'D)

What's going on?

DAMIEN

Why don't you tell me?

Damien pulls his hood off aggressively and glares at Katie. She's flinches.

KATIE

What are you talking about?

DAMIEN

You send Jordan to "break up" with me.

He makes an "air quotes" hand gesture.

KATIE

Jordan talked to you? I didn't ask her to do that.

DAMIEN

She said I'm detrimental to your brand. Sorry for hanging out in your orbit, princess.

Damien gets up and storms out. Katie follows him. Jordan is not far behind, wanting to see how it will play out.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

KATIE

Damien, wait!

Katie races after Damien, they go up a FLIGHT OF STAIRS.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Let's talk about this! Come on!

Damien whips around to face her.

DAMIEN

Talk about what... exactly?

KATIE

Damien, I didn't send Jordan to talk to you. If I had a problem with you, I would talk to you myself, you deserve that.

Damien waits for her to say more, not convinced.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Why would I change my mind overnight? We had such a great time together last night! I wouldn't want to give that up!

Jordan catches up, staying several feet away. Katie notices her approach.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Did you talk to Damien behind my back?

JORDAN

Katie, you have to see where I'm coming from. You're going to be a preacher. You can't have a transgender friend.

Katie walks closer to Damien, who is still during this fight.

KATIE

That doesn't matter. He's a person. His circumstances don't define him.

Katie looks at Damien, and reaches for his hand. She holds it tightly.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I don't need you to tell me who my friends are, Jordan. It doesn't matter what someone looks like or how they grew up. I think you're forgetting the second commandment.

Katie waits for Jordan to say it. There is a long pause.

JORDAN

Love your neighbor as yourself

KATIE

Love! Love one another as God has loved you. It's not about social status, identity, religion, background, race, anything! It's about loving someone for who they are! It is not our job to judge.

Damien looks at Katie, and she looks back at him.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I love you for who you are. Your gender identity doesn't matter to me. You're genuine, kind and fun to be around.

DAMIEN

Thank you.

Damien and Katie smile at each other.

Aubrey Teniem opens the door of her classroom.

AUBREY

What's going on out here?

DAMIEN

Hey, Mrs. Teniem, sorry, we were going back to the cafeteria.

AUBREY

Oh, nonsense! Come on in here!

Damien walks over to Aubrey and she hugs him. He goes inside the classroom. Aubrey stops Katie before she walks in.

AUBREY (CONT'D)

Hey, what you did there... it means everything to him. He doesn't have any great friends around here. It takes courage to do what you did, but he needs that from someone.

KATIE

Thanks. I care about him.

AUBREY

I can tell by the way you look at him.

Aubrey leans in to give Katie a hug, and she welcomes Katie into her classroom.

FADE TO BLACK.

Love Letter From Rome I

Harrison Richardson

To my Darling,

It has been three years since I've heard
Your name spoken softly against hushed lips
From each friends mouth I would see
In early morning when the coffee brewed with the sun
Till at night when I would think of your face before I drifted off.

Do you remember the songs we used to sing
To the children on the street
On Friday evenings after supper
When the berries were sprinkled with sugar
Served over soft cream that melted to the tongue and froze over?
I have all the lyrics written on my body
Where they will never leave.

Chords are stuck in my throat like the guitar I never picked up
Honest to you, I was afraid of my own betterment
So I would sing until I could no longer speak
To avoid my verbal adoration for your writing

I still hold bitterness in my mouth
When I see your name appear out of
The pages I wrote for months
That you tore and spat on
Without a second thought in your heart
For anyone but yourself

Maybe it was the right thing to do
Taking your pedestal away from the noose and
Setting it in the clouds
You can see the world from up there
Breathing out the toxins that filled your liver
And spoiled your mind a deep caramel
Make it soft and chewy
But for me it is bitter and held with regret

Under Perfect Conditions

Emma Morisette

Wind can make you feel
like an actor
on a screen.
Perfectly positioned,
without a hat to blow off,
an untucked shirt to blow up,
or papers to blow away,
there is no risk of loss.
With warm clothes
meeting at wrists and ankles,
headphones calming the external storm,
and the internal loose ends
pinned safely down
by the self-hugs that are
hands tucked tightly
in pants pockets.
There is no risk of being shaken.

But, *actors*
are the ones to witness
perfect conditions.
In reality
there's always something
to be gone
with the wind.
Always a slackened hem
ready to jump out
and corral the gust
Someone always needs
to borrow the headphones
or your ear.
There's always something heavy to hold.
So your fingers get cold,
And the hug must wait for another day.

Dying Bloom

Michael J. Darling



August in August

Ethan Semeraro

You are eating breakfast with your girlfriend—Dunkin’ Donuts and bagels—with such routine frequency that the workers at the drive-thru ask questions if you stray from your usual order. Your girlfriend is asking you to help her look for a car, any car, because she wants to be able to leave campus in order to visit you this fall.

“I want a Pontiac, like yours,” she says, even when you tell her that the Pontiacs she is interested in and the Pontiac you drive are very different.

“Would you be mad at me if I looked at another car,” you joke to her between sips of coffee. “No,” she muses, “But I’ll be jealous if it’s something cooler than this,” she laughs, holding up her phone, displaying the ad for a bright green Kia.

The two of you flip through ad after ad, looking for anything that would catch your eye. While she is looking for affordable, colorful 2000s economy cars, you are looking for something very different: something troubled, vintage, rusting, with dreams of being fast.

“It’s not another Firebird, but what’s a Camaro but a dressed-down Firebird,” you quip, hoping to remind her that this is what she signed up for, and that your future financial state won’t be reflected by reckless maneuvers now.

You remind her of all the cars you’ve thought about buying, and that of all the potential candidates—like the red ‘84 Trans Am, and the unique ‘79 Trans Am, boasting a Buick engine and a homemade American flag paint job—the ‘81 Camaro jumping off the screen at you seems like a Plain Jane. It’s not terribly exciting, but not exorbitantly expensive, and solid enough to have potential. This is the best chance you’ve seen.

To you, the difference between junk and trash is the potential. This car is total junk, but it isn’t trash. The listing offers that the car comes with two engines, neither of which are in the car, two carburetors, the original transmission still in place, and

various loose parts and pieces.

Only a fool or someone entranced with visions of home-made race cars and long nights in the garage would jump on a car like this, and you're glad, and maybe a little surprised, when your girlfriend doesn't judge too harshly when you respond to the ad.

Only a few sips of coffee later, and you are greeted with a text back. An exclamation point concludes the seller's reply, and the dream takes off.

"The engine is out of the car right now, but I just freshened up the brakes, and the car is inspected until the end of September," he says, sending pictures of the car that details all the stages of assembly, disassembly, and improvement on this car.

"I'm out of town next weekend, but you're free to stop by to look at the car whenever." The car is in Alden, NY, but it isn't too far a drive. You'll stop by in a few days.

You take your father with you, and you set out later in the week to see the car. The two of you laugh as you drive past Lancaster National Speedway. "Maybe someday it'll be back here, to race," you say, "That's a long way to drive just for a race," your father says, citing the track he races at in Geneseo. You drive on.

Finally, on a driveway off the main road, you spot the Camaro. It's weathered black paint jumps out at you, covered in pollen and leaves from sitting under a tree. Perhaps The Rolling Stones aren't necessarily to blame, but it seems like every '70s and early '80s Camaro ends up painted black. The hood is missing, revealing the empty engine bay where the manufacturer of locomotion should sit. Is this too much to handle?

You and your father are greeted by a slender, heavily-tattooed man of about 24 or 25, who introduces himself as David and walks you over to the car. With shoulder-length black hair, plenty of piercings, and probably 90 percent of his body covered in ink, you think he just looks like the kind of person who would drive a jet-black Camaro.

"Here she is," he announces proudly. "Don't mind the boxes inside, I've been trying to clean up my garage of all the things to go with the car." You peer through the dusty windows at the interior: carburetors, exhaust manifolds, water pumps, and more— a

large portion of the things you would need to get this car running. “Feel free to open it up,” David says, watching you run your hands along the insides of the wheel wells, feeling for rust.

“There’s a couple of holes in the floor, and some rust going on here,” he says, pointing to the outside of the passenger door, “But it’s a solid car. You can check the frame, it’s solid.”

You hit your head on the steering wheel looking under the dashboard at the mess of wiring; like studying a horse’s teeth or an actor’s neck, the truest way to tell the condition of a car is by looking under the dashboard. Some original wiring is still here, you think. That must be a good sign.

David explains to your father that he’s moving to Rhode Island soon, and that he doesn’t have time to get it running again. He explains how a friend owned it, and that he traded him a VW to own this Camaro, but other than that its origins are a mystery.

“I have the engine in the garage, if you want to see,” he tells you, explaining why the engine is out of the car, “I cracked the water-jacket on the block, so I don’t think you’ll want this one. You could braze over it, if you guys know how to weld, but I have another block at my dad’s house you guys can have.”

“You’re the one selling the car, and we’re the ones buying it,” your father explains, “so we don’t want either of us to walk away feeling screwed.” You know David needs to get rid of the car fast, but he’s honest with you about the faults of the car, so you don’t try to haggle his price.

Neither you nor your father have a truck or a trailer to transport the car, so you tell David that you’ll cover its cost if he can arrange it, and you give him a down payment, and he gives you the title to the Camaro, which is useless until he signs it off to you.

You are eating breakfast with your girlfriend a few weeks later. Like clockwork, it is the same order, the same lazy mid-day moment, when you get a text.

“The car is all loaded up,” David’s message reads, and you’re pleasantly surprised, it wasn’t supposed to be coming for a few more days. You barely finish replying when you get a call. It’s the tow truck driver, and he says he’ll be there in 45 minutes.

“Are you okay with coming to watch me get my car,” you ask your girlfriend. She’s still in her pajamas and half asleep. She nods yes, but only if you let her play Taylor Swift on the drive over to your father’s garage.

She is sitting on seats from your mom’s jeep that you and your dad use as a couch in his garage, watching you both help roll the car off the ramp truck.

“You’re a lucky man,” the truck driver says, “I got a lot of thumbs ups on the ride over here.” You grin.

Your girlfriend asks what you’re going to name the car.

“I don’t name cars,” you say, “makes it harder when you break something.”

“Well, I think you should name it Devin.”

You’re not sure where she came up with that, or if you’ll listen to her, but that’s what she’ll call this old car. You look it over. Based on the car’s title, this car started off life very differently. This particular one started with a 6-cylinder engine, but has since had a v8 swapped under the hood, and you will put another Chevy v8 back in its place. This car was not a speed-machine when it was born; while it may have a hood off a Z28, the option code for the top-of-the-line variant of the Camaro catalog, this car is a Plain Jane, originally born without power-steering or any air vents. It looks like David has installed power-steering lines, easing driveability and saving you some time and effort. The lack of air vents doesn’t bother you; your Firebird has A/C that you drained instead of bothering to fix its leak. Muscle cars are meant to be driven with the windows down.

The inside of the driver’s door is painted maroon, the sides of one of the taillights is a metallic blue, the black paint on one of the mirrors is chipping off the reveal purple, and the black paint on the back of the car is fading to reveal what looks like an off-white paint. The spare tire, which retains its nearly 40-year-old original tire, is cream-colored. Chevrolet did not offer base model Camaros in cream in 1981, which confuses you.

The back seat belts are tan, and the remaining interior pieces like the dashboard and steering wheel are brown, and suggest this was the original color, but one of the front lap belts

is maroon, like the door. This intrigues you, but the seatbelts and seats, that aren't even from a Camaro, but are black Firebird seats, must go anyway in the way of adding uncomfortable race seats and harness seat belts.

The gauges are also from a Z28, probably from a pre-1979 model, as the speedometer goes to 130, signalling it predates the 1980-95 regulation that limited production car speedometers to top at 85mph. This car is made up of parts off at least two other Camaros, but you remind yourself that very few race cars match; you know a guy from high school who has an '84 Camaro that's a Frankenstein too, and he knows a guy with a Toyota Supra that is three different colors of white and gray. A nice coat of paint doesn't make it faster, they'd say.

Still, is your car more mismatched than theirs, and does it even matter? Does this car hold secrets? Is this car more trash than treasure?

There's no way to tell, at least not yet.

"A Jeep is pretty much a truck if you take the roof off"

Your father is sure a 600lbs cast iron engine will fit fine into your mom's car, but you're not sure. Without any better way, you agree, and the two of you head out to Attica, to meet David at his father's house.

"What do you mean you didn't know about the rodeo," your father laughs, explaining like it is common knowledge that Attica's prisoners compete in a rodeo, driving past the prison into the rain to find your engine.

"You guys got here just in time," David's father, John says, looking up at the dark clouds rolling over.

"We drove through some rain on the way here, but it wasn't too bad."

John looks like a cowboy, with shoulder-length brown hair, worn work boots, and a friendly smile. He says his son will be here soon, and he shows you the engine.

With the help of another man, who is explained to you as David's uncle, the five of you get the engine into the back of your mom's 'plum crazy purple' Jeep, using a tractor and a crane. You are surprised it fits, and you hope David gets here before the rain

does.

Your father and John get to talking about cars and Jeeps and how David is always at Lancaster Speedway, watching the races every weekend, and he laughs when you tell him how you borrowed the Jeep.

“I work at the prison,” John says, “So I have to drive a truck, but my wife has a VW bug, with a 5-speed.”

You are surprised such a tough looking prison guard would openly admit to his love for joyriding his wife’s “silly little” car, but he’s friendly. You could see him and your father being friends, as you watch your father describe his car to John, as John grins and says it must be a wild ride.

Thinking to yourself, you wish John could see your father race; that bright orange mid-70s muscle car is your father’s pride and joy, and the joke is that the car is your father’s second son. I could’ve paid for college outright with the money that’s gone into that thing, you’ve always joked to friends, but you aren’t serious. No matter how much time and money you will throw into this Camaro, your father’s 600 horsepower machine will put it and most other cars to shame.

David is here now, and you are glad to see him. He’s wearing a leather jacket, even in August.

“Hey man,” he says, “I see you got the motor loaded up alright.” You nod, and hand him the envelope and a pen. He signs the title over to you, as well as a bill of sale. You think about how technically, this is your first car. You bought your first car at 16, so the Pontiac isn’t in your name, but your fathers, at least for now. At 19, this 1981 Chevrolet Camaro, with holes in the floor, no brakes, and no engine, is your real first car. Maybe someday it will be better. You guess you can only try.

“Keep in touch if you’d like, I’d love to see what you do with the car,” David says.

“You have my number.” You tell him you will.

“Oh, and I’m changing my name, for personal reasons. It’s August now, not David.” You smile and tell him that you’ll call him whatever he likes, and thank him for the opportunity, and for handing his project over to you. You promise him it’ll be fast, and

that maybe he'll see you race it one day.

The two of you part ways. He was David when you met him in July, but he was August in August.

Awaited Bait

Heaven Santiago

If rebounds were exercise, then I'm working out.
But the rebounds I exercise, it's not working out.
I regretfully relapse, what am I working up to?
I set the trap, diffuse the scent, they caught the bait
But this huntress suddenly isn't as hungry.

It's just a Gameboy, I got game, man.
Pushing buttons, pushing boundaries.
Bounce back like the phoenix from X-men
I know them well, my ex-men,
Wounded and confused by my ruses.
Gullible goofs that claw at my bootcuts
Get booted, guillotine cut.

On off hours I meditate, I smoke words
Which are worth more than the mainstream pipe dreams
I own a sewer systems of swears and the words
I blow smoke from is industrial.

When I'm on the clock, I clip minutes into devious origami folds
Creasing each minute wasted, lying to their faces
No, they're not my ex-men, just barcode number cases
That barely fill the spaces
Of my heart and mind.

Why do I do what I do?
This is the Plague at Siege of Caffa
Catapulting men dead from illusioned-love
Overwalk, overwhelming the One I once
Beloved.
As an insult, as revenge
With no ends.

All You Can Ever Know

Maggie DeJohn



Swing High Swing Low

Kayla Elfers

EXT. PARK - DAY

The sun sets as MARGIE, a bright-eyed little girl races to the SWINGS. She touches a swing and sticks her tongue out at PAUL, her grandpa.

Paul smiles at his granddaughter with content. Margie extends her arms, and he lifts her on to a swing.

Margie smiles and laughs as Paul pushes her more and more. Margie swings so high, she can almost touch the sky.

She gets closer and closer to the sun until Paul slows her down.

The swing comes to a slow stop. Paul tries to take Margie off but she clenches the chains. She gives Paul the “puppy dog eyes”. He rolls his eyes and sits on the swing next to her.

Margie watches Paul twist the chains of his swing together. Paul releases the twisted chains, and his swing moves him in all different directions. Margie tries but isn't successful.

Paul gets up and twists her on the swing. Margie's eyes light up as she flies in all different directions.

Margie settles in her swing and laughs with Paul. She lets out a yawn and Paul takes her off the swing. Margie holds her grandpa's hand and they stroll off.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED PARK - NIGHT

The park is dilapidated and Margie is now a teenager. She slowly makes her way to the rusted swings. Margie sits on a swing.

She pushes herself to swing as high as she can. She swings so high, she can almost touch the moon. She lets out a smile.

Margie slows down and twists herself on the swing like her grandpa once taught her. She smiles again.

Margie stops swinging and looks up to the moon with glassy eyes.

MARGIE

I miss you grandpa.

FADE TO BLACK.

Wanderer

Melanie Tunkey

I.

I've pretended my own fingers
Were from your hand,
All the while
I could still smell her on my sheets.
I had to ignore the reality of
Who I'd be betraying now.

II.

Tomorrow, I'll wake up to the sound of silence
Instead of hearing my name
Anxiously
Over, and over, and over again.
And I'll have had slept through the night so soundly,
Instead of all those times I've woken up to crying,
To shaking and quaking and fear,
Having to sit up and wake up,
Try not to fuck up.
Coax you past each shiver,
Untangle every syllable caught in your throat.
I've unhinged your nails
From your skin
With my voice

At least a hundred times now.

III.

We often pretended to be together.
Our roleplay was phone-sex-innocence:
We'd whisper sweetly the ways we'd approach each other in bed,
How I'd put one arm under you and the other one over you,
Spooning,
Hugging you into me.
Cuddle. That's what we'd do. That's what we fantasize about.

We miss purposeful tangling -
The ones of our legs -
And we miss the way our breath got lost in the other's hair.
We sigh against our phones as we curl into ourselves,
Imagining the other is there, holding us, kissing us, keeping us safe.
Without fail,
It would calm you down and make you happy,
And that's what made it enough for me.

IV.

Her smile
Is only ever an inch away
From taking my life.

Glasses

Sophie Infarinato



The Lies We Tell

Nathalie Sciacca

You hate yourself today, breaking yesterday's promise.

You're not surprised, you're used to failure, but the disappointment is immeasurable. It kills every bit of drive you have in you.

You bypass the mirror, as usual. If there's one thing you're good at, it's consistency. Looking at yourself never gets easier, so you've forgone the experience altogether. You have no idea what you look like anymore; it's not like you actually believe the compliments your family and friends give you. No, no, that's too easy. Instead, you choose to focus on the snide remarks anonymous people have made years ago that still scream in your head as if they happened yesterday.

Yesterday. You said you'd change yesterday, but no one knows you better than yourself, and change will only happen when pigs fly. But today is a new day, right? So maybe you'll try. Except you definitely won't, you're just going to wallow in self pity and either binge until you feel disgusting or starve yourself until you feel depleted and sick. Just to make you actually feel something other than empty. And then afterwards you'll cry until your face is swollen, right? This has gotten really repetitive, you know. Everyone must be tired of your sad wallowing by now.

But after you get through today, because you've already failed step one so you can't possibly make a difference, everything will be different.

Because tomorrow, you promise you'll love yourself

Milemarker 297

Miranda Phillips

I came home to a dark house last night
when you promised to always leave the light on.
Boxers on the floor.
Stray fries rattle in the bottom of a Hardy's bag
next to the can of beer you spilled.
I couldn't find your spare key..
who keeps it in the toilet tank?
But don't worry, I threw them
in the woods
with you anyway.

You had it coming. Everyone told you so.
The rifle on the counter, the hammer in the closet,
split lips and bruised skin
I'm sick of wearing scarfs in the summer.
They won't find you,
not for a while.
But when they do
my name will only be a whisper on the wind.
Long gone
across the desert.
You never knew me anyway.

Effervescent

Alexsa Gonzalez



Come Back To It

Courtney Abbe

It comes out of nowhere;
The Voice.
Blaming me for what never happened.

I wash my hands clean of it, I think.
The Voice
is still there; a speck on my hand.

I think I turned the closet light off.
The Voice
says I didn't.

Look again or burn.
On, off, on, off, on, off.

*Remember that one time,
when the world fell apart because of you?*

I think, I wash my hands clean
Come back to it.

On, off, on, off, on, off.

Broken

Hannah Kennedy

My parents had been murmuring in the dining room, the only room downstairs where there wasn't one of their three girls. Tess, the oldest, and Erin, the baby, sat together in the living room staring at the small TV and not fighting for once. I figured my parents were talking about our cat. We all knew she would die soon, she was old, and they were just trying to find the right way to tell us.

My grandma had taught us all how to cross stitch earlier that week. She sat us all in a row and said that she was already making her clothes when she was our age, so we needed to start to learn the ways of a needle and thread. I was trying to finish a little yellow duck wearing headphones to impress her when we saw her later that week when my mom came in and asked me to follow her into the living room.

My sisters had made nests of blankets and pillows on the worn green couches, the only ones I had known up to that point in my life. They were watching TV, something loud and colorful on Disney Channel, and grumbled a few complaints to my dad when he turned off their show and pushed their legs over to make room for everyone to sit.

"I know," I mumbled quietly. I sniffed as loud and dramatically as I could.

My mom gave me a questioning look but got over it quickly and finished settling herself on the couch. I looked at the cat lying so peacefully in the corner of the room on her little cat bed. My mom followed my glance to the ball of thin, grey fur poking out from the sharp bones and aching joints and said, "Jingles is going to die any day now." She said it as a matter of fact, which would have been upsetting if we didn't know that this was how my mom usually talked. Then she added, "Oh, and your father and I are going to separate."

I had never had the wind knocked out of me, but I figured it felt a lot like how I felt at that moment. I was too shocked to cry

at first. Too shocked to even remember to breathe. Erin instantly started to sob, and I could see a trail of silent tears coming down the cheeks of my older sister who had always been the brave one.

My dad looked at the floor, at the ceiling, at the black TV, and anywhere but at us. He rubbed his hands back and forth on the white, worn knees of his jeans, the ones that he wore when he mowed the lawn or repainted the bathroom. “Um,” he started slowly, clearing his throat, “we think that this will be better for our family in the long run. Won’t it be better having two parents that are genuinely happy and who aren’t fighting anymore?”

“I never knew you were fighting.” I was the first of us to talk, finally able to catch my breath but still void of any tears. “I never knew there was a problem.”

“I knew,” Tess said quietly, face half-hidden behind the nest of blankets she had barricaded herself under. “All this summer, I would hear you get home from work late at night, and when I would get up in the morning, you were down here sleeping on the couch.”

“Oh,” my dad seemed surprised that she had noticed this. “Yeah, we had been talking about it then. We were just waiting for the perfect time.”

“It’s October,” I said quietly. “You have been thinking about this since summer and just decided to tell us now?”

“Well, we didn’t want to worry you, I guess. We wanted to be – we wanted to make sure it was what we really wanted to do,” my mom said as she grabbed my hand and gave it a little squeeze.

“So, I got an apartment that my friend is renting. Remember the second-grade teacher a few doors down from my classroom? Well, that doesn’t matter. I am just renting it from her boyfriend. I moved some of my stuff out last week. So..yeah,” my dad trailed off and continued to stare at the floor.

“Well, we wanted to let you know now that we are starting the process. We can talk more about it tomorrow if you want, but I think we all should get to bed,” my mom said as she dropped my hand and left, going towards the kitchen. My dad left the opposite way, walking up the stairs two at a time and closing his bedroom door behind him.

My sisters and I sat in silence for a few more minutes, not looking at each other but glad that we were together. Slowly we got ourselves up with giant, lung-rattling sighs and started getting ready for bed.

The next day my eyes were red and puffy from the tears that had soaked my pillows all night long. I pulled myself out of my bed to the sound of my alarm. I got dressed slowly, then made my way down the stairs, not knowing what to expect.

But everything was the same. My mom was watching the news in her fluffy robe. My younger sister was curled up next to her with a plate of toast. I heard the water running through the pipes in the kitchen walls, confirming that my dad was in the shower. He was still there, and for one more morning, everything was the same.

“How are you feeling?” My mom looked at me with concern when she saw me come around the corner from the stairs. “I told your sisters that you didn’t have to go to school today if you feel like you didn’t get enough sleep.”

“No, that’s okay,” I avoided eye contact with her while I made myself a small bowl of cereal that I knew was probably just going to find its way into the garbage disposal. “I have play practice after school anyway, so I kinda have to go.”

“Okay, that’s good. Make sure you are ready on time then. I can’t be late again. I have to see a few patients this morning.”

“Sounds good,” I answered, going back upstairs to finish getting ready. I stood at the top of the stairs and closed my eyes, letting the smells and the sounds of the morning sink in. I wanted to remember this moment, and this exact feeling of drowsiness in the early morning fog, because I knew it wouldn’t be the same again.

“Is everyone looking at me? I feel like everyone is looking at me.”

“No one is looking at you.” My best friend since fourth

grade shoved the rest of her sandwich in her mouth before consoling me again. “And before you ask me again, no. No one is looking at you.”

“They can tell. I know they can tell.”

“Why do you care? Your parents are just getting divorced. It’s not like they killed someone. Or like they are in the mob. Yeah, see? It’s better than them being in the mob.”

“I know, but...” I trailed off, letting the loud hum from the lunchroom drown me out. I thought about all my friends who had divorced parents. Even the one next to me, the only one I had told that my parents were separating, had divorced parents. I hated to admit it, but I had always seen them differently. I thought for so long that my family was so superior to all of the split families whose kids were in my classes.

Since elementary school, I remember thinking that I needed to hang out with more people like me, like my family. Parents that were not divorced and who had good, stable jobs. But I wasn’t a part of one of those nice, neat little families anymore. There was no need for me to search out perfect little daughters from perfect little families because I had become someone that I had always looked down upon.

“My parents are divorced, and I literally couldn’t be happier.” She ripped open a bag of chips and started to pop them into her mouth one at a time. In between chips, she said, “You get two birthdays, two Christmases, two Thanksgivings...yum. Oh, and you’ll have two bedrooms. You have so much junk and like a hundred books, definitely enough to spread between two bedrooms, so you’ll be fine.”

“Yeah, okay, I guess,” I said, unconvinced. The bell rang, and we both got up to head to our next class.

“Don’t worry about it. It will all work out eventually,” she finished right before dumping the rest of the chips into her mouth.

Everything felt so much less colorful. I would look up at the posters plastered to the front of my earth science teacher’s desk, and instead of getting distracted by the bright blues and loud reds that made up the text and pictures, it felt like they were layered with fog. Everything was so much duller. Almost like I had

dropped my glasses in the dust and didn't wipe them off before looking through them again.

I floated through the rest of my classes. Luckily, there were not that many more that I had to endure after lunch. The bell rang after my last class, and everyone rushed out of the door, on their way to sports practices or going home to their families. I had about fifteen minutes before play practice started. I sat in the bathroom, slumped behind the stall door. Only there did I let a tear come out of the corner of my eye and drag down my cheeks, relieving the pressure that had been built up all day. Then I sucked in a mouthful of air, blew it out, and prepared myself for the loud and crazy couple of hours that I would have to suffer through before returning home.

Sitting on the steps in front of the middle school, I watched the sun dip below the tree line and watched shadows become longer and darker. It was pouring, typical October weather, which is why I didn't walk the mile to my house. I looked at my phone screen. No calls. I tried my mom again. My dad. Again. And finally, my sister, where I left a voicemail, "Okay, so clearly no one remembered I had to be picked up after practice. Just find one of them and tell them to come to get me. It's raining, cold, and really, really dark. Like the streetlights are on dark. Bye."

I pulled my legs closer to my body and cursed myself for not bringing a coat. The doors behind me creaked open, and I looked over my shoulder.

"Oh, you're still here?" It was the musical director leaving for the night. "Practice ended. Like over an hour ago."

"Yeah, I'm just waiting for my ride."

"Well...do you want me to wait with you?" I could hear the struggle in his voice as he said this, glancing at both his watch and the only car that was left in the parking lot.

"No, that's okay. Someone should be here soon. And if not, I can walk."

"Okay. See you at practice tomorrow." I could see the relief on his face as he walked as fast as he could to his car.

I looked at my phone again. Nothing. I slammed it closed and pushed it deep in the bottom of my bag, preparing for the cold, wet walk. Just as I stepped down off the step, I saw my mom swing the car quickly into the parking lot.

“Sorry! I’m so sorry!” She threw the door open from the inside, and I ran through the rain and right into the passenger seat.

“Thanks for answering my phone calls, and where is Dad – why does it smell like pee in here? Oh my god, that reeks! Put the window down!”

My mom was quiet for the quick drive to the house. Once we pulled into the driveway and put the car in park, she looked over at me. “Jingles died. She passed in her bed,” she pointed to the source of the cat pee smell in the back seat. “I had to bring her to the vet. That’s why I was late. And sorry about the missed phone calls, I was just, um, busy...at the vet.” She started crying then, and I could see that the new tears were following a trail of previous tears that had already dried on her cheeks and had left behind a trail of salt on dry skin.

“It’s okay,” I squeezed out through a tight throat that was swelling with the warning of tears. I had never seen my mom cry before. Never. And it was scaring me a little.

“It just, ugh! Today!” She pushed her curls out of her face the way I had seen her do it for all twelve years of my life. “Your father moved into his new apartment today...”

“Already? God, that was so...fast.” I let my tears flow freely, soaking my hands that I had pressed against my cheeks to keep my head up. We sat inside the car in silence for a few minutes. I watched the rain connect and make patterns on the windows as it fell around us.

“What are we going to do, Mom?” I couldn’t look at her when I finally started to talk again. “How are we going to do this without him? I mean, this was the first day, and everything crashed apart around us! Shattered! How are we going to just move on?”

She spoke in a tone that made me look at her, “We’re not broken. We’re just cracked. But you can fix cracks and someday,

we, the four of us, will be fixed, even without your dad. It'll just take some time to figure it out. We will have to find the right ways to glue up that crack, and it might take a few days, a few weeks, or a few months. But we have each other. You have your sisters. And none of us are doing this alone. We are not broken."

I sniffled and tried to smile. "I guess. I think we should start by making a gravestone for Jingles. We can put it out in that small field behind the shed. We could say something like, 'Here lies Jingles Snoggles Rosenberger Ott Kennedy, the bestest kitten with the softest fur and the kindest heart.' Something cheesy and cute like that."

"Good idea. Now let's go inside and get warm. I was thinking of ordering Chinese, your sisters are probably starving, and I am not in the mood to cook. Oh, and I'm going to go to the shelter this weekend. I went last weekend and saw the cutest little grey kitten. We could call him Brodie. Something to keep us distracted, you know?"

The house had an empty feeling that it had never had before when I walked in. Even though my sisters were sitting on the couches watching TV, I swear the walls were absorbing the sound. My dad wasn't bustling around the kitchen making dinner or the famous soup that made him so proud and happy to make. I knew that this quiet house was something that I would have to get used to, and something that hopefully the four of us could fix.

December 14th

Miranda Phillips

“Be free,” they said,
but they didn’t take the chains off my feet.

“Be fearless,” they said,
but they warned me not to leave.

“Be fifteen again,” they said,
but mounded atop me grim realities.

So tonight the truck is packed: blankets,
water, an extra can of gas.
Wad of cash. Dog smiling in the back.

There’s a note on the counter
and a phone switched off in my backpack.
No need for that when I have a good old fashioned map.

Shift gears. Ease down the lane.
Ten thousand stars light our path
until the tires ba-lumph onto asphalt.

Crawl past the house, then the neighbor’s
before switching the headlights on.
Window down. Crisp dark silence fills the cab.

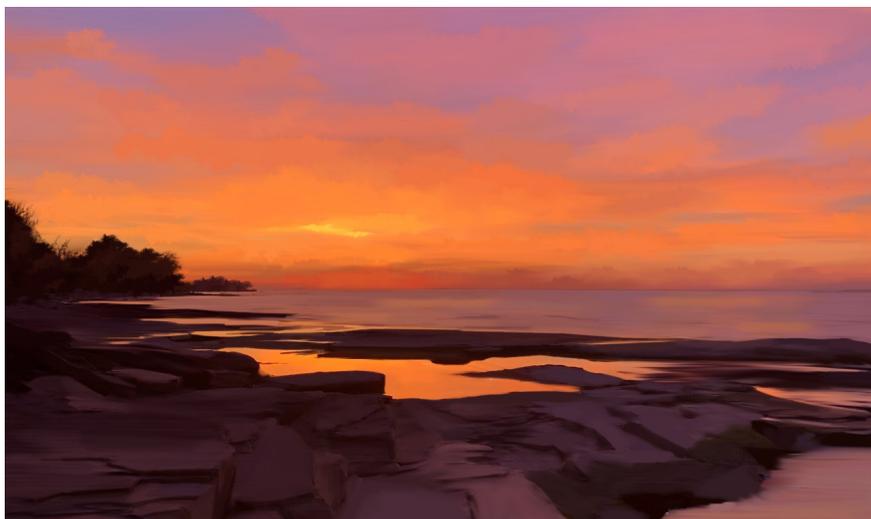
Take a breath. Turn up KALEO.

“Be free,” they said.
So I take the highway west.

“Be fearless,” they said.
So I drive through dozens of daybreaks.
“Be fifteen again,” they said.
So I follow moose into the mountains.

Lake Ontario

Maggie DeJohn



Variations on a Form

Eliana Horning

Lately, I've been dreaming of us
as different iterations of relationships
I've never had:

codependent middle-school lovers,
a high school couple doomed, always fighting, but
somehow magnetized to stay together.
Once, we were Bonnie and Clyde, partners in some
vague, unknown crime
that I woke up glad we didn't pull off.

Each time I wake up
at 4am, dazed and reaching
for you, hundreds of miles away.

I wonder if you feel the same,
wonder if you wake, mouth dry,
thinking of vignettes of us, different versions of us:

picturesque in Paris
or perhaps walking a dog in some quiet suburb.
A doomed pair in some cheap horror movie,
desperately clutching at each other with shaking hands
as the instrument of our doom draws ever closer.

I find myself wishing I would just
dream of us as we are;
two people who fell into each other
and remain fallen, two years later.

Athena

Natalie Archibee



Day and Night

Ryan Figueroa

EXT. SKY - DAY

SUN moves through the sky, looking down towards the Earth.
MOON moves alongside her, with some reluctance.

SUN

It looks beautiful out today, does
it not my love?

MOON

I guess. It's whatever.

Moon looks away and stares into the clouds. Sun notices and tries
to gain his attention.

SUN

Honey, look down at the Earth. Look
at how we shine onto it, we are so
bright and blinding.

MOON

You're the bright and shiny one.
I'm just a reflection of you.

SUN

How so?

MOON

You know how you shine so bright?
Yeah, well your light just kind of goes
onto me and I reflect it off. Then it
looks like I'm shining.

Sun looks at Moon in shock.

SUN

How could you say that? You shine
beautifully and so bright on your own.

They call it moonlight for a reason.
Your light delivers a
luminescent glow that cascades
across the sky in a precious
silvery color-

MOON

But it's not my light. It's yours.
I look like I'm bright but I'm just
a huge rock.

SUN

Honey, you are so much more
spectacular than that. When will
you begin to realize that you're a
force to be reckoned with. You
maintain power over the water tides
on the Earth as well as control the
wind and climate. You simply must
believe in your power.

MOON

How can I believe in something that
just doesn't exist.

Moon begins to move away, headed towards his resting place in
the clouds. Sun stops him before he gets any further.

SUN

Darling, I worry for you. Why must
you constantly be so gloomy?

MOON

Why worry, I'm the Moon. It's
literally what I do. I exist in this
darkness and you're the only source of
light.

SUN

I wish that you would see yourself as I
see you: someone of immense beauty

and power.

MOON

Too bad I don't have any of that.

SUN

Stop it! I would like you to stop that immediately. I hate to hear you talk this way. I hate that you feel like this.

MOON

Well you're...

Moon stops and thinks about if he should admit to Sun how he is feeling.

SUN

Well I am what?

MOON

Nothing, forget it.

SUN

No, go on. Finish what you were going to say.

Moon struggles to make out what he wants to say to Sun.

MOON

You're... You're the reason I feel like this.

SUN

What? Whatever do you mean, my love?

MOON

You just... constantly overshadow me and I can't even shine on my own. I need you. What is that!

SUN

Honey-

MOON

No, stop with all the “honey’s” and
“baby’s” and “darling’s.” I’m sick of it.
I don’t feel like your
partner, I feel like your lesser.
Like I’m not worth as much.

Moon moves further away from Sun and starts to become darker as he moves away. Sun moves closer to Moon, making him shine brighter, and attempts to console him.

SUN

But you are bab- Moon. You are
worth everything and more.

Moon looks up from the clouds underneath him and lets out a deep breath.

MOON

I need some time... for myself. If
I keep living in your shadow, I’ll
never make my own light.

SUN

What are... What are you saying my
sweet Moon? Do you wish for us to
part ways?

MOON

Yes. I think we need to breakup. I
think I love you but can I really if I
haven’t figured out how to love me
as I am... I know you’re gonna try to
fight me on this, but-

SUN

It’s okay, I understand.

Moon turns around and looks at Sun with a surprised face.

MOON

You do?

Sun holds Moon close and smiles at him.

SUN

Yes indeed, I do. I love you deeply and part of that love requires me to let go if necessary. You can reside in the night as I inhabit the day. That way you may have your space to grow on your own.

MOON

I don't know what to say-

SUN

You do not have to say anything.

Moon and Sun hug.

MOON

Thank you... my love.

SUN

You are very welcome my sweet Moon.

Moon heads off into the dark side of the sky as Sun stays in the lighter side. Sun sheds a tear, but smiles and Moon smiles after noticing a dim light come from his body.

Cucina

Alison Hibbert



Lightning

Marlana Williams

Music blaring in a darkened room, a flash of white periodically bursting into space, personal lightning enhanced by the body heat that we all are wrapped in. There is never a moment of silence in this room, murmurs from the crowd of students, laughter sounding like bells and booming thunder echo out between songs. I stand off to the side, drink in hand, as the crowd convenes closer. The beat drops yet again as the bass reverberates through my chest. I don't know what I'm doing here, or why I thought coming was a good idea. Parties have never been my scene. I sway silently, the only thing in the entire house not making a sound. The liquid in my cup moves with me, lapping up the edges and trying to make its grand escape.

A hand touches my shoulder and I am met with a smile more bright than the strobe lights, more dangerous than lightning. She offers me a hand and tells me to dance with her, an offer I would never refuse.

Forward

Michael J. Darling



Scuffmark Souvenirs

Libby Morel

There are footprints on my back, yours,
I'm sure. Just above where my hands can't
reach, doesn't stop me from breaking my
fingers trying. I don't remember when you
did it, crushed my spine under steel-toed boots.
I can't tell if I wish the same on you, bruised
and broken skin, carbon copies of my wounds.

In my defense, I did try to wash them
away. Scrubbed for hours, scraped, tugged,
scratched. I let my skin turn raw under
scorching water, red welts writing allegories
into broken skin. I dunked my head under the
surface long enough to let it boil the blood
sitting stagnant in my veins. Felt my thoughts
melt into lava, pour out of my ears and run down
my neck. Felt myself start to choke on the steam
rising from charred skin, a blackened buildup of
chain reactions and failed attempts at moving on.
I spent years letting my insides turn sour and
rotten, sitting on piles of pages covered in prose,
telling stories of what I'd love to do to you. I think I'll
publish them one day. Put your name on the front cover,
call it a catastrophic collaboration and watch the footprints grow
darker each time a copy sells.

There are footprints on my back, size eleven,
yours. At the end of the day, I tell them
goodnight, tomorrow's another chance to sit on the
remnants of my broken mind, taped together haphazardly, de-
stroyed by the words of someone who couldn't
look me in the eye when I reminded him of stories
he'd let grow old and forgotten.

Bloodlust

Mattie Wallace

FROM THE BLACKNESS WE HEAR A CAR DOOR SLAM.

FADE IN:

EXT. SMALL TOWN HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

A sleek black car sits at the edge of a driveway leading up to a worn blue house. A low rumble erupts from up above as storm clouds roll in.

INT. BLACK CAR - DAY

From within the confines of the car, a teenage boy and girl sit in the driver's and passenger's seat respectively.

DYLAN CHASER (17), Who appears to be a young man, stares blankly at the house in front of him. There's nothing nor nobody insight to entertain him, yet he seems fixated on anything but his passenger.

His silky blond hair remains pulled back behind his ears; his pale skin a stark contrast to the dark interior of the car.

HEAVY PANTING is coming from the seat next to him, but still his crimson eyes never waver.

The teenage girl beside him tries to catch her breath as she fidgets in her seat. Her long black hair is skewed every which way, and her hands are shaking nonstop.

GEORGIE MORGAN (17) glances over at Dylan and searches his face. Her brown eyes soften.

Dylan stiffens but doesn't look back at her.

Before Georgie can open her mouth to speak, a calm voice fills the air.

DYLAN

I don't want to be with you.

Georgie flinches at those words. She immediately shuts her mouth and looks away.

GEORGIE

You're lying.

DYLAN

I'm not.

GEORGIE

You are!

DYLAN

And why would I do such a thing?

Georgie narrows her eyes at him and clenches her jaw.

GEORGIE

Because you're a fucking coward
that's why!

Dylan jerks his head to meet Georgie's heated stare.

DYLAN

We cannot be together.

He leans his face closer to hers, his stare never wavering.

The sky takes on a darker hue as the PITTER PATTERN of raindrops start to hit the car.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

I'm a vampire Georgie. An apex predator. I can't stop thinking about how easy it would be for me to sink my teeth into your flesh and drink every last ounce of your blood.

GEORGIE

(stutters)

You won't hurt me.

DYLAN

And how can you know that?

He brings one of his hands up and rests it on her neck. On his wrists are the initials G.M. inked in black. It's his soulmate mark.

GEORGIE

Because of this.

Her pointer finger delicately traces the soulmark on his wrist. The initials D.C. peek out from under her sweater.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)

We're meant to be together Dylan.
And even if it weren't for some fated
soulmate crap, I would still love you,
still trust you.

DYLAN

You shouldn't though. Fate damned
you the moment those letters showed
up on your skin.

GEORGIE

I know what you're doing Dylan and
it's not going to work. You can't push
me away.

Dylan sighs and trails his gaze down to her neck. He watches as she gulps.

DYLAN

I love you Georgie, more than I've
ever loved anybody in my entire 275
years of existing. That's why I have to
do this.

GEORGIE

Please. I can't... I can't live
without you.

Tears glisten in Georgie's eyes. She takes in a shallow breath as lightning strikes the forest surrounding the neighborhood.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)

I know you think you're doing

what's best for me, but that's my
decision to make, not yours!

DYLAN

Georgie... I would never be able to live
with myself if I ever-

GEORGIE

You won't!

DYLAN

But I will. I'm hurting you right
now.

GEORGIE

Don't do this. Please.

DYLAN

This is how it has to be. I need
you to be safe.

Dylan cradles Georgie's face in his hand. She closes her eyes and
leans into his touch.

GEORGIE

(whispers)

I love you.

He places a lingering kiss on her forehead before pulling
away. He's staring out the window again, rubbing his thumb over
his soulmark.

Rain is now coming down in sheets. The storm clouds seem to
loom specifically over Dylan's car.

Georgie shuts her eyes tightly, letting the tears stream
freely down her face.

She takes one last look at her soulmate before scrambling out of the
car and running towards the front door of the house.

Newport, RI, 2007

Xander Deacons

Forty steps down, my grandfather
carries the vial which holds
his wife of 40+ years.
We are a tearful army, descending
upon the water-beaten stone,
tossing roses like javelins into the sea.
He opens the vessel, letting my grandmother loose.
She spreads across the Atlantic
as the tide on my mother's face begins its flow.

Flowers For You

Diana MacMorris



1 cup sugar, 1 cup water, juice of 5 lemons

Libby Morel

I built myself a home in the clouds,
all white brick and french doors. an
oak tree to sit beneath, back against
a sturdy trunk until the sun fell behind
the house. gave myself a garden to
plant peonies and mums. to dirty my knees
and prick my fingertips on rose bushes.

I called it home for a day, spent a few
hours in the kitchen squeezing lemons to
make lemonade and adding sugar to
clear the bitterness. painted the walls bright
yellow and called it a happy place. crammed
bookshelves with the classics until salinger
and poe caused the wood to bend.

and then the sun stopped coming up over
the mountains in the distance, and the
lemons stopped growing on the trees out
back. the peonies turned dry until their
petals littered the dirt. and when the rain
took over and the windows wouldn't shut,
I ran for my life.

I found cover in the dark, six feet under the
mums. built myself a hole in the ground,
shrunk to the size of a beetle, dug my way
through dirt and pebble and bone until my
lungs were filled to the brim with it all. I choked
on an explanation, felt blood fill my brain from
unanswered questions.

but I grew comfortable down here, with dirt
encrusted teeth and cobwebs in my ribcage.
I've grown used to the feeling of cold hands
and tired words, a sore throat from coughing up
memories I'd tried to swallow whole. you learn
to forget what the sun looks like and the taste
of lemonade.

1.800.799, 02.28

Jade Giuga

I can't do this any longer

three knocks and it's a masquerade
- you'd think I'd be the one to weep

mama's voice cracking like a code,
I nestle her and transfer to her
the mililiter of faith I have left.

her untainted fingertips caress the
expensive, lengthy ivory dress beside me
"I just think you're making a mistake,"
mama says as she rotates the rose gold
on my ring finger.

I watch teardrops race to the neckline
of her blouse
as the gears in my brain begin to grind
so intensely,
I could ignite a California wildfire

I envy the ease with which she exposes her emotions,
for if I do that,

I could never end up at another masquerade with you

and mama would never be able to
absolve herself from this moment,
so

I'll accept your mistakes as my own
and dress myself in them tonight
along with my gown
to the masquerade with you.

I can do this a little longer

Do You Know Who You Are

Natalie Archibee



Hometown

Xander Deacons

What salt is so coarse
that it digs so deeply
and scrapes so roughly
into this city's wounds?

This salt seasons nothing;
it doesn't make a dent in
the thick sheets of ice
many winters have laid on these streets.

In this town every word
has an unmistakably saline stench;
everyone has scars from where the grains
have eroded the skin between their toes.

I don't know what this salt is,
where it came from, or how it got here,
but I know it must've been here
for many years;

I've seen people many years older than me
drinking gallons of salty water
like it was nothing,
smiling even as their insides were drying out.

Untitled Disassociation

Cameron Drummond

Pores secrete an unfamiliar liquid into my open lap.
Wherever I was before fades, hazes before my very eyes.
Structures are incoherent while the form I once knew dissipates through my body.
The air has become a tangible sponge that molds to my hands.
I am still on the ground, simultaneously falling repeatedly over my feet.

Singularity of oneself is fickle, I smell it's departure by the scent of the death cap.

While traversing to a new time and space there is a powerful dysphoria.
The chemicals shifting my brain into a new realm fuel my anxiety.
Concepts of my kind, mess with my mind, as my happiness declines.
The working machine isn't supposed to stop that which perpetuates madness.
I reach out to feel what I no longer can, as the new reality shapes my fragile state.

When one's grip begins to slip, a slow boil of the senses reaches euphoria.

To say *life is pain* would give too much credence to existence.
Marching this way and that scathed the soles on the boots of the proletariat.
Bathing the toxic grime off everyday just to feel clean in an unwashed society.
My distractions birthed more serotonin than the tireless work of the propaganda.
I watch myself from beyond the veil as I demolish my remaining epistemology.

Within one person lies the ability to reconstruct my tolerance for persistence.

Our bodies are just a meta hierarchy of trillions of cells.
Who am I to deny their own revolution?
I don't deserve structure.
It feels cold here.
All alone.

Golden

Alexandra Farrell



Blinding Daylight of Recovery

Allyson Voerg

The light suffocated me,
diamonds dropping down
straight through my hands,
brushing against my bones,
fractals of light leaving
fractures of life behind.

Corroded calcium and splintering sinew
are traded for metal, forged to flesh,
burning up thought patterns and
building boundaries, luring me to
distant salvation, shimmering
illusions inverted as I die of thirst.

Ultraviolet rays are replaced by
violent rays of sunlight,
my blood bleached until
my reflection shines back,
fragments refracted
against my fingers.

White-hot bright light
curving around my throat
that I see from my wide
eyes, pried open by the
tendrils twisting in my
sockets, sneaking behind them.

They curl them around so they
rest, backs turned to the sun
high in the sky, so I may
sink into the soft darkness,
the familiar, in which
I am able to see and breathe.

We Built a Home

Remmington Johnson

We will build a house
and fill it with our things.

Foundation made of earth,
walls made all of trees.
Clouds our only ceiling
(silver moon and stars).
Gushing rivers be a hearth,
winds our only light.
Pillows made from softest grass,
so we can be our own.

Eyes will be our windows.
Arms our only warmth.
Voice will be our music,
whispering our names.

We will build a house
and fill it with our things.

Yesterday a banquet,
doors our only future.
Keys we find inside
(gentle breath and touch).
Desire be our stairs,
laughter for our bed.
Our sighs will be a garden,

but we will be our own.

WE'RE NICE PEOPLE