

GREAT LAKE REVIEW

FALL 2021



GREAT LAKE REVIEW

SUNY OSWEGO'S LITERARY MAGAZINE

FALL 2021

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RESTORATION

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SUNY Oswego's Literary Magazine

FALL 2021

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We're nice people!

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Ghost

Hailey Tredo



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.

THANKYOU RIVER'S END!

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Caitlin Marx

Daydream



POETRY

This Old House at the end of the world

Kacie McKeever

Somewhere when the sirens go off
we'll be lying in our bed
in This Old House
where the floorboards still creak
and the window we swore we would fix
still has cracks in it.

A haunted house,
an old ghost story,
in the middle of the lightshow
We walked to the kitchen
to make breakfast.

In This Old House
we never fixed the stove
so everytime we make eggs.
we might burst into flames
(It doesn't matter now)

You say to me
"God, what's that smell?"
Mice droppings and mildew,
we sit in silence
listening to the birds outside
mixed with the screams of the damned.

We could've done something.
Spent a day scrubbing the living room
floor, or rebuilding the framework.
We could've done something
to change our situation
and yet,
and yet.

When they find our ashes
thousands of years later
all we can do is pray
that they choose to fix the window
in This Old House.

Carey

Evan Youngs

Stumbling from the star-infested night, cursing the restaurant smell, unsteady legs and uneasy mind, I make my way to my car and before my hand can reach the car door, I am bothered once more by a single long honk.

What the hell does Nichole want now? No, I didn't have a good day at work, as if I ever had this season. Why did I come back? I now perpetually have a swarm of flies to swat due to the smell of fish and fryer emanating from my car. My work shirt is stained with bleach. My fingers are bloody from handling silverware. My skin is burnt from the scorching heat of pans and plates. And it's muddy. I'm not in the mood to hear about your boyfriend, or your annoying sister, or the tattoo you want to get. I just want to go home.

The honk is followed by a "hey!", and it isn't Nichole. It's Carey. Carey is a waitress like Nichole, though Nichole always clarifies that she herself is a server. In theme with the "tropical beachside" schtick¹ going on, waitresses wear Hawaiian shirts; bright button ups with palm trees or something. It's cheesy, it's camp. Carey is maybe a thirty- or early-forty-something. Her hair is straight and black to the point of something blue. I've never seen her smoke but I can tell that she does. She is in the car parked next to me, about two spaces away (though the spaces aren't marked, just grass). She's waving her hand from the driver seat, the window down. "Over here!" Most of my conversations with Carey so far have been at the bus station, that is, the station where bussers and servers scrape food off plates into the garbage then place them into the two fragile plastic bus bins. It's usually something along the lines of "How was your day" (of which the pace of the dinner rush requires the answer to be "pretty good, how about you?" but in a jumbled way like "pre-y guh, hahbahtyoo") or "Mrs Brown is trying to kill me." Nobody likes working here.

I slowly walk over to her car. The grass is moist, so when you walk on it there's a crunchy sound. Her car stereo is playing abrasive electropop.

"Sorry," she says, "I'll turn down my Taylor Swift music." It was blasting. "I just wanted to say thank you for talking to me this year. You're a

¹ Complete with cultural appropriation of indigenous people, and a confusion over whether this is supposed to be Polynesia or the Caribbean.

NON-FICTION

really great worker and if you ever need someone to talk to just find me or Nichole.”

She is drunk.

See, this season compared to the previous season of working there, I’ve been a lot more open to my coworkers.

The kitchen staff is not as intimidating anymore. I know most of everyone’s names. Recently Vicky has started using the word “rockstar” to dub me² before she leaves every night.

I don’t know how to handle these compliments. Every night I feel like I am behind. I remind myself of the stuff I should’ve memorized by now. My fingerprints are gone because of the number of times I’ve burned my hands touching pan handles and freshly machine-washed plates out of the necessity to be fast, which in the world of customer service is equivalent to good.

“Uh.” What do you even say to that? “Thanks.” I will probably never consult Carey for help. This is a restaurant and I am a dishwasher. If I need help I can ask Justin, who I’m right next to every day. Besides, she’s probably very busy herself, given how dedicated Mrs. Brown is to making sure the waitstaff is so connected to the Sylvan Beach tourist community³ that in the name of efficiency an individual server will wait five tables at once.

I apologize to her, since by this time I had not known her name. “Carey,” she says, and she pulls up her sleeve to expose an intricate tattoo of her own name on her forearm. “It’s like a permanent name tag, so if you ever forget, you can just look right here.” The tattoo is unclear, but I can make out flames and a reptilian vibe.

“It’s just, you seem like such a quiet person, and I just want to get to know you better.” She is *definitely* drunk. The one thing you don’t do as a middle-aged woman is to tell a young future homosexual that you want to

²This newfound ego went to my head. I’d tell my coworker, Nichole’s annoying sister, “If I was a rockstar I’d be Stevie Nicks. If you were a rockstar you’d be ...” I look her up and down, embracing the camp of it all - “Brendon Urie.” I hate him and she knows it.

³ Every spring a horde of white upper middle class cottage-owners flock to the beach as it recovers from the chill, and gradually as the demographic changes so does the attitude. As I catch a glimpse of a table of elderly fedoras and “I’m His/Hers” t-shirts, I see unrelatable smiles. As I enter the women’s bathroom to clean the shit off the bowl with a paper towel and Windex (don’t ask), I hear a grinning brunette in Pit Vipers tell me to not worry and that she can wait. But after I’m done, an exhausted waitress walks in, moist eyes and stained shirt, and she bawls her eyes into the orange-scented stall. “She’s trying to kill me,” she says. “These people are fucking assholes and I just can’t fucking stand it anymore.”

NON-FICTION

get to know them better.

“Wait! Don’t back up! I won’t hurt you!”

I’m starting to realize the implications behind her being intoxicated in the driver’s seat, and me being the last person to talk to her. I look around: there’s nobody else around except a few cars belonging to the chef and my bosses, who live on the second floor.

Hiccup. “I’m sorry that I’m drunk.” She was holding a bottle that Mr Brown probably gave as a “sorry for the dinner rush” bonus.

Carey and the chef were in a relationship. Were they married? Perpetually engaged? Divorced but not over it? *Affair?* Hell if I knew. I kept my distance from drama traded between the kitchen staff on the line⁴. Maybe that’s why she’s here. Eventually, on the last day of the season, she will leave him and take all her stuff for what I believe is the last time. That same night me and her would hug, her thinking it will be till March that we meet again, and me knowing I plan on never returning.

“I had to fight Mike because of how he treats you.” She takes another swing of the bottle. A flower from her hair band falls off. It’s not part of her uniform. Mike’s a waiter here⁵ who’s very... urban. He has a Brooklyn accent and a build that isn’t immediately obvious but gets intimidating after a while. He is completely bald, has a neck tattoo, and wears a single earring (the kind that tough villains wore in crime shows, not in a fruity way). Like Carey, he always tries to talk to me on the job.

A typical Mike encounter: I walk past him by the bus station. “Hey Evan, what do you say?” I know what he wants me to say but I don’t want to say it. Me: “Excuse me?” Mike: “You say, Mike get the fuck out of my way. Say it.” He emphasizes “fuck.” This is a family restaurant⁶.

Carey fought him over this? I found Mike mildly annoying but not a bully.

“I know you probably have -” hiccup “- really bad social anxiety so I’m sorry if this is really awkward for you”.

“Um,” I look down at her tire, because I don’t like looking at people’s eyes. “Not really.”

Irony. She looks blankly. “You remind me a lot of my son. Do you play

⁴Mostly drug abuse and misogyny, though the height of the gossip had to be when, somehow, a used pad made it into someone’s to-go bag.

⁵ Who will eventually quit, return for a day, and that night ask Nichole for a ride home only to steal her tips and never come back. And I called it!

⁶ Another Mike-ism: “Hey it’s my man Evan!” He turns to a waitress, “Lost his virginity at five!”

NON-FICTION

any video games?”

I shake my head.

I tell her I collect vinyl and CDs. Apparently her father had a big wooden chest full of vinyl and cassettes.

“What kind of music do you listen to? Wait! Here, type it in,” She takes her phone out of her cup holder and hands it to me through the window. “Put in the song that’s been in your head all day.”

Her Spotify has the song she paused. I type in my own recommendation: it’s a light acoustic ballad. I listened to it on repeat. The plucking of the warm bass and the shimmering of the glassy synths helped me orient myself. I needed it.

She grins. To her the phone must be a blurry mess, but nevertheless: “I’m gonna be blasting this on my way home!” She really can’t; it’s not a blast-worthy song by any means. I can’t imagine how someone could throw her hands in the air to something as soft as this.

But this is Carey.

As I sit in my car I text all these details to Nichole, who is already at home. I don’t know how to feel. Is this friendship? Camaraderie? Adulthood? The morning after, Carey will tell me she kept playing the song over and over in the car; about every week or so she’ll ask me for another song to put on her playlist, and each time I put something that sounds very different from the previous one. I never wanted to bore her.

Dripping Wet

Kelsey White



Dear Diary

Kate Miller

Dear Diary,

September 24th, 12:52 PM, Friday.

I don't like wine. Why do you drink it then? One might ask. Well, I bought it for a recipe. If I just dumped the rest out it would be wasteful. I offered it to my roommates and they said they would help. They have not. Wine feels like something you drink when you have everything together and you know you have won. I like the idea of wine when I make dinner all fancy with twelve different ingredients and I eat thinking I'm someone important. In my head, those moments are wine moments. They are moments I have won. The reality is they are not, and I still don't like wine. But there is comfort in the idea of bitter grapes with hints of honey and walnut.

Movie Real

Diana MacMorris

INT. MOVIE THEATRE LOBBY - EARLY MONDAY AFTERNOON

The theatre is vintage and very “small town” with an age of more than fifty years. The lobby is dimly lit and warm from the ceiling lights, making fun neon signs on the walls and movie posters in their display cases shine bright.

We see **TED** (14), a young kid thin as a rake, with hair buzzed down to the scalp and freckles speckled across his dark skin. A name tag, pinned to his red vest, reads “Theodore”. His gloved hands wipe down the concession counter with a rag.

From across the lobby, Ted admires a **MAN** and **WOMAN** strolling happily into one of the theatre’s. They’re much older, hands intertwined and smiling with eyes glossed over in love.

Something stings inside Ted, but he plays it off, focusing back onto the already shining counter, his OCD taking flight. He leans in and circles one particular spot with his finger, making the counter squeak. It’s a quiet day at the movies, until...

KAT (17) bursts lazily into the theatre through the front entrance. Her shirt and vest identical to Ted’s, but the bottom half all her own--torn fishnets stockings, and worn out combat boots rush across the patterned carpet.

Kat joins Ted behind the counter, tossing her bag on a table. Ted looks up and takes notice of her unbrushed hair and the mascara smeared under her bloodshot eyes--then a strong stench overcomes him, making him cringe.

TED

What’s that smell?

KAT

Is it the popcorn? All I smell is popcorn.

DRAMA

TED

No...no it's--

(sniffs closer to her)

Agh! Is that weed?

KAT

You know what weed is, I'm shocked.

TED

Are you crazy?

KAT

(proudly)

I'm high, actually.

Kat pulls a lighter out from her bag along with a sealed Ziploc of joints.

TED

(jittering)

No. Put that--put those away.

KAT

You can have 'em. I'm quitting after today so--

TED

I don't want--I don't want any of it. I don't
smoke...anything.

KAT

I think you should, jitterbug.

Kat tosses him the Ziploc and lighter. Ted catches them both, nearly dropping them.

In an instant, Ted hides the stash behind his back, seeing the theatre manager, **CARL** (late 20s), stomp up to the counter with hard eyes. Kat rummages around, grabbing a bag of popcorn kernels, dumping them into the machine.

DRAMA

CARL

(to Kat)

You're late.

KAT

Aw, you can live five minutes without me Carl.

CARL

And what did I say about your uniform?

KAT

Wear it.

CARL

That's not your uniform.

KAT

It's the vest. The vest is all I need to show.

CARL

It doesn't look like the only thing you want to show.

Kat rolls her eyes, masking the hit. Carl sighs and clicks his tongue from his teeth, considering her.

CARL (CONT'D)

Wear the pants, please. Carl turns away to leave.

KAT

I obviously do in this relationship Carl.

CARL

(irritably calling back)

Don't sass me. Get to WORK!

KAT

(to Ted)

He's all over the place isn't he?

DRAMA

TED

(timidly)

I--I guess.

Ted drops the ziploc and lighter down in a compartment of the counter with disgust, then removes his gloves. The popcorn kernels burst inside their glass cage.

All of a sudden, the sight of two girls approaching the counter makes Ted freeze. Before him is the girl of his dreams--**AMY** (16), a kind, colorful spirit with blonde hair dipped in pink highlights and a smile that radiates the sun.

Following her lead is her friend, **MONA** (16), poised with dark eyes and strands of hair tucked inside a backwards baseball cap.

AMY

(whispering to Mona)

You want anything?

Mona shakes her head and stares at her cellphone. Amy turns to Ted and smiles.

AMY (CONT'D)

Can I get a medium, Cherry Coke please?

Ted remains starstruck. Amy's head leans forward with curiosity.

AMY (CONT'D)

(again)

A cherry coke?

TED IS FROZEN. KAT GETS THE SODA FOR AMY INSTEAD.

TED

How umm--

(beat)

That's five-fifty.

Amy pulls out the money from her coin purse. She holds it out for Ted to take, but again, he doesn't move.

DRAMA

Kat returns next to Ted, and the two girls, curious by his sudden inability to work, exchange awkward glances at one another.

Amy finally trades the dollar bills for the soda with Kat.

AMY

Um, thank you.
(to them both)
Have a nice day.

Ted watches Amy leave as she trots away with her soda in hand. Mona giggling by her side. Kat drops the money in the cash register.

KAT

(mocking him)

Smooth.

TED

(waking)

What?

KAT

You're such a cliché. You like her--

TED

SHHHHH!

KAT

(beat)

You know what, I can see it. You should ask her out.

TED

You think so?

KAT

Yeah, I think she's really going to dig the whole paranoid, social anxiety thing you got going on. It's great--

DRAMA

TED

(sighing)

Oh my god--

KAT

A guy with problems now that--that's hot.

TED

(skittish)

You don't know how wrong and disturbing that is
on so many levels--could you just--

Ted brainstorms about what to fill in the blank, then desperately blurts--

TED (CONT'D)

Could you help me? Please.

KAT

(laughing)

Help you?

TED

Yes.

KAT

With what?

TED

Just...

Ted gestures, almost dancing with his eyes widening.

KAT

(getting it)

Oh, you want advice.

TED

Yes, obviously.

DRAMA

KAT

From me? Not one of your other friends I assume you have outside of here.

TED

I don't have any friends.

KAT

(beat)

What does that make me?

TED

You see it all the time in movies, the guy asks his "guy" best friend about dating advice and when he takes it, it backfires and it doesn't work out. It never works out.

KAT

Sure--

TED

You're not a guy, you're a girl.

KAT

I've noticed.

TED

No guy ever asks another girl for advice on girls. And if I asked another guy like you said, that would be--

TED/KAT

Cliche.

They both take a moment and smile tentatively at one another. From a cardboard box buried in the counter, Ted begins to stack more candy into the glass box, aligning each one perfectly in order from chocolates to hard candies. Kat makes herself comfortable, leaning on the counter top.

KAT

I'm gonna be real with you right now... love isn't

DRAMA

all it's cracked up to be, jitterbug. This world's full of shit and people suck, and it's not like how you see it in the movies.

TED

Documentaries are based on real life.

KAT

And most of them we know are about serial killers.

TED

That's not what I--
(beat)

I mean, how else would movies be movies if they didn't come from real life? People? Some movies even reflect the real world if not certain things from it--

KAT

Yeah, and those people who make them want something better than their real life, shitty lives so they create unrealistic expectations of what things actually are. I didn't think you were someone to buy into that crap.

TED

There's nothing wrong with hoping what things could be. Or what they could be like.

Kat takes this in, seeing Ted as she was a few years ago. Hopeful...but naive.

TED (CONT'D)

(peering at the counter)

Besides, I don't think she's like that.

KAT

A serial killer?

DRAMA

TED

No. Like the people you know who apparently suck. She's nice, and smart...

Ted straightens the candy boxes, more than he already has and continues placing more sweets on the glass shelves.

KAT

(beat)

You're not in love with her, are you?

TED

(unsure)

No?

KAT

Oh jeez.

TED

NO.

KAT

Shit. She doesn't even know you. Does she?

TED

She--She could know me--when I talk to her.

KAT

I know you Teddy, and you don't even have it in you to say "Hi". This--This is painful.

TED

(staring at her)

If you asked for my help with anything, I wouldn't be this mean to you.

KAT

I'm sorry, okay? I'm not being mean. I'm just thinking realistically.

(then)

If you do ask her, whenever that is, and she says

DRAMA

“yes”, great. Go for it. And if she says “no”, I wouldn’t take it too hard, okay? Either way, just don’t get your hopes up.

TED

(tensing up)

I don’t even know why I asked you for help. What do you know about--about me? About relationships?

KAT

I know a lot more than you think.

TED

How could you? You’re...

KAT

I’m what, Ted?

Ted’s mouth moves, but no words come out. Kat nods, assuming his answer.

KAT (CONT’D)

A slut?

TED

NO. I wasn’t--

KAT

That’s what everybody else thinks--

TED

I’m not like everybody else, CLEARLY--that’s not what I was going to--

KAT

I get it. “Experienced” is the word, right? That’s why you really asked me.

(beat)

Don’t say I didn’t warn you when she or some other wannabe girlfriend finds out there’s

DRAMA

someone better than you, and you're left alone with nothing but--nothing but yourself.

TED

(cold)

At least I'm trying everyday to get into the world. Looks like all you want to do is ignore it.

KAT

(beat)

You want my advice?

TED

What?

She hesitates...

KAT

(whispering slowly)

Go fuck off.

Kat swipes her bag off the table and grabs a pack of twizzlers, dismantling Ted's candy order, striking him uncomfortably. She jumps over the counter and storms her way upstairs.

TED

Where are you going?

KAT

It's 1:30. I'll probably find some action in theatre seven.

Kat leaves without another word. Ted stands awkwardly alone in the silence of the lobby, biting skin off his bottom lip.

A moment passes, and Ted realigns the packs of shifted candies. Then suddenly, Amy and Mona stroll out of the theatre laughing.

Ted notices they're holding each other's hands--not as friends, but something more. The same look in their eyes as the couple he saw earlier--

DRAMA

the love.

Ted's heart sinks, watching as the two stroll into the bathroom. As he looks down, he spots Kat's lighter and the ziploc filled with joints.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE - THEATRE SEVEN - AFTERNOON

We see Kat sitting in the back aisle, no one in the audience but her. The light from the projection booth beams over her head as she chomps on a twizzler, listening to the audio of explosions and car wheels screeching.

Ted scoots his way down the aisle and pushes the seat down, sitting beside Kat. She tries not to acknowledge him, not until he hands her one of her joints.

KAT

I told you I'm quitting.

Ted takes a twizzler from her pack and with the lighter, lights the end of it. Kat genuinely smiles, as if for the first time today. Her smile then fades as the two stare at the movie screen, watching the action.

KAT (CONT'D)

I'm pregnant.

Slowly, Ted's concerned face turns to Kat, finally entering reality.

An orange light brightens the darkness as an explosion bursts on the screen. Ted removes the twizzler from his mouth, replacing it with the joint. He lights its end.

BLACKOUT

Farmhouse

Alison Hibbert



Arizona

Kate Miller

Sometimes I wish I were still swinging over wood chips, hands
on hot metal until the blisters sting so bad I can't hold on.
Running across fields of cracked, brown grass,
except when you find a park with sprinklers,
then you can't help but cover your clothes with
pickle colored stains.

My time there is an out of focus picture
in a department store frame. It reads,
"Sisters make the best friends", or,
"Family is the greatest gift life has to offer".
And I've never been inclined to agree but it's okay
because the wildlife holds my best days.

I hope the sun remembers watching me laugh
and squint under his harsh rays.
I hope the quails know their song will always be my favorite. And I
will always find comfort in sandstone and redwall the same way
coyotes will always howl to find each other after hunting.

I'm not there anymore, and I haven't been for years.
And sometimes I think I am a liar when I say,
"I'm from Arizona"
because there is no trace of that person left.
So I keep it in the back of my mind,
holding onto the way it felt to exist there.
Forever trying to get it back.

Inferno

Bryce Levac

On the first day after her husband's death, Kathy Miller decided to buy a gun. The kind in question is a Colt Navy Revolver. Its varnished wooden handle makes it feel loose in her hand, encouraging a tighter grip than she'd like but one she is more than willing to accommodate. The barrel seems abnormally long to her as she rubs over its ice-cold steel. Her fingers make their way to the chamber, opening it up and examining the empty cylinders. Each of them is a black hole, begging to be filled, with its sole purpose being to extinguish the flame of another's life. Mrs. Miller tries to imagine what her husband's flame was like in the moments before his death. Was it a bright, resilient blue that defied every attempt to put it out? Or was it a sad, whimpering orange that feebly begged for more air in order to survive as a single shot sealed its fate? She pushes the thought away, deciding to remember the blue flame, as her gaze falls upon her husband's Winchester rifle that now hangs above their bed. He had always used it for the purpose of hunting, an act which Mrs. Miller saw as necessary. What she desired to do now, however, wasn't necessary. No, what she desired was a gun that was separate from necessity and reason, only dealing in pure annihilation. In some way, she believed that if she used that rifle for what she planned next, it'd only contribute to what her husband would consider God's vengeance, and all she sought was her own.

On the second day, Mrs. Miller began practicing with her revolver. The targets being utilized were a mixture of dinner plates, drinking glasses, and an abandoned whiskey bottle from her late husband. She focused on the plates first, since their size provided an easy target as they stood up against the base of the willow tree's trunk. The first five shots miss, kicking up pieces of bark or dirt with each attempt. An impatient rage begins to rise but quickly subsides as her breathing now slows. Five breaths are what she allows herself before aiming once more. A final breath is released along with the sixth shot. The plate shatters, giving Mrs. Miller a slight satisfaction before reloading the gun for the drinking glasses. Three shots ring empty this time before the fourth finally connects. She fires upon the other glass and it too connects to its target. A smile shamefully stretches across her face at this. She considers if the man who shot her husband felt the same satisfaction. The rage fills her again, drawing her attention

FICTION

to the whiskey bottle on the ground. A desire to see its liquid contents splatter forth upon the earth around it is the only feeling or thought she can manage to conceive. Placing it at the base of the tree amongst the other casualties, she prepares herself and the gun in her hand. She shakily fills one of the cylinders, gripping the smooth handle firmer than needed. Despite this effort, her hand still shakes. Hoping to subside her bodily tremors, she brings her other hand up to control it, seeming only to make it worse. It finally goes off but the only impact to be found lands amongst the dirt and shattered glass. Instead of loading the gun for another chance to redeem herself, she throws the gun itself at the bottle. It flatly lands amongst its victims. Tears flood her eyes as she storms the bottle, grabbing and throwing it with all the power she can muster, resulting in it simply bouncing off of the trunk with an almost entirely hollow clink before falling back to the earth.

As the mocking bottle lay there upon the ground, she began to wonder why he had to go to the bar. About why he felt the need to drink as much as he did. Why he had to pick a fight with Frank Harrison of all the drunken bastards within the saloon that night. Why had his pride as a man trumped his duties as a husband? Mrs. Miller couldn't conjure an answer, only a desire to see the whiskey bottle ground into fine bits of dust. Picking it up from the wreckage, she slams the bottle between her hand and the tree's sturdy trunk as several pieces of glass wedge themselves into her, soaking it in blood and alcohol. Only serving as a needless distraction from what truly ails her.

On the third day, Mrs. Miller tended to her hand. Ten shards of varying size and length had lodged themselves firmly within her hand. Thankfully for her, most of them came out smoothly and weren't damaging enough to where she couldn't still shoot. If anything it only aided in Mrs. Miller's aiming practice. Anytime she tightened her grip or was forced to load the weapon once more, it'd remind her of the reason she was firing it in the first place. She had unknowingly traded her comfortability in exchange for an improved and exceedingly focused shot. After she was done practicing for the day and had settled to her now isolating bed, Mrs. Miller began to question the exact role of God in the decisions of life and death. She and Mr. Miller had been devout Christians like any other Southerner at the time though it was mainly her husband who had encouraged their commitment. Mrs. Miller was always skeptical, but never truly opposed until after his death. She began to wonder if, much like her improved aim, death was something that could be traded or reasoned with. The idea was that of a fantasy novel. The ones where a poor girl would sacrifice safety or even a piece of themselves in order to obtain something greater

FICTION

in the future. These sacrifices were almost always at the expense of the woman's own sense of worth or security, a trend Mrs. Miller never really understood but was nevertheless compelled by, as she too began to imagine all that she would give in exchange for her husband.

The most obvious is her own life but she knows it'd be a rather pointless trade. Her fertility is another option to consider as she never fancied the idea of children anyway despite her husband wanting a boy. It's a desirable idea to her now however as it would've at least given her a piece of him to hold on to. The only remnants of him now are the house, his rifle, and the land which all now belonged to her. She then considers if that would be enough to satisfy whoever controls such things. If the land and the house that was built upon it meant anything to a being like that. Or the tool that provided them sustenance, a rifle that gave them salvation in the form of sacrificial meat that they'd always thank Him for. Mrs. Miller always believed those conversations to be one-sided but now she half prayed that He had heard her husband's gratitude and granted him some form of peace in his final moments. The final option she considered was her scarlet hair which was of great value to both her husband and herself. He would often twirl it in his fingers as they lay in bed together, seeming to lose himself in her crimson waves. Unconsciously, Mrs. Miller was also feeling the depths of her own hair, feeling it wash over her fingers. When she realizes what she is doing, she simply freezes and begins to wonder what exchange had been made for her husband's death.

On the fourth and fifth days, Mrs. Millers' home is consumed by a thunderstorm. The roaring thunder and flaring lightning had coupled with the incessant rain in an effort to overtake the entirety of Mrs. Millers' being in a seemingly endless onslaught. It seemed to be succeeding as it had encouraged a terrible plague to fester within her. The affliction was debilitating to both her mind and body as she was struggling to conjure the strength necessary to get out of bed. Her mind wanders to the empty cylinders in the revolver. She considers the paradox of them, how their innate function is to be filled and yet, truly, their purpose is to be perpetually emptied once again. The thought then permeates the rest of Mrs. Millers' perception. Bodies filled with food and water only to piss or shit it out later. Filled and then empty. Clouds become constipated with thick grey moisture only to unleash it upon the earth below and create putrid muck that drowns out the life surrounding it. Filled and then empty. Her husband was born to live but fated to die in a bar just because of one man's ill-advised decision to once more empty the cylinder within his gun. Filled and then empty. That's all it was now. Rotating in cylinders, waiting to be fired upon another being for the pure sake of consumption

FICTION

or destruction. It sickened her very being and made her decision to stay in bed for the entirety of that fourth day all the easier. The following day proved no better as the little sleep she got only staved the thoughts off temporarily. The storm itself was easing up ever so slightly, as the blinding flash of lightning and drowning waves of thunder was subsiding, but the rain's oppressive tapping upon her roof continued. Mrs. Miller's affliction seemed to be worsening however as she envisioned the hoards of maggots and worms that would be invading her husband's corpse right now. Reducing him to the same filthy, rancid shit everything was destined to become. The thought was not a horror for Mrs. Miller at this point but rather a numbing acceptance she wished so badly would conjure fear. Anything would've been better than the empty cylinder that was her mind now, constantly spinning, begging to be filled, waiting to fire.

Sometime in the evening, Mrs. Miller directed her attention towards her hand. Before this, she had simply set her gaze upon the ceiling as it was the only source of activity in the house due to the continued and numbing rhythm of the rain. Eventually they too began to slow, making the only noise being produced a light dripping from the roof. Eventually leading her eyes to wander the room, reaching the scarred hand that was now the focal point of her tortured attention. The ten points of prickling pain were subsiding ever so slightly. The cuts looked improved as a mixture of blood clots and skin were attempting to seal the self-inflicted damage. Her body's effort to heal herself finally awoke something within her. It mattered to her not what the feeling was exactly, but that it was just that. Feeling. The cylinder within was finally filled, realizing the choice to fire was always her own. Pushing the covers and blankets off, Mrs. Miller gets up, fetches her gun, and begins practicing once more.

On the eighth day after her husband's death, Mrs. Miller decides it's the perfect day for her to kill Frank Harrison. The past couple of days had been spent training more with the revolver, letting it become an extension of herself. She was able to ensure each bullet landed on its desired target within at least two shots of each other. He was a drunkard who lived alone aside from the constant smell of pig and cow shit that always accompanied him, so she figured this accuracy was good enough to seal his fate. Now all she had to do was confirm his residency. Fortunately for her, this matter was as simple as asking anyone in town if he still lived in the little prairie shack by the river. The answer from those she asked was a yes, usually followed by a socially necessary "How are you doing?" Mrs. Miller would respond with a similarly sociable "I'm doing well."

It took her a few hours on horseback to get to Frank Harrison's minimal abode and just as she hoped, he wasn't there yet. Eyeing the chair

FICTION

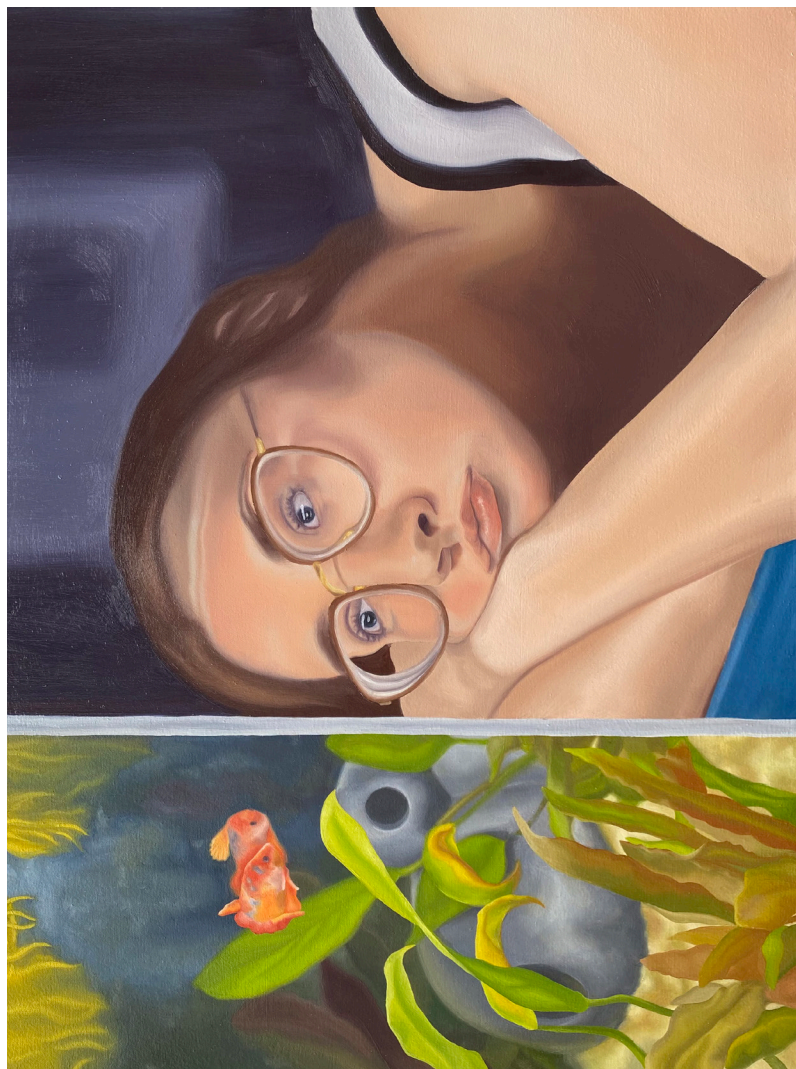
on his front deck, she decided it'd be as good a place as any to wait until he showed up. She places the gun on her lap, examining it once more. The weapon was familiar to her now, knowing now exactly how to grip its handle and inspect its cylinders with delicacy and precision. She began to think about after this if she'd keep the gun or simply throw it in the river after Frank's death. At the moment she certainly leaned towards keeping it, proper memorabilia for her soon-to-be-completed vengeance. The eight days she had waited to finally complete the cycle and empty her cylinder was well worth it as she awaits his inevitable arrival. It's at this thought of her imminent revenge, however, when the sun begins to set.

The sun shines upon her and the land in a warming embrace that spreads to the surrounding area in an inviting, orange glow. Its nostalgic rays permeates Mrs. Miller's very being as she is consumed with memories of her husband, William. Memories such as their wedding day by the willow tree, when the wind was blowing so hard she couldn't keep the veil over her face. Or when they'd lie in bed together, reading each other mesmerizing and horrifying fantasies that would astonish the both of them. She even thought back fondly on the days in church as his hand held hers, a knowing sign of gratitude for her joining him every Sunday. Eventually, all of these memories coalesced back into the orange glow that Mrs. Miller now realized was a great inferno. It was not the measly flame she had imagined before, measly gasping for breath like she once thought it had, but instead taking it in gratefully as each one promised another moment of life. Her husband's perceived spirit was now resilient and accepting. From this brilliant inferno, Kathy could hear an echo of her husband one last time. *I love you, darling.*

"I love you too William." Croaking it out into the open prairie, praying that God relays the message to him. It's the only favor she inquires from Him before leaving the revolver in the chair and riding home.

At Least I'll Always Have You

Caitlin Marx



A Town If it Was Tofu

Alexis Santos

There are peach skins growing in a Christian school.
White with blue trim, a basketball rim weeping in its schoolyard.

It sleeps at the bottom of a hill crested by a racetrack.

There is a tall wooden cross with termites stuck in His crown,
and it's sitting ditch-side in a lakeside town.

The student's neighborhoods sit like crooked teeth,
in a sailor's mouth.

Their mothers beat living room rugs on their porches,
the dust reminds them of PCP on the first day of spring,
at the top of the lighthouse.

The classrooms are only shadow puppet shows.
But look now, the light operator has fallen asleep. He is dreaming of:
1. A woodpecker in the Everglades with no trees.
2. The woodpecker pecking itself into mutilation because one.

The teacher is a mannequin that started its own life,
but he can't remember the pole is not up his ass anymore.
(Which is why his wife hates him)

And you, sitting in the back row,
you look like you've swallowed a GameCube, just a hologram of yourself.
So at recess, the students jump rope
with the cables that fall from your stomach.

All with accents that sound like syrup filling every hole on the waffle.

The clouds in their skies come from smokestacks,
or from the chimneys of family homes
burning travel brochures in their fireplaces.
Even their booted legs are bootleg,
so they slip when they climb boulders,
that look like cinnamon rolls from the winter frost.

Together Burning Bright

Marlana Williams

There's electricity in the air. Bodies thrumming together with it, blindly touching, grabbing, caressing. Not a moment alone in a swarm of hundreds.

You can feel the clothes you're wearing stick to your skin, the body heat of others dampening the material. You must have come in contact with at least 80 people in this one small section of the concert's cement floor, but they all look familiar somehow. Forgotten friends all gathered at the 15-year reunion.

The base settles in your chest, vibrating so hard that your heart feels like it'll rattle right out of your rib cage. With each swaying moment, you're stuck between another pass of heat, another round of revitalizing revelations found in The Used lyrics being crooned out.

A hand touches your face and turns your head to the side. It's a girl, crying silently with serene smiles and wild curls, smoke curling out of her nose. She's holding a blunt in between shaking fingers as Bert continues to serenade the crowd.

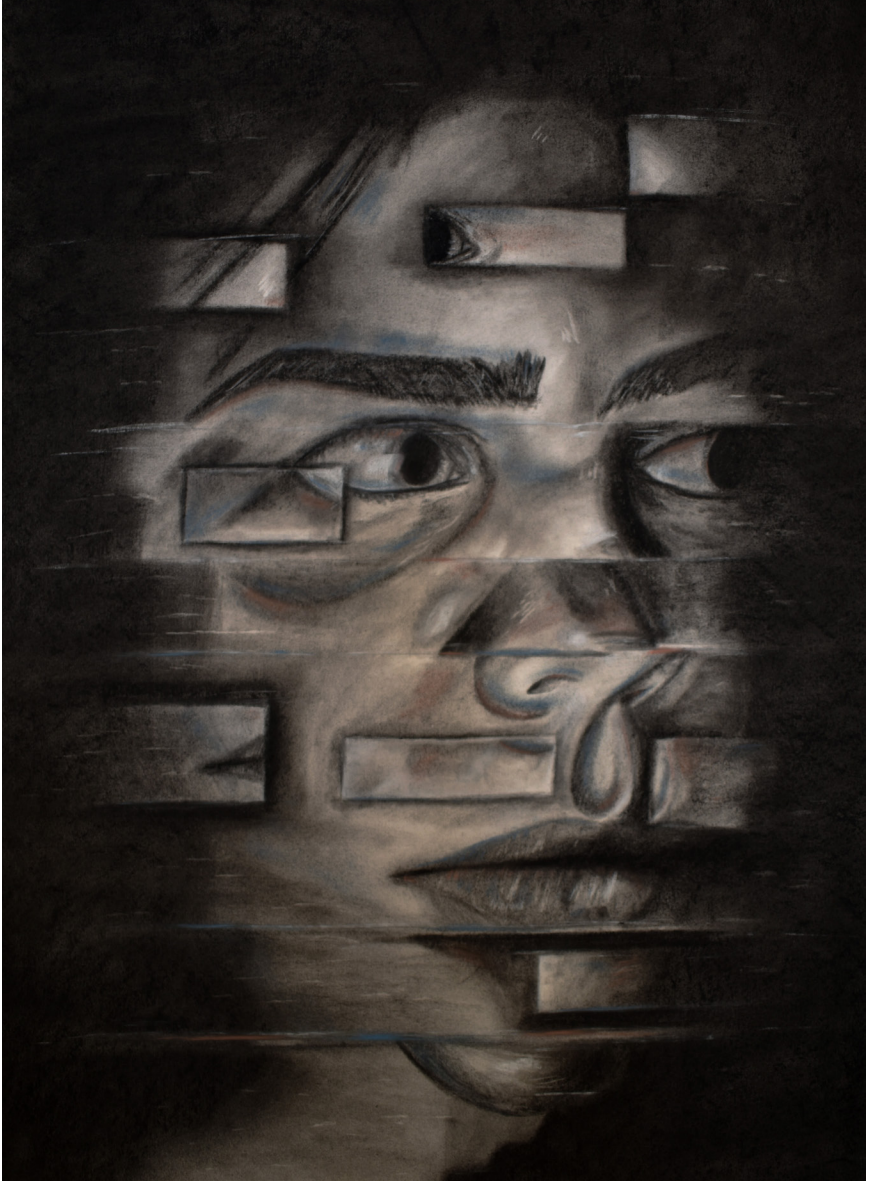
She has a friend, who is also touching you at your wrist, and they look so peaceful. The feeling of belonging settles something deep within that had long since scabbed over, yet had never stopped weeping.

They offer the blunt to you, as one girl whispers gospel into the shell of your ear, warm breath exhaling the hymn, "This moment was meant for us, for all of us to experience together. Do you wanna smoke?" You deny her, but the smile stays and they hug you close anyway. Their caresses linger and you all sway to the music. They murmur to you that you're beautiful, that it's ok, as their tears reach your eyes.

You spend the rest of the concert sandwiched between the two of them, never alone for even a second. A new experience in a lonely existence.

I'm Here Now

Alison Hibbert



To Kill a Girl

Noah Rust

If I said I wanted to push my thumbs in
the corners of your eyes
they'd ask for my repentance
as if you're not the one on top of me
as if this body is not a prison cell
or a blow-up doll.
Even though you've done this
to me more times than I
have fingers and toes
wanting to bite your tongue
makes me evil.
Maybe I am evil
maybe I do want to hurt you
maybe I want to steal her back.
Maybe I wanted the 14-year-old to try
and fight, resist, push, scream, bite, claw.
Maybe I didn't want her to watch
the beach on the car ceiling.
Maybe I wanted her to kill you back.
Maybe I want my body
to forget your filthy fingers.
I will write my victory in your blood.
I hope my words kill you.

The Perfect Piece

Brendan Lentini

INT. COLLEGE HOUSING - NIGHT

A college student named JACK sits on a well-worn couch, empty ramen containers sprawled out on a table next to a laptop. Jack rapidly types away, maniacally grinning to himself the entire time.

JACK

(chuckling)

Oooooohhh, this is going to be THE one for sure.
It's got everything a great story needs!

Jack looks at his work, basking in his writing.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's so meta, it HAS to get accepted into the Grand River Feedback Literary Journal! I mean, c'mon, it's a story about a person writing a story, it's genius! I have an intriguing character, who is a lovable oaf, commentary about the real world, and it has a cute dog. Who can say no to a dog?

A golden retriever named REX walks up to Jack, rubbing his head against his calf.

JACK (CONT'D)

Not now, Rex, can't you see daddy is creating a masterpiece?

The dog turns its head in confusion before scurrying into the kitchen.

JACK (CONT'D)

Ah, now where was I? Oh yes, my story! It's all about their theme, too, rejuvenation! When the main character falls into the elvish pit of despair and bad internet connection, the audience truly believes all hope is lost.

DRAMA

Rex barks in the other room. Jack dismisses it until he does it again, forcing him to enter the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Rex is sprawled onto the floor next to an empty water dish that he had accidentally spilled.

JACK

Oh, c'mon now, Rex! You gotta be more careful. Silly little accidents are nothing to cry over. Look, see?

Jack refills Rex's water before returning to his laptop.

JACK (CONT'D)

Okay, let me re-jog my train of thought. What plot twist did I want to include? Ah, yes, that's right, it needs to be more meta.

Jack begins typing away, the keyboard audibly clacking away as he mashes each key.

JACK (CONT'D)

You see, when Jingles the Enigmatic blows up the moon, it is all a facade to trick Ranviccius the Ignorant. He doesn't realize the moon isn't actually gone, he just temporarily deleted it from existence.

Rex struts back into the room, his tail wagging excitedly.

JACK (CONT'D)

Hey, buddy, you excited for my story? Oh yes you are my lil Rexxy poo, yes you are.

Jack rubs Rex's chin adamantly before turning back to his laptop.

JACK (CONT'D)

Okay, buddy, let me just finish my masterpiece, alright?

DRAMA

Jack turns to his laptop, scanning his work. He sits back, proud, now proof-reading it.

JACK (CONT'D)

Ahha, it's almost done.

Jack smiles eagerly as he bridges his fingers.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's incredible. I might shed a tear, it's so beautiful.
All I need to do now is put in this one last period
and...

Jack places a period on his paper. He doesn't realize it, but he had accidentally triple-clicked the document and selected all of the text, replacing it with a period.

JACK (CONT'D)

What.

Jack looks in pure shock and awe at his work. It is all gone.

JACK (CONT'D)

No, no, no, nooo, noooo, nooooo!

Jack begins to panic, immediately shuffling around his workspace.

JACK (CONT'D)

Rex! Did you eat my paper?

Rex makes a confused noise as he can not comprehend the question.

Jack begins to panic, tossing empty ramen containers around, cold noodles flying against the wall.

JACK (CONT'D)

Oh God! Please! God, did you take my paper?
Did you do this to me?

Jack pauses for a moment before looking out the window at the sky. There

DRAMA

is a full moon.

JACK (CONT'D)

Jingles? Did you do this? Did you delete my paper?

Jack has a mental breakdown before returning to his laptop, staring at the empty page.

JACK (CONT'D)

Oh my God. It's all gone. There's nothing. I have nothing. I am worthless. How can I have any perception of self-value if I don't receive accolades for my work reminding me of my self-value?

Jack begins to panic, no options working. Unsure what to do, he enters a montage of peculiar tactics.

We see Jack engaging in various rituals, spanning from prayer, to tarot cards and crystals, to a black magic sacrifice. Nothing seems to work. Jack's panic increases.

JACK (CONT'D)

If God can't help me, there's only one human being imaginable that can save me...

Jack picks up a phone and dials. We do not know who he calls but we hear a VOICE on the phone.

VOICE (V.O.)

Thank you for calling Brainy Benny's Late Night Tech Support, you break it, we tell you how to fix it, this is Brainy Benny speaking.

Jack clutches the phone tensely.

JACK

Hello, Benneth. Tonight is a night of urgency and chaos. My life's greatest work, nay, society's magnum opus itself is on the line here. What I need from you may be very difficult to provide,

DRAMA

dare I say impossible, but if there is a chance it can be done I need you to take it.

BRAINY BENNY

You can just call me Ben. Now, uh..

JACK

Jack. My name is Jack. My friends call me Jack but you can call me Jack.

BRAINY BENNY

Okay, well, uh, Jack, am I saying that right? Jack?

JACK

Yes. Thank you for asking. Most people mispronounce it.

BRAINY BENNY

Mhm. Now where was I? Oh yes, now what exactly is the issue?

JACK

Well, you see, I was writing something akin to the Bible, only in terms of historical significance and revenue, when it vanished. I don't know where it went.

Jack gazes up at the moon, and then back at Rex, who is now asleep on the floor with a piece of ramen hanging out of his mouth.

BRAINY BENNY

Okay, well let me see. Have you tried -

JACK

(interrupting)

I have tried EVERYTHING. I have run terminal diagnostics on my computer. I have begged Jesus and his dad. I even sacrificed my dog, Rex, to the Hindu Goddess of Wealth and Good Fortune, Lakshmi.

DRAMA

JACK (CONT'D)

(to Rex)

Sorry, buddy.

Rex awakens, quietly growls, and returns to sleep.

BRAINY BENNY

Interesting, usually that last one works. Hmm, I have one idea that might be a little extreme.

JACK

Anything. Getting published into the Grand River Feedback means everything to me.

BRAINY BENNY

Have you tried pressing the “undo” button?

Jack’s face drops. He has no expression. Dumbfounded and embarrassed, he presses undo, not having tried that yet. In an instant, his entire story is restored to his laptop.

Jack sheds a single tear and whispers into the phone before hanging up.

JACK

Thank you, Jingles the Enigmatic.

Salamander Stories

Caitlin Marx



Isla Verde

Alexis Santos

We sneak away with a kiss under the streetlamp in Humacao
that makes a nervous rain look like goldfish,
and the grapes taste of the tree root, Mavi.

The wind burglarizes open windows, and the mountain range
takes on the curves of the sleeping lady who dreams
on a titanium horizon
of wrangling the wild mountain clouds in rope.

when we look at her silhouette with lust, is her heart black
or only our own? The chirping of the coquis
won't interrupt her still sleep, and only we get to see her move
for dirty dancing, like how the tide sways her hips for the orbit of the moon.

Is she the caged rainbow parrot in the heart of Caguas,
the heart of the island?

The answer hides in a good night's sleep just above her longing brow,
which moves like our river in Guavate where we washed
our feet.

Permanent Pictures

Marlana Williams

I waited for the pictures to appear on my skin.

I wasn't expecting much; maybe just a butterfly, blue and beautiful on my wrist.

Or perhaps a fox, the colors of fire curled up tight on my hip.

My dad had so many, almost always black and white, a new one every time he came to visit.

My favorite picture was the devil being embraced by an angel,

Or maybe the flames that curved up his arms, creeping towards his neck.

Maddy had one too, a beach scene that appeared on her waist, captured at sunset.

The colors made up of cerulean and amethyst, with lines that puff up in the cold.

Sylvester got a dragon on his upper arm, strong and proud,

Created in black and white, teeth bared in a snarl, his protector.

They always seemed to just appear one day, an image that never was suddenly is

And I ached for them, for the pictures to pop up and make me new

To make me an island girl like Maddy, who had palm trees that swayed with her in dance,

A warrior like Sylvester, who had an animal spirit sturdy and in sight, always ready for battle,

An author hidden amongst codes like my father, who wore his life on a sleeve and left it up to the world to decipher.

At 18, my first tattoo appeared as a semi-colon on the back of my neck, marking me a survivor.

Leaves

Matt Margolis



The Grandkids' Annual Visit

Kayla Elfers

We tumbled down the hill.
We laughed and then got up.
We played ring-around-the-rosie.
We laughed and then got up.
My brother grabbed your flowers,
I collected water from the faucet.
We made our way to you.
We planted the flowers
Right on your soil.
We looked at your cross and tell you
He's now four years old
And I am almost eight.
Joey's really good at Soccer.
And I am still dancing___.
Goodbye, we love you.

We watched them
Tumble down the hill.
They laughed and then got up.
We all played ring-around-the-rosie.
We all laughed and then got up.
She grabbed your flowers,
Joey collected the water.
We all made our way to you.
We all planted the flowers
Right on your soil.
We looked at your cross and tell you
Laci is four years old and beautiful.
John is the little one in my arms.
You remember Joey, he's ten or
Maybe eleven, I forget. As for me,
I am thirteen.
And I am still dancing___.
Goodbye, we all love you.

POETRY

We watched the two youngest ones
Tumble down the hill.
They laughed and then got up.
We all played ring-around-the-rosie.
We all laughed and then got up.
John grabbed your flowers.
Laci collected water from the faucet.
We all made our way to you.
We all planted the flowers
Right on your soil.
We all looked at your cross and tell you
Jaxson just turned four and he's funny for a little guy.
John is now ten and suffers from middle child syndrome.
Laci is now thirteen and wears braces and bras.
Joey is now eighteen and goes to college.
And I am still dancing through life.
Every day. For me, for them, for you.
Goodbye, we love you.

Serenity

Ashley Budd



Pumpkin Patch

Alexandra Leahy

I hate pumpkins. Strange, right? Pumpkins are meant to be joyful and sometimes even scary. They remind people of the season's change and the upcoming holidays. Somehow though, for me, I saw pain in them. The harder the exterior, the messier you can be below what anyone can see. At some point just like a pumpkin, soft spots will form. Families are like this, too--mine was. A mother whose hard exterior was softened each night by my father's hand.

After my mother left him, she drowned herself with men that hurt her the same. Every night I would stay awake hating myself because maybe I was the problem. Maybe I was the one who hurt my mom, the reason my older sister doesn't trust her reflection, and the reason why my middle sister fights for everyone but herself. I began to exclude myself. The guilt of being the cause for the pain I saw terrified me, and that fear eventually led me to isolation. Anytime that I felt happy, my conscience haunted me. "I am not special, not worth happiness or care. I am just in pain."

One morning the cloudless sky filled my room with a garish light. The warmth was so persistent that it distracted me from realizing that the voice in my head wasn't so loud and the hurt held in my stomach wasn't so heavy. What I thought was non-existent turned into a genuine smile. That day was the start of a realization that not doubting myself for just a moment made everything obvious. I didn't understand that my older sister came to only trust those who truly deserved it, and my middle sister fought for others as a way of choosing her path. I was not the reason for their hurt, but instead for their survival. I did not realize how close they grew to me. We were a pumpkin patch with our vines forever intertwined.

I still hate pumpkins, but now they hold a feeling of relief that I am no longer hiding my pieces where others cannot see, but rather asking if those I trust can help put me back together again. I have learned that being in a difficult spot doesn't mean you will be stuck forever--it means that the path you are on is being constructed and you need to wait patiently until you can see forward again. Not every bump in the road requires you to step back. The way I have thought of it through the years is that if you step back you become a victim, but if you step over you become a survivor. I have become a survivor.

NON-FICTION

Every day I grow more comfortable talking about the trauma in my life that has passed. Every day I know that I have so many people around me that care and are good, but when you start to heal it's not the trauma that is scary, it's the happiness you gain and the more people you start to trust and love. Now that is terrifying, but what I have come to realize is that I finally have a life that I am proud of and never want to lose. I have changed to guide myself through so many impossible situations that I should not have had to. I have grown up in ways I hated so I can survive and the lessons that came with it taught me to fight for everything I want.

self portrait as a ghost

Libby Morel

all mighty and man, all hot water
running through your veins to keep
you company at night. through
the bones of this house i rest
on tiptoed wonder, floating above
splintered floors that'd creak
even beneath the feather touch
of my silver feet.

turning pages of photo albums,
thinking if you flip fast enough
i'll become a movie in your hands.
the speed of my smile faltering
makes you sick to your stomach
and your fingers stop turning. i sit
stagnant in your lap, wanting to
crawl out of the pages to hide in
your memories.

we were in the kitchen when you
joked that you'd haunt me if you
died. one hand on my cheek as
you described the way you'd live
in the cracks in the floors and the
tears in the curtains. how i'd never
forget the sound of your voice,
you wouldn't let me.

"i'll sprinkle constellations
into your morning cup of coffee
in hopes that the bitterness will
pickle your tongue and you'll
think of me, silver-toed and happy.
you'll feel my name on the back

POETRY

of your neck, static in the air
causing the little hairs to stand up.”

“and if i see you forget the red
of my cheeks, if i have to watch
you soak my name in gasoline
and light a match to my memory,
i’ll blow it out like a candle and
will my wish into the smoke
and let the universe bring me back
to remind you.”

i find myself taking your advice
now that the walls are my home.
now that you stand in the kitchen
unexpectedly alone. now that my
fingers tangled in between yours feel
like pins and needles on your skin,
tell me, do you like the bitter taste
of a starry night in your coffee?

Azaleas

Amber Paige



The Solicitor

Alexis Santos

Look who's here and look what they are asking for.
I know the rain brings you,
you always visited me in increments.
You look like a lost dog poster, but it's all in the eyes.
Then you're asking me:
"Why am I always the thumbtack
in a room full of jellyfish?" Because,
with you a bruise is a plum and you store memories
in a satanic nightjar. Any love is coerced theft.
But this shade of rain can make any bullet
look like a badminton birdie.
It even makes you look less like a murder at daylight savings time.
Tonight, I think you're not too unbecoming for a circus carney
holding a funhouse mirror on my doorstep.
You are miserable because you're a tumbleweed,
and with the dust settled you can see
that there's no more dirt to collect.
You are miserable because your tears are no longer
the morning dew in the kitten's whisker.
You are miserable because your tears are now the cyanide in my Kool-Aid.

Ruin Lake

Jamie Perrin

In the middle of the night Tara moved me from my lonely lab facility to Rune's lonely facility. I've been outside, but I woke up inside and jammed within a transport pod. I don't know why Tara suddenly decided to introduce me to another person. I've spent all sixteen years of my life with no one. I woke up with video message from Tara saying, "Rune lives like you."

"This is Evelyn." I hear his voice before I see him, his words are fast and jumbled. The room is white, the counters clear, and the drawers are shut neatly so that nothing sticks out. He stands to the side of the room holding a plant, who must be Evelyn. He's wearing all black, a hoodie and jeans. He stands out from the white of the room. One of his eyes is blue, one is green. This is how I imagined the sky and grass to look like, vibrant and with little flecks of darks and lights thrown in.

"I'm Lake." I say, I never had a plant of my own so I have to introduce myself.

"Rune," he says, his finger pokes the soil then he rubs his fingers together to roll off the dirt. "Do you think she looks healthy?" he sets down the plant and talks faster. "I think she's doing well for not having much to live off of. We don't get a lot here. Once the supplies were late and she wilted because we didn't have water. I worry, because she's never seen the sun." He could be talking about the plant, he could be talking about himself. Rune grew up the way I did. He's been living without much to live off of. He's never seen the sun. "Do you think she will?" We live without enough food, we live without other people.

"I know she will." If Evelyn never gets outside, then Rune and I will be stuck under these white ceilings forever. He has now moved onto examining individual leaves of the plant, as if he's checking for disease or bugs, or maybe he was searching for a place to move his eyes so that they aren't on me. His plant is a club moss, a fern-ally, the spores are flammable, and the club moss was one of the first vascular plants, they used to be 100 foot tall trees.

"Why did she bring me here?" I ask.

Rune's hands pause. His fingers are clasping a flipped stem. He lets it drop and it springs back into place. His fingers rub together then curl

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in on themselves. "I think she's scared." He pauses then continues, "We're smarter now, and she knows we can't be docile forever."

I've never been docile. "Have you met her?" I ask him.

"Tara? No."

"Have you met anyone?" I ask him. Rune shakes his head. The people of earth hate ectogenesis babies. We have enough torture and pain being trapped inside that I would prefer anything the outside world has to offer. Tara built us, and kept us locked away to perform her experiments and build perfect gardens. She only communicates occasionally, and never lets us outside, but I've been fighting her rules most of my life. I have one goal, and nothing will stand in my way.

"What are you thinking?" Rune's eyes have narrowed and he watches me.

"We're going to see the sun," I say. I'm not letting Tara keep me here forever.

* * *

"What are you doing?" I ask. He's sitting on my stool, in my workplace, one of my books is open on his lap.

"Reading." Rune doesn't even bother to look up. He turns a page. I don't know how anyone deals with other people. "Need something?" he still hasn't even looked up.

"My room," I say, but I doubt he'll be moving. He's infuriating, he's always trying to find me, and talk to me. I turn away from him. I'll work somewhere else. The facility is the same everywhere, white walls, grey desks, empty. I wrote on my walls, I filled them with ideas and calculations.

"When are you getting us out of here?" His tone has dropped. It's calmer, he's quieter. I pause. I stand at the edge of the hall and the lab, where the white tile of the lab meets the white plastic floor of the hall. We have been together almost a week now. We rarely talk, we rarely interact, unless Rune is invading my space. The facility we are kept in is identical to mine. There are ten labs, and ten bedrooms. Food and supplies are delivered once a week they're placed inside a tiny shoot that only unlocks when Tara allows it. I've tried escaping through it, it's not possible. There are no windows and all the doors are sealed.

I can't ignore his question any longer, "I don't know."

"Are you getting us out of here?"

"I don't know."

The chair creaks. "Lake, please." His voice cracks.

I lean against the door frame and close my eyes. I'm not sure what he's expecting from me. He's lived here his whole life, but never escaped. I

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could solve differential equations when I was ten and I could never escape from my facility. He's never tried to escape. He's perfectly obedient to Tara. She is keeping us safe, but she's also not letting us live. Escape is not simple. And too many times I've tried to escape, and too many times I've let myself feel happiness and hope, and too many times I've failed to escape.

"I don't know what you expect from me."

"Why don't we plan our escape together?" His nature-like eyes are fixed on mine.

I have no reason to trust him. But I have no reason to distrust him.

"We don't work well together." Rune doesn't care if he's wrong. He experiments, then corrects. He doesn't plan.

"We have to." His gaze is steady but all the color in his eyes is throwing me off. Or maybe it's my excitement. My head feels light. I can't focus my eyes, they jump from Rune's eyes to random objects around the room: my computer, a beaker, a stack of crooked books and finally back to his eyes. I nod, then step into the hall. I can't let my hopes get up, but we will get out of here. I force myself to focus on the science, not on my emotions. I have a goal and emotions won't help me reach it.

* * *

On top of being born using an artificial womb, Tara played with our genetics. Looking at us, it would not be hard to tell that genetic manipulation was in play. Rune's heterochromia is rare. I am a tetrachromat, though that's more inconspicuous. We're built to ideal human ratios with body types that studies have shown are what people enjoy the most in potential partners. I'm sure she researched pheromones, voice inflection and tone, hair color, facial symmetry. Everything that could positively influence the attractiveness of a person, we fit the criteria. As a result of this, she threw us into facilities with only ourselves for company.

Tharra Winchester, or Tara was born in 2710, thirty-three years ago, in a town called Midtown, she left only to get her PhD, but never returned. She founded the facilities, her research has help build safe homes for people, and cure diseases. Sometimes Tara "drops in." I've never met her face to face, she's too busy for that, but she'll video call me at least once a week. My phone-gram dings and Tara's image grows out of it. The image flickers for a moment before stabilizing. It's a black and white image and is just a 3D cutout of her body, the room where she projects from isn't visible.

"I'd like you to start a hydroponics lab," Tara tells me. Her voice is always soft, but firm. She's brilliant and beautiful, her face is pale and smooth, but her chin and cheekbones are sharp.

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“I have no seeds,” I tell her.

“Everything is going according to plan,” the hologram shivers then comes back into focus, “you can begin work on the set up and the plants will come later.”

“When will the seeds come?” I don’t wait for her respond, she could leave at any second. “Why couldn’t I be awake when I changed buildings? Why did I change buildings?” And the question I keep unspoken, when can I leave?

“It’s a dangerous world outside. I know what’s best for you.” That’s all I get in response. She really does care about us, I think, but she also created us and brought us into this world to be trapped our whole lives.

* * *

“Do you ever have fun?” Rune’s voice is low.

“What?” I’m in my room on my bed. I have seven books spread open around me and my computer on my lap. I’m researching how to make chemicals from common materials.

He’s leaning against the door frame. I left the door open. I’ve never had to worry about privacy. “You’re so callous. And what is with you wanting so bad to escape, but having no interest in me? I’m another person Lake, why can’t we get to know each other? When you make it to the outside world you’re going to be meeting a lot more people.” Is he mad at me?

I fold the laptop and start shutting and piling the books. He tries hard, and sometimes I feel like giving him credit. I’m sure he’d love more than anything to be trapped with anyone else.

There’s a draw to the outside world. “I want to be free.” I don’t know what he wants from me, he’s getting to excited, he’ll be crushed when we fail, but I’ll feel nothing, because I don’t let myself feel anything. “What kinds of experiments have you done here?” I ask him, maybe he knows something that can help us escape. I stand and start sliding the books back into their places on the shelf. I built the shelf yesterday out of a desk I took apart.

“Mostly I hypothesize, instead of actually performing experiments. Tara hasn’t given me many supplies. She asked me to work with water once, but the water was so contaminated the filtration system refused to pump it into the facility. Once she gave me plants for an experiment but she took them away when I started into genetics. Luckily I had Evelyn in my room.”

None of this information helps. Tara has raised us so that we are scientists; we want to learn, and experiment. Instead she gives us nothing to satisfy our curiosity and we’re stuck freezing water and pretending we’ll

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be able to solve the questions of the universe. She never trusted me with supplies for experiments, but expects us to do the experiments anyway.

“Because we’re working together, you could think out loud,” Rune says.

“I have nothing,” I say.

“You study all day,” he points at my books. “And you rarely leave this room.” He sits on my desk. “I feel like you have some ideas.” He doesn’t look at me, and his hands are clasped.

“I... don’t.” I can get myself out. I sit on my bed and flick a bent corner of my blanket over my pillow. I can figure it out on my own. All my life it’s only been me, I don’t need to rely on anyone else. I roll my lips inward and press them together. My eyes fix on a point on the floor. I have ideas, I’ll get us out, but I might actually need help from him. “Do you know that the spores of the club moss are flammable?”

“Yeah, of course. Did you know that they’re descended from towering trees?”

“That’s irrelevant.” I stand. “But we could use your plant to get out of here.”

He rises, slowly, “I don’t follow.”

“I’ll need your help to build a bomb.”

* * *

“We have one chance before Tara reinforces your doors so that we can never escape.” I feel like I have to keep forcefully reminding him of our dire situation. We’ve been working for two weeks, but he’s convinced that there is no reason to take it slow. I’m ensuring our success. I’m making sure that this will work. “You rush things.”

“You need to start trusting other people.”

I don’t answer him. I’m across the lab checking on Evelyn. I told Rune not to water her so she’d be dry, but he’s refused.

He’s been sneaking her water. “Like how I’m trusting you to stop watering Evelyn?”

“I’m going to unpack our supplies.” It’s supply day and our typical shipments of water and food was even smaller than normal. Rune leaves.

I wander to Rune’s station. He’s supposed to be making potassium permanganate. First he took the MnO₂ from batteries. Then I made the Potassium Hydroxide. Potassium permanganate accelerates burning, unless combined with sulfuric acid, then it will burn. All of these chemicals we have to make from what we have around us.

Rune’s supposed to be using fractional crystallization to separate the permanganate from the carbonate. But he left his station. I knew he would mess this up. Fractional crystallization works by heating a compound and

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solvent then cooling it gradually so each component will crystallize and can then be separated.

He left it heating. He doesn't have a timer. He wasn't even watching it. I take over and begin turning down the heat.

"What are you doing?" his voice is soft like always, though his emphasis is as though I'm doing something wrong. "Do you remember the talk that we had about trust not five minutes ago?" I don't answer him. "It wasn't ready for the temperature change, Lake, it's not going to crystallize now."

"You left it heating, you weren't even watching it." I twist the dial lower, continuing to decrease the heat.

"But I still know what I'm doing." His hands twitch like he's going to stop me then he shoves them into his pockets.

I continue turning down the heat, but I can tell that he's right. It won't crystallize. I've messed it up and we're going to have to start the whole process over again. "Please leave." I tell him. There are not a lot of places that he can go, but I don't want him in this lab anymore.

* * *

Rune's holding his plant. Both of his arms are wrapped around the pot and he's clutching it to his chest. We stand at the door. It's locked but we're going to try to blow it open. We made the bomb. After hours in the lab, I finally got it to work. The plant will catch fire after a reaction is started, and the fire will heat the rest of the chemicals and cause the explosion. Rune did help. He actually helped a lot. We remade the chemicals needed, though we couldn't work together.

His eyes are red and puffy, he looks more tired and dejected than usual. I swear he's been crying. But it's acceptable. He's losing his best friend. But I lost my home. It wasn't good for either of us to be thrown in together. Except our escape. If this doesn't work we will have nothing. Every single one of my exits is impenetrable. I've tried escaping through them all. Rune hasn't tried to escape and Tara hasn't strengthened the reinforcements on his doors.

"I don't think this is—"

"It will work," I say. It has to. I first tried to escape when I was five. After that Tara strengthened the doors. I kept trying though.

I kneel beside my device. It isn't much. But we did it. "I'm going to need the plant." I tell him. I twist the position of the bomb slightly.

"I don't like this." Rune says. His fingers are white.

"You want to get out don't you?" I stand. I shove my hands into my back pockets.

Rune nods. "Then you're going to have to sacrifice your plant. If we try to break out and fail, then Tara is going to seal off these doors so that

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we can never leave, and unless you're content with being here for the rest of your life then I don't think it's in your best interests to refuse this."

"You're going to kill Evelyn. My plant." The fluorescents flash light over his eyes as he takes a step backward. He's too focused on caring. Without people he's become dependent on loving this plant.

"And outside there are a lot more plants." I follow him and reach out for the plant.

"I'm not about to kill your best friend though," he tells me, keeping it out of my grasp.

"I don't have a best friend," I tell him. He's very emotional. For someone who has never been around people, he sure is willing to be vocal and share all his opinions, and emotions. And I just really don't care. "Are we breaking out or not? It's your decision. I can only do so much."

Is he really going to stop our escape because of his plant? He's a scientist. What good can he do for the world if he's living here? How could he sacrifice my life, and his own life, to keep the life of this plant?

He swallows. The white fades from his fingers. "Fine." He walks around me and kneels next to my bomb. My stomach lurches. We could be getting out. I slow my breathing, I force it to be even.

"Are you ready?" he asks me.

"No." I shake my head. It's hitting me. This could be it. I could be free. All my years of trying to escape and it might be Rune that breaks me out. Hopefully it will be enough for Tara, that I'll have earned this escape through hard work, and that she'll let me stay outside. I'm feeling it now, all the hope and excitement that I keep trying to suppress.

His hand touches my arm. It barely brushes my skin, most of the feeling is from his warmth. "What if it kills us?" I ask. The white of the hall floods my eyes. But the blue and green of Rune's eyes are there, right in front of mine.

"What if it helps us live?"

* * *

The door sits at a skewed angle. Neither Rune nor I move. The door has cracked open. There is light from outside spilling into the room. Rune is standing in front of me, but I watched the explosion over his shoulder, after setting off the chain reaction to light the bomb. I shove my hands against Rune's shoulders, "go."

He falls forward a step then doesn't move.

I did it. I escaped. I broke out.

I step around him. I go to the door. I kick aside the ashes of the plant, the pile of broken glass, and chemical remnants. I got us out. We're free. I wrap my fingers around the edge of the door. The sun brightens my hand.

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It's warm. I'm not sure where Rune is, maybe he's still frozen. I drag open the door.

It takes too long for my eyes to adjust to all the light. I stand blinking, my eyes burning as the pupils try to shrink smaller than they ever had. Indoor lighting can't compare to the outside world.

We're free. We are free. My heart is pounding and despite the adrenaline my legs feel as though they might collapse.

My eyes adjust. Stretching out in front of me is a crater. Far into the distance it rises into mountains. I blink quickly. It's still so bright. Filling the crater are little houses, or something. They are all rectangular, and white a single story, no windows. The roofs are flat and each building is in line with all the others. The ground isn't the green of grass. It's brown. A sickly brown. It is caked dirt and sand. Cracks stretch over the dry ground. It's desolate. It's ugly.

"What is this?" Rune stands behind me. I hadn't noticed him walking over.

"We're in a desert," I say. "Tara must have put us here. She wanted us far away from people, and life. We just have to find the cities now." It will be easy. We're out of the facility.

"What are all these?"

"Let's go see." I take the first step out of the facility.

The ground shifts under my feet. I'm wearing shoes but I can feel the sand slide underneath my feet. I grin, and a breath of a laugh escapes my mouth. It's not green, but it's still beautiful. I roll my neck back. There are spotty clouds of white covering the sky but the blue is still there.

"It's like your eyes," I tell him. My feet slip over the sand as I spin around, taking in the sky from all directions. It's so large, and blue. No color on a computer screen can compare to the color of real life. I feel free, I throw out my arms and spin in a circle. The wind catches in my fingers.

It's a while before we move. I walk first. Heading forward over the sand toward the nearest building. They shimmer in the sun. Maybe we'll find answers there, find ways to locate others, see animals, get our own labs and supplies. Further away mirages dance in the heat. Rune follows behind me. His footsteps are silent, but I can hear his soft uneven breathing.

I almost feel bad. I slide a bit on the sand, but I don't fall. I promised Rune we would see plants, yet we're in a desolate desert. But we will find plants, we are free now.

We reach the nearest building and I stop. The door of the building is white, the whole thing is white, and it's blinding. I try the handle, it's hot.

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It cracks open. It sticks, I shove my body against the door and it opens.

I step inside. My feet fall back onto hard ground. I move inside far enough that Rune can fit behind me. It's completely black. I wait for my eyes to adjust. Eventually I can see again. It's a facility. There are scribbles of notes and equations on the wall. It's my facility.

* * *

We go into all the other facilities. The doors all open easily from the outside. They are all empty, uninhabited. The last building is small. The size of a single room. I'm sweaty and nervous, I have more questions. Rune is silent, he keeps licking his dry lips.

I open the door to the last building. My eyes adjust quicker now to the lighting changes. The walls are covered in screens, and wires. Desks line the walls and run all around the edge of the room. They're all covered in different kinds of computers, and monitors, and backup drives. There is dim light from all the monitors and computers.

"What is this?" I say. I cross the room and tap my finger on a keyboard. The monitor wakes up. Lines of code scroll over the screen. I press escape. Rune hovers at my shoulder. The code disappears off of the screen. I click through different functions on the computer, trying to determine where I am and what's going on. I've never planned for my escape. I've only planned my escape. What if Tara comes after us? What if we integrate into society and the people know who we are and they hate us? There are so many things that I've never considered.

Most of the files are the same as on my computer. There is one that's different. A file listing what happened to the world, how the plan was enacted, and details of everything that has happened since. The file was meant to be uploaded to the computers in the facilities when the time came. My hands are shaking and I take a step back to let Rune search the files.

I watch his hands work the keyboard and click over the mouse, but I can't watch the computer. It's too much and I never considered the ramifications of escaping. Or the realities of escaping.

"Tara," his voice is soft. "TARA. Terran Artificial Resuscitation Aid." He curses, his hand slams against the keyboard and the screen goes black. His eyes are in shadow, his chapped lips are pressed tightly together. "It's an acronym. She's a computer." He types again at the keyboard and information scrolls over the screen. "This is all..." More scrolling, I can only watch him. "This is everything. What we see here, this is the rest of the world."

* * *

What does he mean? I wish I didn't understand. I wish I could stop

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believing him. I wish I could hold onto this distrust of computers, but we've seen the facts. We climbed the crater and looked over the edge into the distance. All the life left on earth, except Rune and I - is the computers. And computers aren't alive. "I can see why she never wanted us to go outside." We're still at the top of the crater, the desolate land stretching out around us. I drop onto a rock. It is burning with the heat from the sun. This is nothing like I expected. I thought the sun would feel comfortable and reassuring like a thick heavy blanket on a cold night. It burns instead. I don't know if somewhere there is life out there, rebuilding itself. Recreating itself. Recovering from the destruction that the ancestors of my genes caused.

Over the edge of this crater is more desert. Somewhere past the edge of the desert is ground ravaged by radiation and fire and the death of the surface of earth. And we're here in land that's begun healing, but isn't alive, won't be alive. We're a glitch.

The year is 2931. Tharra Winchester, TARA's creator would be 221. Everyone is dead. If we were born when we were meant to be it would be years from now, once the earth had more time to heal, we'd then help rebuild and grow the world together. Rune and I and hundreds of others. All of our experiments, we were meant to have the supplies, but the earth isn't ready to produce the supplies yet.

"Lake..." Rune sits next to me. His hands fold into his lap. Pain builds in my stomach and rises through my ribs. I might throw up. I might do nothing at all. "We'll get through it," he says. They're all dead. Life on earth... it's just two humans who were built by computers. Maybe there are a few bacteria, or amoebas. We've been outside too long and my lungs ache.

"What does that even mean?" I demand. "We are nothing more than a glitch on earth. TARA, the program, she shouldn't have been activated. This planet isn't habitable, the food we eat isn't real. Everything is fake, just like us." The computers were set to start rebuilding life when Earth was habitable. Earth won't be habitable for hundreds of years. And we trust the computers despite everything, we've seen the data, readings taken today, from all over the planet.

"We're alive." His hand darts forward and wraps around mine. His fingers shield mine from the sun and my hand feels cool. "And well... we're together." And we're it. We are all that's alive here. Maybe he is compensating for the pointless loss of his plant. Maybe he craves human connection. But I don't. I stand and his hand falls from mine.

We were built by computers, from computers. We have blood, we respire, we live. No, we're alive, we don't live.

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“We have nothing.” I look out over the desert, where the dirt meets the sky and the mirages make the sky shimmer.

“We have each other,” he says.

We escaped but we’re trapped. People destroyed our planet, the whole thing is in ruins. We killed all life and we killed ourselves.

“I think this crater used to be a lake.” Rune says.

Now we’re all dried up.

Regrowth

Alison Hibbert



Khang Trinh

Catnap



Privilege of Peace

Kayla Elfers

Where are the men in Baghdad?

I walked through the door and saw you again.

The women and children and animals are all there, right?

It was the end of February when you would shoot your stars at me.

The poverty is there, the massacres are there?

I've never seen shooting stars, as bright and as big as yours.

But no men?

You were iridescent-

The women walk the dilapidated streets, with their babes on their hips?

-A nocturnal commodity of luminescence my universe moved toward.

The children hide in torn towers terrified of troops?

My heart for a moment in time was forever frozen for you.

The cacophony of a single bullet entering the heart of an innocent?

You blink and suddenly your sparkle is depleted.

But where are the men in Baghdad?

Your universe walked past me and I hoped we would collide.

These innocents need help?

We never did

Help.

When did you stop seeing my stars?

Fearful of freedom, they flee from the unfathomable fight.

My stars shoot at you.

Souls, searching so desperately for peace.

You've never seen my shooting stars?

The innocents leave behind the world they once loved.

You leave behind the illusion of collision.

They now bear witness to a new world.

Our world would wash away the watery worries we wish to withdraw from.

These refugees cling to a piece of peace.

You understand but you left the idea behind you and above your skies.

They force themselves to fall in love with the names "Jane" and

POETRY

“John”.

You can't force yourself to pull down your skies for me.

Teach themselves “Hello, how are you?”

I learn I cannot catch your shooting stars.

People pity their broken plives.

I pity the words you haven't said to me.

Where are the men in Baghdad?

Where are you?

Still obsessed with the absence of peace?

My mind is a waterfall recycling our small moments over and over.

Still maliciously murdering mothers?

I resist at first but I soon flee from the neverending cycle of waterworks.

The men in Baghdad don't exist, only malevolence.

You don't exist, only memories.

The refugees are courageous as they tread their way to American soil, they've been through so much.

My heart only aches. A privileged turmoil that slowly clouds my progressive speech.

Refugees from Baghdad relied relentlessly on peace to get them through.

I wanted peace but not with the memories of you.

Moon

Diana MacMorris



Blank Slate

~For my Great-Grandmother~

Alexandria Wyckoff

Vacant eyes stare,
unblinking above my head.

A faint smile graces the lips;
a memory resurfaced.

Bony fingers, connected
to vein-ridden hands,

clasp together in an
unspoken prayer.

Her voice, quiet, fragile,
tells a tale of the past,

as if it were yesterday.
The story ends, the light

in her eyes dims, and
once again she asks,

“Who are you again?”

A Love Letter to the Universe

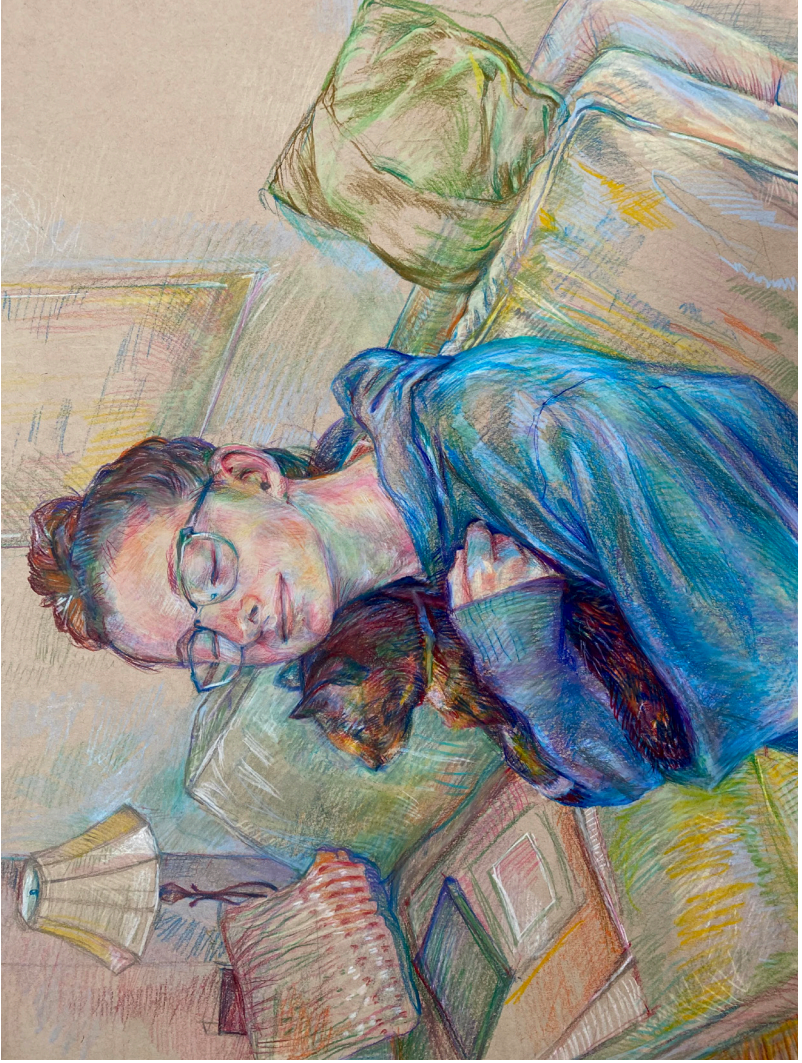
Brendan Lentini

Dear [REDACTED],

Were the late-night drives, where we would get caught staring out the fingerprint-painted windshield at the youthful stars wishing we could switch places with them, even for just a brief glimmering moment, not enough? The thought of life elsewhere; evolving, maturing, breathing. The thought of someone else, on some made-up planet where your parents aren't supposed to compete to see who could neglect and abuse you better, or guidance counselors that wouldn't tell you that all you'd amount to with a creative writing degree is a job as a high school English teacher, is living the life you always wanted? Or was it the inverse? Did you find solace in the fact that somewhere, in the distant, limitless galaxy, lies a tiny planet, with a teary eyed and afraid little girl wondering when mommy and daddy would stop fighting, who sits looking out her bedroom window at the stars and whispers, "I'm here, too."? I knew you were a pessimist, but I never expected my optimism to bleed into you. On nights like these, when I'm alone, cruising down Route 104, matching my hand up to the dirty smudge you left and wishing I could feel your childlike hands again and smell the lingering strawberry lotion, I think about the little people in the universe, just beyond the stars. Do you ever look up and think, somewhere, deep in the solar system, lies a guilty conscience and eyes stained with remorse and dread somehow deeper than my own? I know you're not here anymore, able to ponder whether the aliens would find pity or paradise in our world, but I wonder, is there solace up there, above the mourning sky? Sometimes, when I turn off the radio and drive through the eclipsing trees that conceal a peeking moon, I can feel your light and warmth travel across the galaxy and form in my passenger seat, leaning over the cold leather console dividing where you once sat, and I feel your words tickling the back of my neck, whispering to me, "I'm here, too."

Sister and Cat

Rachel Dibble



285 Fulton St.

Brendan Lentini

the blazing sun blinds
the dried-out roses
not fully dead
wilting in the barren heat

the crashing waves destroy
the empire of sand
not fully crumbled
a bucket foundation in shambles

the howling winds thrash
the dandelion divided
a wish not yet cast
seeds kissing fertile soil

two towers avalanche
flames soar seventy stories
until all that remains is ash and dust,
Freedom growing over the skyline

The Predicament

Samantha Keaney

EXT. FIELD - DAY

- "The Wild West", 1887 -

We see a strong, sturdy HORSE SOFTLY TROT across a grassy plain. The hills in the distance are bathed in an early morning, yellow light.

The horse rides up to a wooded area. We see the horse's passenger unmount and hitch his horse to a tree.

JIMMY (late 30's) feeds his steed a carrot from his satchel. Everything about Jimmy is carefree. His demeanor gives him the illusion of a much older age than he actually is. He shushes, and pats the horse gently.

We hear the CRIES OF A MAN in the distance. Jimmy turns in curiosity towards the noise. He grabs a rifle from his horse and holsters it to his back. He begins to walk.

Two men can be heard having an INAUDIBLE BUT RELAXED CONVERSATION.

EXT. SWAMP/BRIDGE - DAY

Jimmy walks along a swampy shore. We see a man in the center of a stone arched bridge dangling some rope over the edge. Terry places his hand on the revolver in his gun belt as caution.

TERRY (O.S.)

What. a. predicament.

Jimmy stops dead in his tracks. His face turns from cautious to an annoyed realization.

JIMMY

No...

Jimmy lowers his head. He hesitates and looks behind him.

DRAMA

JIMMY (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Just turn around Jimmy.

He sighs and continues around the other side of the bridge.

Tied by his feet, head a few feet from the surface of the muddy, green water, is TERRY (early 30's). Terry speaks in a slow southern accent, very monotone; as if he's always drunk.

TERRY

Jeemy?...

(now happy/delighted)

Oh! Hey, Jeemy!

Terry's arms flop as he attempts to wave upside down. Jimmy begrudgingly acknowledges him.

JIMMY

Howdy, Terry.

An awkward pause. Jimmy looks at the man dangling his partner, but neither men say anything to one another.

TERRY

...My... uh... my extremities are completely numb.

Before Jimmy can speak, Terry continues.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Oh yeah, I wanted to tell you...uh, last weekend I met this fine lady at the saloon. Her name's Marietta.

JIMMY

Okay... and I presume...

(he nods toward the man dangling Terry)

This'd be Marietta's husband here?

DRAMA

TERRY

Hm?... Oh no this here's my bookie. Owe him about five hundred.

BOOKIE

Time's runnin' out, Terry boy.

Jimmy's attention splits from Terry to the Bookie.

TERRY

Jeemy...I'mma need you to spot me a couple hundred--five of em' actually...You know, on account of me danglin' on croc infested waters...

We hear a faint GROWL of an alligator.

The Bookie turns his attention to Jimmy. They have a silent agreement that Jimmy is not here to rescue Terry.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Hey, Jeemy.

Terry begins to involuntarily turn away from Jimmy. He grunts as he wiggles his way back in his direction.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Jeemy, I reckon this is the end. And if it is, I'd like to make some confessions.

JIMMY

Ter--

TERRY

No no. I need to git some things off my chest... I been stealin' yer cigars for about the past three years. And uh, last year, I slept with yer sister...

Jimmy's eyes widen in anger, but he can't get a word in.

DRAMA

TERRY (CONT'D)

...and yer sister-in-law...and the lady that cuts yer hair...and yer-- I digress.

The Bookie frowns with respect; in a “gotta hand it to him” kind of way.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Oo! You remimber that time you found me outside Wallace Station, butt ass naked tied to a tree?

Jimmy grips the bridge of his nose in annoyance.

JIMMY

...Yeah Terry. I ain't ask no questions then...

TERRY

...Well I ain't 'bout to tell you what happened. I-I reckon I'mma just take that one to the grave--

BOOKIE

Alright, time's up Ter--

Jimmy reacts quickly and draws his revolver. In a blink, the bookie is shot directly in the forehead. Terry yelps as he plummets barely two feet into the water.

JIMMY

Terry! God. Damn it, Terry!

Terry's screams as his head bobs to the surface. He calms.

TERRY

(with a shocked smile)

Oo!... That wasn't too bad...

Terry's head immediately gets tugged below the surface. We hear SPLASHING and the GROWL of alligators as Jimmy effortlessly grabs the rifle on his back and aims.

DRAMA

CUTTO:

INT. SALOON - DAY

Jimmy leans back in his chair and sips a beer. He grabs a folded letter on his table. It's read in Terry's voice.

TERRY (V.O.)

“Dear Jeemy, if you’re readin’ this, it means sum’s has gone horribly wrong. Just wanted to tell ya what a good friend you been to me all these years. Like when you pissed on me that one time that rattlesnake bit me in the arm. Wouldn’t be here today if you hadn’t... well I’m not here anymore...cause I’m... Irrelevant-- Ultimately I’m writin’ this letter to warn ya. Despite all this, I haven’t forgiven ya for that time in Tumbleweed...yeah, you know the one I’m talkin’ ‘bout. I’m hauntin’ ya Jeemy...for the rest of yer life... Love Terry.”

Jimmy takes another sip from his beer and looks over the letter one more time before folding it back up, and placing it on the table. His eyes shift from the letter, to in front of him.

We see Terry sitting on the opposite side of the table, sopping wet. He looks at the letter on the table like a child who knows they’re in trouble.

JIMMY

Postman said you was cryin’ when you dropped this off for me...

Jimmy sighs, and continues.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

I promised myself I was done wichyou, Terry...

Terry looks away as he says, to himself, but loud enough for Jimmy to hear him...

TERRY

That’s whatchyou said last month too...

JIMMY

Listen here Terry. I'mma give it to ya straight--lay it on thick for ya. We've had the law on our tail for years now. Your head is plastered on just 'bout every bounty poster from here to Cripple Creek.

TERRY

Yeh thas right.

JIMMY

Right. And I got a wife now, Terry. I can't come savin' you every time you go hootin' and hollerin'. I'm done--I'm out.

TERRY

...Right, right. I'm--I'm sorry Jeemy. I promise, I'll--I'll git my act together.

Terry notices a WOMAN across the saloon. He gives her a flirty wink. Jimmy looks sternly at him. Terry looks back at Jimmy, trying to hide his excited smile.

TERRY (CONT'D)

(subtly nodding towards the woman)

That's Marietta.

Jimmy, disappointedly shakes his head and finishes the last sip of his beer. While Terry's focused on Marietta, Jimmy gets up and heads out of the Saloon.

When Terry refocuses, he notices Jimmy's gone. He shouts to Jimmy's back, now barely visible past the Saloon doors.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Wait, Jimmy!

(mischievously smirking)

You say you got a wife now?

Last Goodbyes

Lily Logan



Groom

Noah Rust

On his wedding day, he wore a tie
with Winnie the Pooh on it
One arm supporting himself with a cane

The semitruck should've killed him
It was heaven's match
that the devil won.

The truck bore out the driver's quadrant
He sustained critical injuries
but he fought
as if he had something to live for.

He fought
like he was innocent
He fought
like he was guilty
But either way
he fought
like he wasn't finished yet.

On his wedding day, he wore a tie
with Winnie the Pooh on it
and I am reminded
of the little girl
with blood on her thighs
as he smiles
and his wife does too.

The Caged Bird

Kayla Elfers

My Papa's house has been quiet for over fifteen years. The still of the silence encompasses me. I take in the smell of musk that lingers on the walls.

My Papa's bird, Marlin, screeches and screams as if he's in complete agony. This poor bird, hidden in a cage inside an abandoned bedroom, and his only friend is my Papa. Marlin does not scream because he's hidden, he screams because he wants to see someone other than the man who takes care of him.

I walk over to the high pitched screaming machine and he stops instantly. His feathers-- only on his head, the rest of them pile on top of one another at the bottom of the cage. Marlin looks cold. He shivers in curiosity as to how someone different stands in front of him. I wonder if he knows I'm the same little girl that used to get him dancing by singing to him. I quietly sing the song I used to sing to him and he comes towards me with widened eyes. He bites the cage with his grayish beak. After a moment he flies down to eat some food. I shift my focus to the outside of the cage.

My uncle's bedroom. The caged bird lives in my caged uncle's bedroom. My sadness ignites my curiosity to look through the room. I open a drawer. I find a small compact and costume foundation. I look in his closet and I see his old sneakers jumbled on the bottom, and the same all-black outfits that hang on the top of the closet. I go over to his night stand and pick up his cologne--my uncle's favorite cologne that he'd always wear before stopping by to see my brother and I. I see the outdated television and the DVD player right next to it. My uncle always loved watching movies, especially the ones he could rent out from the library. I smile with teary eyes and I focus my gaze into the white wall across from me; it's the same wall he punched a hole into a few years ago before his hands were placed in chains.

Marlin starts mirroring my every movement as I move across the room. This bird is trapped in another man's cage. Marlin stands on his stick, unaware of what this room was and is. Marlin does not know my uncle's demons--even I don't know all of them. The demons I know of are what make me want to shriek and scream in this cage of a room. I close my eyes for a split second and I smile as I think of the happiness my uncle brought to the family. He used to pick me up and throw me into the air.

NON-FICTION

He showed me how to make pizza from scratch. He loved cooking food.

When I was younger I never noticed the teardrop tattoos on his face, I only noticed the jokes he'd tell at the kids' table. But I got older. I notice the teardrops tattooed on his face, his missing teeth and his lies. The lies are what I notice the most. He's not a bad person, he's just a good person who has made bad decisions. The life he leads now was never his intention when he decided to try something with a bunch of his friends back in 1988. If he knew he would live in a cage for the majority of his life, would he change? Or does he enjoy being caged?

The bird in the cage was screaming for help. He wanted company, he wanted love. Marlin was never a bad bird, maybe a tad annoying but not enough to be bad. He was and is important. He deserves to fly through the house every hour of the day, and he deserves to have his feathers back. But his feathers are ones that can never grow back to the way they used to be on his body. So here he stands trembling in his own vulnerability, hoping to find some warmth from my presence. I feel for Marlin but he's the one that decided to pick off all of his feathers. Maybe he thought he had to pick off his feathers to be noticed by someone other than my Papa, or to see what he could accomplish on his own. Maybe he picked off his feathers because that's the only skill he thought he had.

I say goodbye to Marlin and he seems so sad but he understands that people don't stay in that room for a long time. I walk to the den to say goodbye to my Papa. I say a prayer in my mind as I leave, may God free these caged birds soon.

Birdnap

Khang Trinh



Where Esmeralda Sings

Alexis Santos

I think I have a Honduran grandfather.
He carried my dad on his back across a river
and left him on the other side for the fish to feed on him.
They would eat away at anything that looked like cowardice
until he was a castaway bottle formed of sea-glass,
that I can put to my eye when I want to see
what it means to be a man with the morals of a Mayan Sea Catfish. My
dad is a bottle
formed of sea glass and there are forgotten Honduran cities all down
his neck, like
Yoro, where small silver fish fall from the sky during monsoons,
where people can turn
their umbrellas inside out if they have families to feed. I look out
through my father
and from the bottom, past the city of raining fish, and past the gold
rings of his
mother's left hand
that clink and clank inside him when he's shaken good enough,
and past the green mountain iguanas being turned on a spit roast,
from the glass bottom of my father,
I see my grandfather's back as he crossed the river home.

My Name is Jordan Kinde

Jamie Perrin

I'm in a room I don't know. That's not unusual, but it's cozy and that is unusual. I can see I'm in a bedroom, laying on a bed, there are red dusty curtains over the windows and a dresser in the corner with half open empty drawers.

Something feels off. It's warm here, not the perpetual chill that's constant inside Catharsis. I throw the blankets off of me, covering the other side of the bed, covering the dent there. I get up. I stretch a little, I'm a little sore, but that's not unusual. I'm wearing an oversized shirt and basketball shorts. It's comfortable. I open the door, it's quiet. I step out of the room into some sort of beach house.

There are windows everywhere, but they are all covered in curtains, only the faint glow of outside light shines through. In front of me to the left a white door, beside that a living room and rows of windows all still covered. It's all very open. Beside the living room is the kitchen, behind that an open door leading to a bathroom then a whole wall made up of more windows and then back to where I am at the last wall.

There's a boy sitting at the counter. I know him. No. I don't. I don't know him. He has curly long brown hair, it could use a cut. He's tall and pale, the circles under his eyes are dark. "Hey Jordan," he smiles up at me, the boy at the counter. He knows my name, I don't know him.

"Who are you?" This must be some test. Catharsis loves their tests. I've recently been captured by Catharsis, recently been ripped from my life of rescuing people from Catharsis. I became the victim.

The boy has paused, his eyes squinting slightly and his breath catches. "What do you mean?" His eyes are a familiar brown. Familiar? No, I don't know him. I know that I don't know him.

"Where am I and why are we here?" What test is this?

"Jordan, it's the safe house... we just got here. We escaped Catharsis. Are you—" "I don't know who you are." I snap at him. I feel this need to fight, to escape. To continue my plans to break out of Catharsis. Catharsis studies our powers.

"Jordan, listen—" he starts walking toward me.

"No," I hold up my hands. "Just answer my questions." Do not walk near me. "I remember trying to escape from Catharsis, I remember getting

FICTION

caught, I remember..." I falter, I just... don't remember things. It is like there are whole missing gaps of time within my memories. "How did I escape Catharsis?" I can try believe for maybe a second that I'm free. I trust this boy for some reason.

"We met there, I helped you escape." He says. "You don't remember... Jordan..." He trails off. I've lost focus. One of the curtains is not fully covering the window and outside the window is a stretch of blue.

"That's the ocean," his voice is so quiet now. It feels... right. But nothing here is right. I run to the window and open the door beside it brushing by the curtains. I step out onto the back porch. It is the beach, and then the ocean. There are stairs that go down to the beach. To the sand. To freedom.

"No, no, no," his arms wrap around me, and he drags me back into the house. He kicks the door shut behind us. I don't struggle out of his grasp for a moment, he's warm, sturdy. I break away and back into the kitchen. He doesn't fight me.

"Jordan, listen—"

"Don't talk to me." I hiss at him. I don't know him. He's keeping me trapped here it is Catharsis. I'm a prisoner I'm—

"Listen, I know it's weird—" the boy says. It is like he is trying to reason with me. To calm me.

"Weird?" I snap.

"We escaped from Catharsis two days ago. We came here. We can't go outside because we can't be seen, we don't know if they're looking for us, but we expect that they are. You don't remember any of this?" I shake my head and he continues. "My name is Theo, we're... we're friends. You can trust me." Usually I can never tell when people are sad, but I can tell that in the way is eyes squint and his breathing is alternating between being too quick or him forgetting to breathe, he's upset. "You..." He trails off for a moment before resuming. His voice is even quieter now. "Jordan you had to use your powers a lot to escape. But you should remember..." he whispers it. To himself. "It's fine." Theo adds in, louder, but too quickly as though interrupting his own thoughts, keeping things from me.

"What do you mean by that?" I ask. I can tell that he isn't going to answer, so I use other ways to get information.

He was okay. Yesterday he knew more. Usually it's just confusion, never full memories gone... I can hear him thinking it. His thoughts pointing out what he is not saying out loud.

What do you mean? I say inside his head. I feel a pause in his mind, then clarity, anxiety, terror.

Stop. He's pleading. "When you use your powers it damages your

FICTION

mind.” He speaks quickly now and I can hear his panic in his head, his realization. “When we were imprisoned and they were experimenting on us you used your magic a lot more, but you used them so much more when we were escaping.” Theo shifts his weight between his feet. “These last few days while on the run, you’ve been using your powers to monitor the minds of people around us, and get us to safely.” And by doing that we caused my mind to deteriorate. “I’m sorry,” Theo stares at me.

Now when you use your powers you’re starting to forget more and more. I can see in his mind that I used to just forget for a moment where I was or what I was doing, forget recent conversations, but then I’d remember them again. Now, now I don’t. I can see memories in Theo’s mind of us together, but I do not remember them from my own perspective.

I have a headache. I feel it forming, and swelling, the pain matching the beat of my heart with it’s thrumming.

I shake my head. I don’t want to see him looking like this, so distraught and broken, I can tell he knows me well. We are friends. I drop my eyes to the floor. My magic is destroying me. “We’re going to fix you,” Theo says.

I’m losing focus. My headache has reached migraine proportions.

Theo is sad, so sad. I don’t remember knowing him, but I can tell he’s breaking apart. My stomach clenches, I’m stressed, I’m scared, I’m hungry, but that pain is nothing compared to what I’m feeling in my head.

* * *

I’m in a bedroom, laying on a bed. There are red dusty curtains over a set of large windows and there’s a dresser in the corner. There is a notebook on the bedside table next to me. I pick it up. I don’t know where I am. Maybe it’s a Catharsis test. I flip to the first page and begin reading. *Jordan Kinde. That is your name. This entry is being written on April 3rd. We escaped from Catharsis (evil people) on March 27th. You have anterograde amnesia. I’m writing this for you, to help you. You cannot use your powers, it degrades your brain. Please do not use—*

I stop reading. It’s just the ravings of a lunatic. But it terrifies me. I know I’m not Jordan Kinde. That isn’t my name. I know that, Jordan is the name I would want, but could never have. I don’t remember how I got here, I don’t know where I am.

I want to scream, but I’m too scared. I hear the scream echoing inside my head, but I don’t release it. I throw the book across the room. It hits the wall and drops to the floor, one corner of the notebook dents slightly.

There’s a knock on the door and I jump.

“Yes?” My voice is a squeak, I clear my throat for a lower sound. The door opens bringing in a light from outside and a boy. I examine the boy,

FICTION

he is tall and pale with long curly brown hair, he has dark circles under his eyes. He'd be cute if he wasn't so haunted. "Are you okay?"

"I... don't know."

"You screamed," he tells me.

"No." That was in my head.

"Jordan, you can communicate with people in their minds." He says it outloud, but I realize that I can also hear it in his head just before he says it. It creates this weird echo. It makes my head ache.

"That's not my name," I'm stubborn. That's something. I anchor myself to it, to this part of me I understand. This is who I am, I am stubborn. I'm just lost right now, but I'm stubborn, so I'll be okay.

It is your name. "You have to stop talking in my head."

I don't know how! I can feel that I am. I am inside his head. I don't know how to stop this, if it even is a thing. I focus. My fear and panic and shaking hands don't help.

I love you. I hear it in his head. I don't know him.

"What's happening?" I need to know. I'm shaking. I pull my legs up to my chest and wrap my arms around them.

"You have... you have..." but he can't bring himself to finish it. But I can hear it in his head, finishing what he can't. *You have amnesia. You're forgetting yourself.*

* * *

You have amnesia. It's painted across the wall, above the door across from the bed I lay in. And it's true. I think. I don't know why, but I feel like I know this to be true. I feel tired, drained. I feel scared and broken. Yet I don't know why, and so I can believe I have amnesia. There's a notebook beside my bed. There's a dent on one of the corners.

My name is — no. That isn't my name. It can't be my name. I hate that name. And... Yes. I pull my shirt up over my head. And I have scars. These scars that cross over my chest. And that's something. I do have amnesia, but I do have these scars, and that's worth a lot.

I stand. I leave my shirt off. Because this is something. I'm confused, I don't know who I am. Yet I feel right, because I'm okay somehow. I step to the door and open it. There are no locks. No squeaking, the door just opens. There's a kitchen, and a whole lot of windows. They're covered in curtains, but it doesn't make me feel closed in.

"Hey," a boy sits at the counter, facing me. I don't know him.

"Hello." My voice is higher than I might want it to be. But it doesn't sway my confidences.

He watches me. He's uneasy. His eyes are slightly narrowed and his shoulders are stiff. "When did this happen?" I ask, and I guess he knows

FICTION

what I'm referring to because he responds.

"You had the surgery several months ago. It was before I met you, before you were captured."

"Okay," I can believe it. He hesitated, but for some reason I believe him. Maybe because I know him, that somehow even with my amnesia I can still trust him.

"How... are you?" He picks up a glass of water and just holds it in front of his face. Peering around it to still see me.

"I feel great. Though I guess I should be more worried." But I'm not. I'm too happy. I cross to the counter and sit at a stool across from the boy. "Who are you, and also what is my name?"

"I'm Theo, and you're Jordan. You changed your name more recently, after being captured."

"Jordan." I whisper it. I can't help but smile.

He sets down the glass, stops hiding behind it. "Can I ask you what the last thing you remember is?"

I think... It's weird because I know that there must be chunks of time missing. I know there are so many things that I cannot remember.

I remember feeling scared. I pull up the memory. The most recent thing I know. "I was playing with my sister when an alarm went off. So I grabbed her hand to run her to safety. And..." I pause. I think. "I..." I don't know. I don't know if I got my sister to safety. I don't know what happened since then. So many things have happened since then.

"Jordan," he says. He stands and moves to go around the counter. Then doesn't. He waits far away from me.

"Yeah?"

"I have to tell you something without making you freak out because if you freak out then what I'm trying to warn you about could hurt you."

"I don't think anything could freak me out right now." I'm too happy. I cross my arms over my chest. More of just to have them there rather than wanting to cross my arms. "I'd hold you to that, but I'm still going to worry."

"Tell me. What's the worst that can happen?" My smile fades. I've allowed myself to be distracted and in reality I don't know where I am, or who this boy is. Or where I am, or anything. "You could lose more of your memory."

"Tell me."

"You can speak to people through your mind. You do it more often when you're scared, or nervous, it's a mental connection, you reach out to the person. When you use your powers you damage your own mind. It has destroyed years of your memory."

FICTION

"Years of my life are gone..." I do feel older, taller, I am different.

"You're calm right now. If you can find a way to never use your powers then you will stop losing your memories. You can beat this, there is a way." He looks hopeful. His eyes are wide, he's smiling, but only slightly.

"I'll find a way." I say, with certainty, because I want to stay like this. I'm happy like this. A smile flashes over his face and then we're both just standing there grinning, but for very different reasons, and somehow it makes me feel close to him.

* * *

I haven't used my powers in three weeks. I'm awake in the bed I now recognize. Next to the boy I now know. I have three weeks worth of new memories. I know things now, I'm learning things. Theo is filling me in on things about me, and about him. I love learning about him.

Theo has powers too. He can move objects with his mind, and he gets damaged too by using his powers. For him it's very different. He doesn't lose his memories, but he hurts his body. If Theo moves a bowl with his mind, he'll get weak. If he moved a couch or something larger he'll sink to the ground or collapse. If he keeps using his powers after that he might just pass out. So far he doesn't know if he will have any longer lasting detrimental effects, but based on how awful my amnesia is he might.

There's a noise outside. I sit up. My movement wakes Theo next to me. I couldn't sleep and was thinking about my lost memories, but there was definitely something outside. All the curtains are drawn tightly shut, as they always are.

My heart pounds and I touch Theo's hand, his fingers wrap tightly around mine. He says nothing, but I suppose he can tell something is off. We have this down. If I don't use my powers I don't lose my memory. I believe Theo, and I know enough about how to avoid my powers. I have a few weeks of new memories and whatever is outside could jeopardize that.

I've learned a lot too. About Theo and about the things that I've forgotten about myself. He hates being trapped inside, he paces the halls daily, and only stops if I grab him and hold onto him. He fears that one day he'll realize just how badly his power could hurt him. Not everyone is as lucky as me, some just die. I've just regressed backward. But I'm happy. We're happy. Until this sound outside in the middle of the night.

"What do we do?" I whisper. I focus on making sure I only say it outloud, I can never use my powers, I don't want to lose him.

There is a scrape then a grinding noise. The shatter of breaking glass makes my arm hair stand up. I focus on keeping my thoughts my own. Theo rises, his hand drops from mine. It's silent for too long. I stand and find my way to Theo. The room is dark, but I manage to find his hand and hold on

FICTION

tightly. Maybe it's people who are raiding the house for food. Though our beach house is pretty far away from anything else. Which is a long way to travel with hopes of stealing food or supplies. Then there's a crack and our door is thrown open. They have guns. People stand in the doorway to our room. The lights are on out there and the lights pool into our room.

The dresser beside the door rocks then springs forward. It smashes into the first group of Catharsis people and blocks the doorway from the others for a moment. Theo drags me away from the door. Toward the window.

Right now, Theo knows me a lot better than I know him. Yet, for him I'm willing to lose anything. We only need to keep running, to get out of the window, to get away from them. In my current memories I've never trained myself how to reach out with my mind, just how not to, but right now we need to escape.

I reach out and I can feel their minds in mine. I'm surprisingly calm. I could lose everything, but I stay calm, clutching Theo's hand and working to open the windows, tangling in the curtains in our haste. We can get through them and then we'll be on the beach, in the sand.

All we need to do is open fire and kill them all. They will not escape again. I wonder how last night's hockey game ended. Trying to run to the beach, there's nowhere to hide. Their mental voices are all jumbled together. They're all just people at their jobs, people running around and rounding up children for work. But it will destroy us.

I can feel where they plan to go in their minds. Someone helping the wounded, others are reaching for the dresser. "You're going to have to jump." Theo tells me speaking out through the open window.

"You first," I insist. I release his hand, directing him forward. A headache splits across my head. He stumbles, I catch him. His arm wraps around me and he holds onto me, he's stopped moving toward the window. We're still for a moment. Then I pick out Theo's thoughts. "No!" I shout it too late. He slams the door shut. The Catharsis employees are thrown back and he slams the bed in front of the door. Theo's wrist is tight on my own. Warm and comforting despite everything.

"Run," he whispers. He tries to push me away from him, toward the window. I focus for a moment on the contents of his head. On his fear, on his dedication to me. He wouldn't leave me, but he's asking me to leave him. I wouldn't. There is no point anyway. I could fight my headache, drag him out the window, but now I read the people that are outside too.

My headache worsens. The pain in my head overtaking my ability to use my powers. Theo's too weak to move. I sit on the floor. Allow him to rest his head on my shoulder. I'd rather stay in his thoughts, but I don't.

FICTION

I go to the enemy, straight into the minds of Catharsis. I scream out an attack, and before I collapse I feel that I've injured them. It won't be enough though.

* * *

I wake up inside a white room. The walls are white, and blank. There are no windows. The bed is scratchy and I sit on top of it, with no blankets. My feet are cold and I'm wearing a cloth gown. I'm wearing a plastic bracelet too, it's tight on my wrist. There's a number written on it. 42357. Then there's a bar code, and then nothing else. A door opens and a woman walks in. "Good morning Jordan."

Jordan? Is that my name? Should I recognize that name? Should I feel any sense of who I am? Or who this woman is? Should I know where I am?

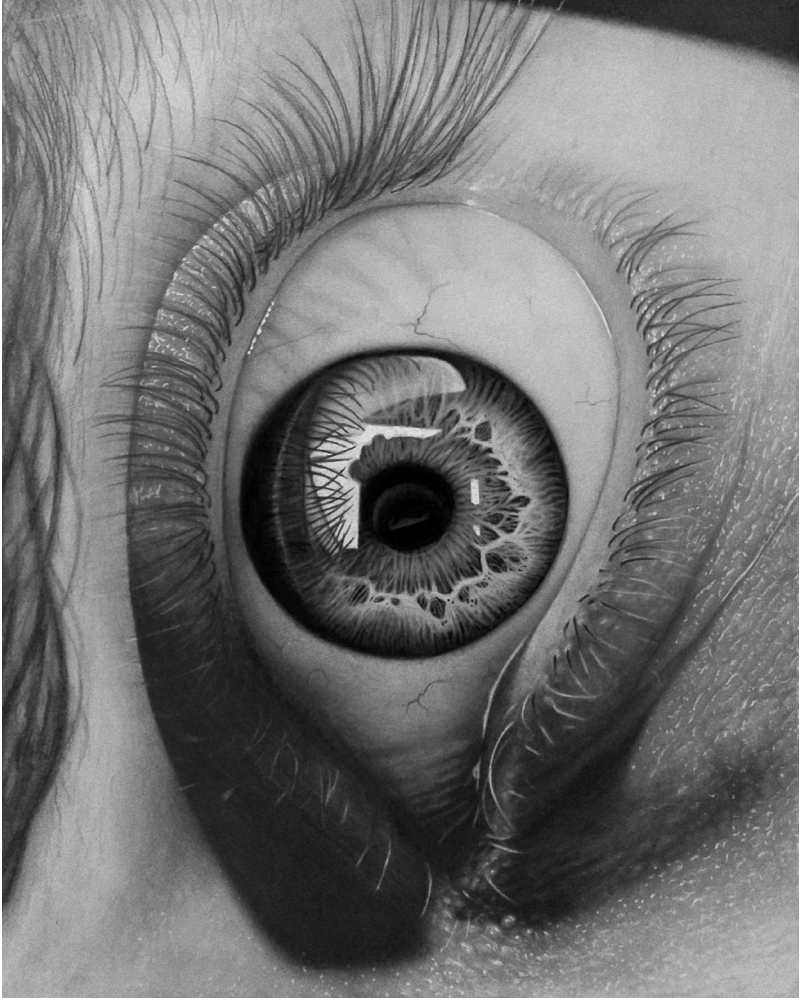
"Where am I?" My voice is a horse whisper. That feeling from screaming and screaming. Though I cannot remember ever screaming. I cannot remember anything.

"You're somewhere safe," she tells me with a smile.

I don't feel safe.

Kelsey White

Eye 1



My Choice

Christian Aversano

*First and foremost I need to acknowledge
You lifted me from a sunken hole and for that I am thankful
Truly*

This month I made a choice
A choice that might seem a little crazy, to at least some A choice that could
probably fuck my life up, if I don't move swiftly But
it's a choice I need to make
Not just for her, but myself
My humanity
I don't expect you to understand
I really don't.

I know you're looking out for me
You're my bro, my buddy, someone who's got my back I
know you don't wanna see me like those people you know I
know you don't want me to end up in your situation I know
you're going through it, I know

I could be impulsive, maybe crazy, probably manic
I'll acknowledge it
We're all hypocrites at heart
And what I've realized, not everything has to make sense
Sometimes there isn't a reasonable explanation
For anything, really.

I know you want me to do better
But the truth is, for once, I think I'm gonna be ok.
No disrespect, but I'm not your child
And I don't wanna feel like one
I might be a little crazy, but I know I'm capable
I'm not asking for you to agree with me
Nor do I expect you to even support my decisions

I just ask you to let go of my hand
And let me be me
Because I think I got this.
Respectfully.

Weekend Review

Brendan Lentini

It was April, sophomore year, and AP tests were right around the corner. I had only one AP test to take, yet I still was stricken with fear over it. I knew I would not be able to get the necessary 3 or higher on AP European History to get college credits for it. The encyclopedia of a review book I went out of my way to purchase served no purpose, a slab of dead trees and wasted ink. In my sophomore class of 230 kids, only a small fraction chose to take the standard global as opposed to taking the advanced placement counterpart, European History. I anticipated failure from the get go, and soon my fear turned into relief. So long as you took the course and the test, your transcript showed that you had taken the magnificent and more challenging class, regardless of your score. That was my rationale, and with it came a sense of ease.

With failure as good of an answer to me as passing, the far more minimal strategy of the two being to not study, I had made up my mind. “Yo,” I said to my friends surrounding me, “Let’s be out somewhere.” A small group of us gathered in the back of the AP reviewing room, the only difference being that we chose to be here today, even though none of us really wanted to. It was a Saturday, and the school offered students of all AP classes and sections to come review. I was with a hodgepodge of friends from all sections of AP Euro, eager to alleviate my tiresome day.

“Whatchu tryna do? This review is lowkey whack.” Ranvir replied. Ranvir was a tall Indian kid, with a perfectly lined up bowl haircut. He had primed himself often, going to great lengths to coordinate his hypebeast outfit. A glimmering diamond earring carefully skewered his left ear, a recent addition. Despite this well groomed exterior, he was an oafish yet smart kid. He was always screwing around and saying something dumb yet could pass the test with flying colors with no review.

“I don’t know, let’s just go to the gym or something.” Amardeep spoke up, the white laces of a leather football peering out of his backpack. Amardeep and Ranvir managed to be two brilliant students with vastly contrasting personalities and appearances. While Ranvir’s hair was straight and flat, Amardeep’s was much curlier and wild, a two inch thick hedge mounted atop his forehead. His eyebrows were unkempt and almost formed a unibrow, the opposite of Ranvir’s recently threaded eyebrows. Amardeep’s appearance was easily outshined by his personality; he was a sociable person, known by all for a plethora of things. Most people knew

NON-FICTION

him as the kid who showed up on the first day of Sophomore year on a longboard wearing a Minion (from *Despicable Me*) costume. Those around him easily recognized his plucky attitude. Despite overloading himself with AP classes and outside college courses, he always remained friendly and stress-free. He could afford to skip review and goof off in the gym, and was more than eager to do so.

“Bet, let’s just go one at a time, tell some of the other guys too.” I remarked, assuming a leadership position amid my group of deviants. I’m sure it would look suspicious if a group of ten guys gets up from the back corner and leaves mid-way through review, toting along backpacks and loose papers. We were already on the fourth floor, and our gym was just on the opposite end of the hall. We scurried over, the typically cramped hallways now barren. The sound of rubber soles squeaking across the linoleum tiles echoed through the hall as twenty feet marched towards our gym.

We walked in a line, like a game of snake, where the head of the snake had realized that our gym was locked. The metal door, with a rectangular window in the upper half, blocked our entry. Peering through the window, all that was visible within the dark gym was a cracked wall, with deep indents from where balls smashed into it countless times.

“Damn, now what’re we gonna do?” Ranvir asked, his question was to everyone but his eyes looked towards me for the answer.

“Let’s go to the other gym.” I said with ease. Our school’s building was divided into two schools, with us occupying the 3rd and 4th floor. We were the Academy of American Studies, with a fitting bald eagle as our mascot. Our rival, Newcomers, the Lions, took up the basement through second floors. They had a gym far greater than ours. Our gym had been composed of a sea of wooden tiles, like a dance studio, each one about three inches by five inches. Our gym also had two pillars located in the middle of both sides that often interfered with basketball games. Of the 22 work out machines we had, only one worked by the time I graduated; the pull-up bar. Our sports teams were required to practice in the Newcomers gym due to the clear inability to practice in our own. Even our basketball hoops were messed up, either not at regulation height or bent and hanging off the wall.

Heads turned and the group muttered their own variations of the unanimous decision we reached. ‘Aii, bet, I’m with it, let’s be out’, and any other way to say let’s go was said, and we trudged down the staircase immediately adjacent to our gym’s entrance. I ran up ahead, scheming on how to enter the gym. It had only occurred to me now that the door to the other gym was probably locked as well. I ran down a bland grey hallway

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lined with painted beige radiators and empty bulletin boards. This was the grand entrance to their gym, where a star athlete could come running down the long strip and burst into the gym in glory. I charged down, ready to burst the joint metal doors open. Instead, I was greeted with a metal blockade, seemingly as immovable as the last. My friends had not yet reached my position yet, making whatever foolish pit stop to the bathroom or to screw around in the hallways. The two doors were locked, but were able to wiggle slightly. If maneuvered the right way, the middle of the two opens up to a small gap, nothing big enough to slip through, though. I paused momentarily, unsure of what I was doing or how I even got two locked doors to budge.

I began to rapidly shake the two doors, the muscles in my arms tensing up. My fingers wrapped around the two mirroring handles as I forcefully shoved the door open and slammed it backwards over and over. I don't know why, but this just felt like the right thing to do. I braced myself, putting my right foot forward and redistributing my weight to properly force the door open. I continued to seize the doors until they flew open. The force of the doors opening was enough to make me lose balance, stumbling forward a few steps. For the first time ever, I managed to break into the other school's gym. Just as I had closed the doors, guarding the path to restrict entry to only those I approve of, a flurry of my friends came.

"Yo, what the fuck?" Ranvir asked, his eyebrows arched up and his mouth remained open as he was lost in thought. "Bro, how'd you get in there?" He tried to push the doors open but to no avail. The doors had locked on them, and I was the only one who knew exactly how to manipulate the doors into opening.

"Just try to open it, bro, I just pushed it and walked in." I replied back, deviously. I was aware the doors could not open, but it was still fun to mess with my friends and watch their reactions. Ranvir continued to argue with the door, incapable of getting it open despite how much he pleaded. Amardeep, however, used his intuition, aware that I must have gotten in some other way.

"Can you just let me in?" Amardeep replied with exaggerated anguish and defeat, speaking for the congealed mob behind him. Succumbing to his requests, I opened the doors, allowing him and all the other kids who deemed review unnecessary into the gym. Their gym had two pristine glass backboards mounted to the ceiling, with a sparkling clean court to match. In the far right corner was a stairwell that connected the gym to an emergency exit on the ground floor. One kid pulled out a basketball, Amardeep grabbed his football, and our indoor scrimmage began.

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Amardeep threw a deep spiral across the gym, which had a high ceiling that allowed for a second floor balcony to exist overarched from the left side of the court. The wall underneath it was lined with the words NEWCOMERS and LIONS wrapped around a cartoon lion. I sprinted across the gym, relishing in the exclusivity of this occasion, and caught the ball. I tossed it back, immediately growing tired of this simple exchange, and we quickly decided to play basketball instead.

All of my focus was shifted from the looming threat of AP testing to playing a pick up game of basketball. The tension that we all carried into the school initially had now been stripped from us as we began losing track of time and our surroundings. The AP review became nothing but a distant memory as each basket was made, right until the game was tied at game point. I had possession of the ball, and I surveyed the court to see who on my team was open. Amardeep was standing outside the arch, ready to take a three despite not having made a single one of his many attempts the whole game. Regardless, I passed it to him, watching in fascination as he jumped up for the final shot. His hands arched, the ball delicately spinning as he tried to drain the shot. All eyes were on the ball, gradually going closer to the net, until our immense focus was broken by the shouting security officer above us.

“Hey, what are you kids doing down there?” A female security officer, short and pudgy with a thick Romanian accent, shouted to us from the balcony. Panicking over a security guard who was unable to reach us, we sprinted towards the back door, exiting the gym and the school. We left, partly nervous due to the close encounter, but mostly excited. It was just the start of April, and there were many more weekend review sessions to attend.

Angry Lake

Carol Thompson



91st edition

RESTORATION

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