



GREAT LAKE REVIEW

SPRING 2022

GREAT LAKE REVIEW

SUNY OSWEGO'S LITERARY MAGAZINE
SPRING 2022

92nd EDITION

WITHER

The Great Lake Review is open for submissions throughout the year.
We publish a new edition each Fall and Spring semester.

Please submit your fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry, and art pieces as
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GREAT LAKE REVIEW

SUNY Oswego's Literary Magazine
SPRING 2022

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The Creative Writing Department and Donna Steiner (We'll miss you!)

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We're nice people!

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Rift

Noah Helion

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

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

THANK YOU RIVER'S END!

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Time Stands Still

Shannon Reals



The Lovers Consider the Phrase “everything happens for a reason” While Brushing Their Teeth

Izzy Dunning

The Lovers card means choice,
decision,
temptations from the heart

That we often don't start

The Lovers card means you or I, she, or her, they, or them, have a
sacrifice to make
in the grand scheme of things, the probability is,
it's subtle

But for The Lovers a life altering experience
is about to begin

they brush their teeth, most mornings
together,
gazing at each other in the mirror of a tiny bathroom with unfinished
floors,

But for these Lovers, their love game is
coming to a close

The Lovers find themselves unwilling to say “everything happens for
a reason”
because they know the universe has never turned them wrong
before,
however, is it possible the divine, got it wrong?

The Lovers must decide, to love or to let
love go

Because when you draw the lover's card, you better take hold
of those you love and cherish,
as the world tears at least a half from the whole.

Chilled Hands

Tessa Uline

My dad was not a very physical person. He valued his own space and respected other people's bubbles. If he came into contact with one of us, it was for a silly reason; swinging our clasped hands as we would cross a street, wrestling with one of my brothers. All pretty fun, light-hearted stuff.

That's how I knew something was wrong when he asked me to sit with him and hold his hand one warm June night. I wasn't going to say no to him—we knew he was dying, and in any case, he was my dad. Even if he'd been at peak health, I would've sat with him for a bit just to exist.

This night, he was in his battered tan recliner, feet up and legs bundled in blankets. The television was on Food Network, but it could be difficult to hear at times due to some of his medical equipment's persistent droning. Draped over the back of the recliner was a light blue towel, there to try and catch any drool my dad would miss with his own hand towel as he slept.

I sat with my dad, slipping my warm hand into his freezing cold one. The air conditioning wasn't on and it was fairly muggy still—to this day, I still question why his hands were as cold as they were. It could have been the lack of muscle across his entire body (with, for some reason, the exclusion of his left cheek, which was exceptionally swollen). Maybe, though, his body knew what was coming before my mom and I did.

He was basically a collection of bones with a thin sheet of skin stretched across the framework of his body. You could see where his forearm connected to his upper arm, the tendons straining to keep everything held together. It was deeply upsetting to see as a 14-year-old, but I can't say it was unexpected. Seven years of cancer will take a toll on the body, no matter the amount of time spent in remission.

As I sat with my father, he asked me questions about my day. He couldn't speak well, so his primary form of communication with me was by whiteboard. He asked what I had done and wanted me to remind him of who I had been with, listening to the best of his ability. Although his speaking was near impossible to understand, his writing wasn't much clearer. He took his time writing the words, but as he

did, his boney hand trembled with the effort of holding the dry-erase marker. It hurt to see him in such an unfamiliar, vulnerable position.

I had always seen my dad as a strong individual. Years prior, he would go to chemotherapy one day just to mow the lawn and change the oil in his truck the next. He continuously reassured me that he would be alright, that he would kick cancer's ass over and over again. He never let his guard down, and he never let on once that he was scared of what could happen.

Seeing him in this frail, exhausted state made something inside of me break. With his chilled hand clasped in mine, I really took in who was in front of me. He was hardly able to keep his wrapped head up, spit continuously slipping past his lips onto the hand towel draped over his shoulders. The blood red blanket across his legs was barely concealing the state of his legs. They were small and barely held together by the remaining muscle, similar to his arms. The shirt that once fit him snugly was now hanging loose over his shoulders, his glasses clinging to his face. The only thing keeping them in place was the compression bandages and gauze wrapped along the length of his head.

Others may have seen his physicalities as disgusting, weak, or adverse. While his state of being definitely wasn't ideal, I realized this: he was still the strongest individual I had ever met. I knew for a fact that the pain medication was no longer working for him, and my dad had to have been so incredibly tired. To some degree, he knew what was going to happen soon. The thing was, my dad never wanted people worrying about him. Even on his last full day of life, he put others first. Part of me wanted to scream at him to reserve his energy, but the other part of me knows he did it purely out of love. He wanted my mom and I to rest assured that he loved us, and he would put us above anything else to just know how we were doing. On this day, where he could barely hold his head up, where he couldn't keep his eyes open, he focused on his child and his wife.

We sat and talked for a little over an hour, pushing whatever was to come far from our minds. I told him about what I bought that day and the adventures I'd gone on with my aunt, gesticulating with my free hand. As I spoke, I realized just how long and gray his hair had gotten. It feels like an odd thing to have noticed, but I would always visualize my father with a shaven head. It was something little me would be enraptured by, enjoying how the small amount of hair would feel texturally when I ran my fingertips over it. His hair had grown long enough to cover his head, leaving me with an unfamiliar

and uncomfortable image of my dad.

Despite the fear and general discomfort I was experiencing, I stayed with my dad until he was falling asleep. Even as he started to zone out, I took in as much as I could about his physical state. I took in the wound on his left cheek and the way he leaned his head in the opposite direction, doing his best to avoid putting pressure on the injury. I took in the plaid blue button-up he was wearing. It was undone to keep him comfortable—it wasn't very soft, but we couldn't give him much else given the state he was in. Nothing would've eased the discomfort for him.

I noticed then that even though I had been holding his hand for the better part of an hour, it was still chilled. It was almost as if the cold were seeping into my skin, gripping whatever it could get a hold of and fighting for its right to stay. It all felt incredibly unfair. My dad was still alive and breathing, draped with blankets and a warm hand gripping his. There were countless outside sources trying to make it all more tolerable for him, but it wasn't difficult to tell that our efforts weren't very beneficial.

As he started falling asleep, I felt the weight and reality of the situation settling deep in my chest. I knew that if I didn't slip away now, I mentally wouldn't be able to bring myself to go later. Reluctantly, I dragged myself off of the edge of the recliner. Sitting on the edge of a reclined chair was not good for the knees.

I said a quiet goodnight to my father before trying to slip my hand out of his. Before I could, he squeezed it with a grip I had not known possible for someone in his state. I hardly had time to process the gesture before he let my hand go, and it wasn't even 30 seconds before he had fallen asleep.

I slowly made my way out of his bedroom, going across the hall into my own. I closed the door behind me, the cold door handle reminding me too much of the hand I had held such a short time before. I pressed against one of my eyes with the palm of my hand to try and stop myself from crying before sitting down at my worn wooden desk. My computer chair would creak and groan each time I moved in it, despite the chair not even being that old.

As I sat and stared at the irritatingly cheery lavender wall ahead of me, I allowed myself time to process all that had happened in the last couple of hours. The day had been so good. I thought of my father, how he didn't deserve any of the pain he was in, and how strong he was. He was the one dying, and yet he held my hand and brought me a sense of comfort that is still difficult for me to describe to this day.

As I thought about that, I felt the tears threaten to spill again, my breathing becoming ragged and my face growing hot. I remember taking my glasses off and setting them as far away from me as I could get them, out of fear that I would break them with a vice grip if I had kept them in my hands. It was, to some degree, selfish to believe that my dad was talking to me that night for my own comfort. The knowledge that you're dying can't be easy to process, especially if you can feel it creeping up faster than you would hope. There's a very distinct chance that him talking to me that night wasn't just to bring me comfort. He knew what was happening and probably needed comforting himself. He needed to know that I was going to be okay if he let go, and he had to know I wouldn't avoid him if he needed me.

That felt like one of the biggest issues, though. I had been avoiding him since the night in April when I found out his cancer was terminal. It was too upsetting to see this person, who I had grown to see as invincible, be beaten down by something intangible. It looked like the illness had been eating him away from the inside out, debilitating him until he was rendered too weak to function. He was the shell of the person he used to be, and as self-centered as it felt, I had turned my back on him to protect myself.

Having all of this hit me at once, I didn't even try to stop the tears from flowing. I let myself cry until there was nothing left in my system to get out, simply taking a few deep breaths to ground myself before going through my nightly routine and heading to bed.

Getting into bed that night felt like the most relieving thing I could do at that moment. Without knowing what was to come, the welcoming warmth of my comforter and the weathered squish of my pillows had me feeling just a little better. My favorite stuffed animal, a tattered white bear holding a red heart who I named Buddy, was waiting in the corner of my bed to greet me. I was able to sleep in mere minutes.

The next day, I went on a day-long school trip to the Bronx Zoo. I was super excited, as going to New York City in any capacity was really rare for me. Having the opportunity to go for a full day left me rushing out the door, but before I left, I wanted to make sure my dad knew I was heading out.

I remember poking my head into my dad's room and murmuring, "Goodbye, dad. I love you." His reaction was subtle, a twitch of the hand to let me know he had heard me. Satisfied with that, I left and found as much joy in the clapping seals and waddling penguins as I could.

Around 6 in the afternoon, feeling wholly exhausted but happy with the day, we got back on the bus to head home. It had begun to rain, a sunny day suddenly sullen with clouds and a dull atmosphere nobody could quite shake. I held tight to the bulldog plush in my hands, excited to show my dad the present I had gotten for him while I was out.

When my mom picked me up, it was still dark and gloomy. The car ride home was uncomfortably quiet, something uncharacteristic for the two of us. The air felt heavy in the car as soon as I slipped in.

She told me he had passed away that night, right when the rain had begun to fall in New York City. Despite the knowing, and alternatively, the waiting, it never made the news easier for my mother and I to hear.

We let ourselves feel everything we had to feel. We barely comforted each other once we got home, going our separate ways and finding solace in the distance. I did my best to relax with one of my best friends at the time, while she talked to relatives and supported her kids. We became two souls no longer held together by a person, but by a memory.

At the very least, my last clear memory of my father was sitting by his side and spending time with him. I had gotten to hold his hand one last time.

Nine Mile

Morgan Barnett

We are three days out
From the first of spring and
Already the snowdrops
Have pushed their way up through the soil,
Delicate white petals hanging down
Like milky bells,
Guarding the treasure of
Their hidden emerald eyes.
The earth smells wet,
Like decomposition,
And odorous mud.

I went for a walk through the park today
And the creek was higher than I've ever seen it.
Then again,
Maybe this is the new normal.
It's been years since I've walked these trails.

The last time I was here,
I was the same age as the kids I see swinging together today.
They're side by side, soaring together asynchronously-
One kicks forward; the other pumps back. The chains
Clink loudly, metallic protest
You can barely hear over the sound of
Moving water, miniature rapids,
The swollen Nine Mile winding through flooded grass
And snaking out of sight.

Not so long ago I was the one kicking up wood chips
With the worn soles of my dirty sneakers,
Burning the back of my thighs
On the black rubber seat
That bakes lazy in the sun all day.

POETRY

Today,
I miss people who I don't see anymore.
The friend that I used to swing here with
Moved away,
And we haven't spoken in ten years.
Maybe longer.
Today,
I miss people who don't miss me,
And I am very much aware of this.
It causes a particular kind of jilted ache
That pulses between each of my heartbeats.
I walk through the park and try to remember
What it felt like
To be so young,
And unaware of the passing of time--
I take a moment to appreciate
The snowdrops.

Flowers

Diana MacMorris



love song for the hardwood

Anastasia West

I think I was a tree
in some burned down yesterday.

One of those weeping
Willows. Because.

I am no stranger to loss.

Lilac and brilliant
and lovely and benevolent
Because.

I know what it's like to watch the animals
hide away in the wintertime.

I think I would have
basked in the sunlight,

where you'd never take me.

I think I would have
had many rings on my trunk to match
the frost on my branches,

the nothing on my finger. I
can still feel

That hard grey loam, I think I

That cold winter of you. I

rooted myself so deep within the earth
But in the end it would be

would have weathered through to the
summer if i knew you'd be there to;

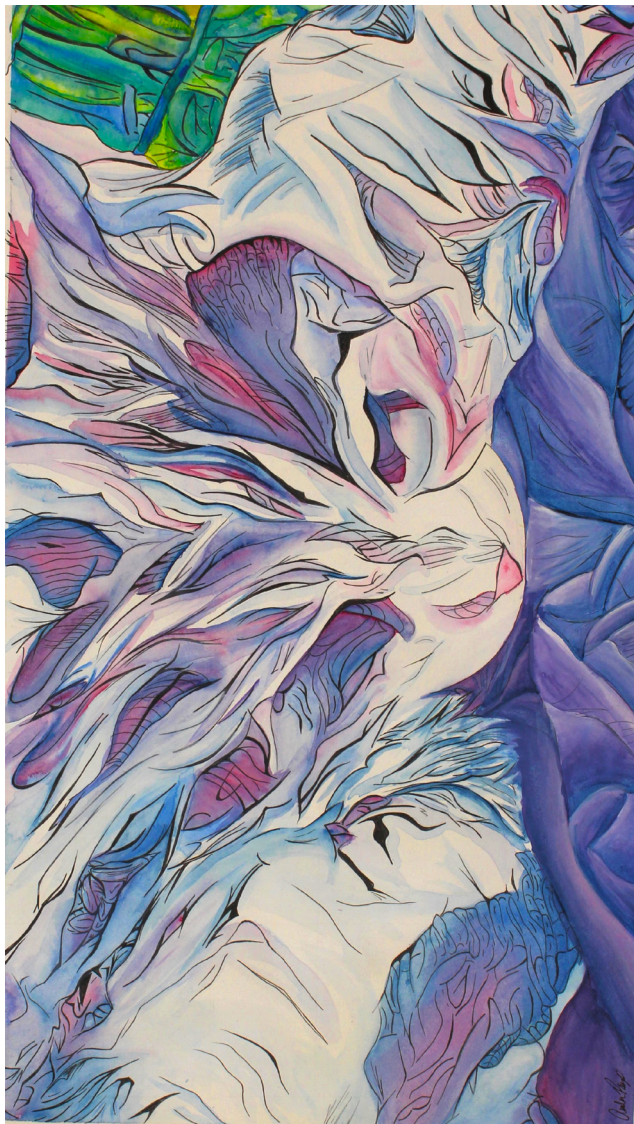
cold and unforgiving
dirt, that's all.

You, an invasive species, you

I am not a willow, and yet
I still know how to weep.

Amber Paige

Sylvester



The Birth of an Elf

Charley Benz

Late in the night, a man sneaks out of a house. He wore a red coat, red pants, and a red hat all lined with white. On his feet were two shiny black boots. He has a big white beard but his skin is graying and wrinkled. The bag he has lugged over his shoulder squirms and wiggles with muffled sounds escaping. The man walks across the lawn, his boots crunching in the snow as fat snowflakes drift lazily to the ground. He reaches a bright red sleigh that is lined with metal and gold. Reindeer are strapped up to his sleigh and paw at the ground in anticipation. Santa throws the bag into the back and then climbs in. The bag yelps and grunts, continuing to wiggle around on the floor of the sled.

“Hiyah!” He flicks the reins. Immediately, the reindeer shoot off into the sky. There are about 5 other bags in the back of the sleigh, all squirming and making noise. The opening to the most recent bag loosens and Ethan pokes his head out. His tear-soaked cheeks were painful as the bitter cold air hit his face. He is gagged and about ten years old. Clouds fall behind the sleigh but then everything becomes bright. Ethan squeezes his eyes shut, and when he opens them the Northern Lights light up the night sky. The air is significantly colder and Ethan shivers while other bags whimper and tremble. Ethan curls up and tries to get more warmth out of the sack, even though it isn’t all that thick.

The sleigh slows down to a stop, the clip-clop of the reindeer quickly fading before it becomes eerily silent. Ethan trembles in his pajamas and he tucks his bare feet under his legs as much as possible. I want my slippers, my jacket, mommy, and daddy. Ethan hides in his bag but can’t sit still. One by one, the other bags get pulled out and dropped down out of the sleigh. When Santa grabs Ethan’s bag, he notices it is open and Santa raises an eyebrow.

“You certainly have been a naughty boy this year Ethan.” Santa’s voice is raspy, as if he smoked all his life. He pulls Ethan out of the bag by his pajama shirt and throws him onto the

floor. Ethan’s arms and legs are bound and he grunts, fresh tears falling. “Don’t cry. Do you know how much you make your parents cry?” He raises a very bushy eyebrow and Ethan’s eyes widen. Ethan shakes his head and sniffs, his breathing coming close to

hyperventilation. Santa sighs and

gestures for someone to come over from the side. A team of five 10-year-old children, all dressed as elves with artificial smiles, walk into the room and grab the bags. They pull the bag out of the room in the same direction they came in.

“You’ve always been a trouble maker Ethan. You bully other kids, act like a brat with your parents, practically bullying them into taking care of you.” Santa leans forward, his breath reeking of eggnog. He jabs one wrinkly long finger into Ethan’s shoulder and grits his graying teeth. Ethan shakes his head again and scoots back, only for Santa to step on his chest and hold him down. “You aren’t going anywhere, Ethan. You’re going to work here for me. You need to learn the value of hard work.” Saliva flies off of Santa’s lip as he speaks. He takes another swig of eggnog and grins.

“Oh, don’t worry. With a bit of Christmas magic, your parents are going to have a loving son for the next year. They won’t miss you.” Santa chuckles and Ethan starts screaming and crying against the gag. Ethan desperately squirms under Santa’s boot as Santa’s beard lowers into a frown. He grabs Ethan by the shirt once again and starts walking out of the room. Santa’s boots make a loud thud with each step. “Time to make you an obedient elf.” Ethan screams and cries through the gag as he gets pulled into a dark hallway. His cries fade, and then the thudding fades, leaving an empty eerie silence in the room.

From down the hallway the sound of loud clanging, metal against metal echoes. Faint shouts and rushed footsteps grow louder, and bare feet slapping on the metal floor are followed by heavy thuds. Ethan comes sprinting back into the dark and cold room. His feet are turning blue but his cheeks are flushed. Santa chases after him in a swaying run, but Ethan is lighter and faster. His wrists and ankles are bruised from the ropes that held him tight but Ethan pays no mind as he turns down the hallway the reindeer went to.

“You brat! Stop him!” Santa’s words slur as he runs and 5 different elves run out from behind him. Their smiles seem glued to their faces but their eyes are glassy with unshed tears. The bells on their shoes and hats jingle with each movement as they rush ahead after Ethan. Ethan, however, has gotten to the reindeer in stalls. There are more elves who tend to the reindeer, filling hay bales, water, and shoveling manure. When Ethan runs in he skids to a stop as all of the elves stop and stare at him with unending smiles. Without a word, they approach him as the elves behind catch up. Ethan backs

himself into a corner then Thud Thud Thud, Santa comes in.

“Elves! Round him up...,” Santa wheezes, his big belly getting bigger and smaller with each breath. “...and throw him in the gingerbread house.” Some of the elves look up in horror at Santa, who is doubled over trying to catch his breath, but they still smile. Ethan looks around desperately for an escape but the reindeer are out of his reach, there’s nothing near him to use as a weapon, and there’s no opening in the crowd of elves. The thick layer of dust and hay stuffs his nose up to the point that snot starts dripping.

“Please let me go! I promise I won’t be bad!” Ethan begs as the elves close in. Tears spring from his eyes as he starts crying, snot and drool making a mess on his face. The elves hesitate as Ethan begs which makes Santa scowl.

“To the gingerbread house! Before all of you go there!” He yells and slams his fist down on a wooden shelf, breaking it. The elves jolt and then jump on Ethan. Ethan screams and cries harder as they restrain him.

“No! No, please! I’ll be good! Please!” He fights against the elves, but every time one gets knocked away, another takes their place. The elves lift Ethan up and carry him out of the stalls. His screams can be heard as they fade once more and Santa stares after them. He spits in their direction and then goes to his reindeer.

“Hey, Dasher.” When Santa reaches out to pet it, it jolts back and grunts. Santa’s hand falls to his side and he storms out of the room. Instantly, all of the reindeer relax and munch on their hay then drink their water.

When You Enter a Person's Heart

Harrison Richardson

When you enter a person's heart,
do not make it your own.

Unintentionally, we pillage the remains of each empty chamber,
as if they were once a vibrant home filled with hand-written letters
and crocheted blankets.

When you arrive to occupy such an unsettling space,
you are lucky not to pay rent to the wounded whose chest swells
when you widen their love.

Do not enter, unannounced.

When you enter a person's heart,
do not paint their walls with grief.

Keep what dignity you have left inside your eyes.

Brown, blue, and green
are the doors to each abode.

But all of our walls shall remain red with every rhythm we tap in
tune to.

When you enter a person's heart,
do not tamper with the valves that allow our souls to escape into the
mind.

Dark is the unknown that festers in the crevices of that which makes
us human.

The memories we hold dear are all we have when we leave a home.
I hope that you never witness the spring of chrysanthemums in a
person's heart.

Blowing It

Makena Matarese



Reborn

Destiny Crossway

TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. NYC APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

The NYC night lights illuminate a bedroom, where two motionless bodies lay on a QUEEN SIZE BED. The light allowing the furniture to be made out. CLOTHES and SLIPPERS lie on the floor.

BAILEE (32) is seen curled up in a ball on her side. Her hair a mess from moving about, her large BLUE T-SHIRT wrapped around her body, BLANKETS wrapped around her leg, and PILLOWS flown on the floor. JACK (34) is sprawled out, body laying in a starfish position, snoring away.

BAILEE

No... I don't. Stop! I said stop!

Jack, motionless beside her, isn't woken up by her movement and talking. Bailee moves, now laying on her back and begins to speak.

BAILEE (CONT'D)

Don't leave me here with him!

DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A farmhouse kitchen, white wood cabinets, an island, with black stools. BAILEE'S FATHER (38) hard working, determined and distant family man, is talking with MORT (37) his life long friend, who is ruthless, cunning and petrifying

BAILEE'S DAD

I have to run to the store, Mort
can you stay with Bailee?

MORT

Sure, no problem.

Bailee's father leaves the room, the sound of a door closing is heard moments after.

INT. BAILEE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mort makes his way to Bailee's bedroom standing in the door frame, arms crossed watching her for a moment.

Her room is painted a light pink, with various BAND POSTERS, INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES, and a BOOKSHELF lined with BOOKS.

Bailee is laying on her stomach on her bed. Legs lifted in the air, crossed at the ankles. She is playing with her hair as she reads a BOOK.

MORT

(knocking on the door
frame)

Hey B, your Dad went to the store.
What are you up to in here?

BAILEE

Reading, I need to finish this book
for English on Monday.

MORT

Is it any good?

BAILEE

Yeah, I like it. It's "To Kill A
Mockingbird."

Mort makes his way into her room and grabs the book from her hand.

MORT

Isn't it boring, sitting here and

reading on a Saturday? Don't you think there's something better you could be doing?

She grabs the book back from him.

BAILEE

Hey! You're gonna make me lose my spot. No, it's not boring, and I have to read it.

Bailee tries reaching for the book, Mort pulls it farther from her.

MORT

Let's just mark it and do something else.

He takes the book from her, folds the corner of the page, and places the book on her side table. He sits down beside her, taking his hand and putting it on hers.

BAILEE

(snatching her hand from his)
What are you doing?

MORT

You know what I'm doing.

BAILEE

No.

MORT

Come on, let's go have a little fun.

He leans in and kisses her. He grabs her arm and leads her out of her room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mort leads Bailee into the living room, and motions to the couch.

DRAMA

Bailee stands there a moment, frozen in shock. She grabs the end of her sweater in her hands pulling them over her fists.

MORT

Come on you know the drill.

He unbuckles his pants, and tosses them on the floor. Bailee sits down on the edge of the couch. He follows, legs slightly brushing against hers. She avoids eye contact and begins fiddling with her necklace.

MORT (CONT'D)

Come on.

BAILEE

No, you can't make me. Last time we did... why are you making me do this?

MORT

Because I want you to. You're going to continue to keep your mouth shut and do as I say. Understand?

Bailee shakes her head in agreement, and looks around the room. Mort Moves closer to her putting his hand on her cheek.

BAILEE

(flinching and pushing his hand away)
(MORE)

BAILEE (CONT'D)

My Dad's going to be home soon, I think I should go back to my room.

Bailee tries to get up from the couch and Mort grabs her wrist hard stopping her in her tracks.

MORT

Did your Dad lock the door?

BAILEE

I don't know.

MORT

I'm going to double check. Don't
move.

Mort gets up and exits the living room. Bailee very careful to not make any sounds exits.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Bailee slowly walks down the hallway, making her way to a door. She stops just outside listening to Mort make his way to the front door.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bailee slowly makes her way into her parents' bedroom, closing the door carefully behind her. She makes her way to the GUN SAFE in the closet and struggles with the keypad. Punching in random numbers, failing. She types 1017, it fails, she SIGHS and begins hitting the safe.

She types in 1228 and the knob CLICKS. She turns it quickly and opens the safe.

MORT

Hey! Where are you?! I told you not
to move!

Bailee grabs the PISTOL on the top shelf, and scrambles to the DRESSER behind her. Opening the top drawer to find BULLETS, she grabs them, and begins trying to load the gun, dropping bullets on the floor. Rushing to pick them up she loads them.

She can hear Mort walking through the house, she takes position in the middle of the room. Facing the door, she raises the gun, pointing it up where it would be pointing at Mort's chest if he walks through the door.

Mort's footsteps are heard right outside the door, she places her

DRAMA

finger over the trigger. The door knob turns, she begins shaking. The door opens.

MORT (CONT'D)

What are you doing B? Put the gun down. You don't want to do that.

BAILEE

You...you don't know what I want. Why are you kissing me... and touching me... and

MORT

No one will believe you B. Put the gun down and we can talk about this.

He moves closer to her. She grips the gun, squeezing it as hard as she could, and starts crying. Terrified by the situation.

BAILEE

Don't move!

She aggressively juts the gun forward.

MORT

You won't shoot me B. I'm your uncle...

BAILEE

(screams)

You aren't my uncle!

He takes a step forward, and moves his arm up to try and grab the gun. She pulls the trigger. BOOM.

END OF DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. NYC APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bailee jerks awake, tears running down her face, gasping for air.

BAILEE

(screams)

No!

She looks down to see her shirt is drenched in sweat. Jack startles awake.

JACK

Bailee?! Are you okay?

He sits up in bed and looks over at her, her hands covering her face. He reaches his hand over and places it on her back. Bailee grabs his hand and pushes him aside.

BAILEE

Don't. Please don't.

JACK

Bailee what's wrong?

BAILEE

Just... ugh... just another
nightmare. Go back to sleep.

Bailee gets up and walks to the bathroom.

INT. NYC APARTMENT BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bailee closes the door, she stands in front of the mirror looking at her reflection. Her face red, tears begin streaming down her cheeks, she steps back and slowly slides down the wall.

Sitting on the floor she puts her head in her hands, tears coming faster, she begins shaking and gasping for air.

FADE OUT

not quite ready to admit

Libby Morel

so in the convenience of staying,
i've convinced myself the pain of you
is better if you're still mine. pockets
full of spare change and reassurance.

*it's not so bad
it could be worse
at least i'm happy sometimes.*

you'll find sometimes becomes enough when
you grow tired of the leaving and the draft
left in your room from the swinging door
downstairs. when in his absence the lonely
isn't quite so bad, and there's a warmth in his
shadow i haven't felt in so long.

you find excuses just to keep him,
a child convincing their parent of a pet.
*he climbed the stairs to see me,
he must be mine. i'd like to keep him.*

and when you're ill they give you medicine
to kick the infection out, orange bottles
collecting dust and curious stares on the sink,
painkillers tasting of sonnets and rhyme.
but i've been swallowing poetry for days,
and he's still here and

i'm still sick.

Lion Mosaic

Kelsey White



Things They Don't Tell You About Growing A Beard

Edward Sourby

It takes two years for stubble to form. That's 104 weeks of stabbing yourself in the leg. 728 days of leaning close to your reflection, hoping for more hair than last time.

It won't even look good. Not at first. It'll take at least 20 more stabs before it grows into more than a patch of dry grass.

It itches. You can't scratch it safely, don't want to risk tearing the flesh. Don't want the sensation of nails against sandpaper.

It hurts. The hair doesn't know any better. It's unaccustomed to your soft face. It bends back into your skin.

The mustache doesn't come in with the rest. Thin, wispy blonde hairs residing on your upper lip make you feel incomplete. You scrape them away every three weeks in shame.

It hurts. Shave it all because it isn't good enough. You miss it immediately. You wish for it to come in stronger.

It leaves a bald spot, just under your chin. Another missing piece, a reminder that this will not come naturally. Looks like a crater.

It hurts. It's been years since you've shaved anything at all. Wield the razor like a toddler with a crayon. You cut your cheek. Nick your upper lip. Blood runs through the shaving cream, stings when you wash it away.

It becomes part of you. You forget what you look like without it. You are scared to shave again. You leave it, let it scraggle, trim it back with safety scissors over the bathroom sink.

You feel it. The first time you dunk your head into the clear waters of a lake in Massachusetts, the hairs float and sway with your movements. When you emerge, they flatten and weigh against your cold skin.

Kiddie Pool

Andrew Buyea

Let me paint you a picture. You're a sixteen-year-old teenage boy. You work as a lifeguard at a shitty little pool in a "gated community" that's basically a trailer park full of broken families. A man in his fifties with fat pouring out of his trunks swims up to you. He points at a man in his seventies and asks, "Does that guy work here? Or is he a pedophile?" How do you respond? I'm genuinely asking because that question has plagued me for four years.

When I became a lifeguard I expected more... responsibility. The job name sounds crucial. Lifeguard, someone tasked with guarding lives. I imagine some lifeguards definitely deal with serious shit. But in my case, the job felt like sitting around and yelling at kids and drunk adults. Even my lifeguard training felt juvenile.

My lifeguard certification started seriously enough. The process began with watching a bunch of educational videos that essentially said, "If you fuck up, someone's gonna die. It will be your fault." These videos terrified me. During the videos, I imagined a mom crying over her dead son and cursing me for not being vigilant enough. My imagined response was, "I'm sixteen and get paid minimum wage. What did you expect!"

After being shellshocked by my life and death responsibilities, my instructor took my fellow aquatic messiahs and me to the pool. When we practiced our broken spine scenarios, I got forced to play the victim. My associates extracted me from the pool, using a device called a backboard, and dropped me on the ground. Twice. They all passed somehow.

After I was done getting dropped on the ground, my abusers and I learned CPR and how to use a defibrillator. During CPR training we were instructed to follow the beat of Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust" during chest compressions. I wonder how a family would have reacted to me singing the lyrics while trying to save their loved one.

Ba-dum-dum-dum, another one bites the dust. Ba-dum-dum-dum, your son's gonna fucking die.

They say teenagers cannot be trusted enough to drink or smoke. They're not "responsible" enough to do those things before twenty-

one. But somehow it's okay to give a sixteen-year-old a defibrillator and tell them they should be ready to save lives.

After surviving my training, I applied online to the gated community a few minutes from my house. I got a phone interview the next day and was hired as soon as the interview was over. Looking back, the quick screening process should have been a red flag.

On my first day of work, a lady at the community entrance gave me a skimpy red tank top and pointed to where the pool was. I felt like a stripper getting told to put on their g-string and walk to the dance floor. I was nervous because my training videos conditioned me to expect an emergency any second.

When I got to the actual pool, I walked up to the head guard and asked where the emergency defibrillator was. My training instructor told me to ask this question immediately after arriving at a new pool and I didn't want to fail to do so and have it held against me.

In response to my question, the head guard who had been working at the pool for four summers, took a brief pause and said, "Shit... I don't really know. Storage shed probably?" That response set the tone for my employment.

Despite what my training videos led me to believe, lifeguarding was essentially babysitting. I would get paid to spend hours watching children and drunk adults acting like children. On the most exciting days, I would tell kids to stop running or pull a neglected toddler out of the deep end and hand them back to their buzzed parents.

I was the only boy that worked at the pool and I had about ten female coworkers. You might think as a hot-blooded sixteen-year-old boy, I would love working with chicks in swimsuits all day. My imagination definitely enjoyed the idea.

But in reality, the situation was awkward. All the other guards were friends and I could see their disappointment whenever they showed up and saw me instead of one of their girlfriends. In my second week as a lifeguard, one of my coworkers walked into the pool gate with a smile on her face that vanished the moment she saw that I was the only other person there. She looked around, turned back to me, and said, "Hi..." awkwardly. I felt like a leper.

Most of my co-workers were party girls who used their sunglasses to hide the dark circles under their eyes. Normally these girls wouldn't talk to me, but after a few hours of silence their boredom overran any restraint and they would tell me anything and everything to fill the dead vacuum of sound.

The first lifeguard I ever worked with was the head guard that

was unsure where the defibrillator was. Her name was Megan. Megan was a skinny twenty-two-year-old college student with blonde hair and bronze skin. She seemed so mature to me at the time. To this day I have no clue what her eye color was because she never removed her sunglasses once.

It was Megan's last year at the pool and she was out of fucks to give. I knew this because the second thing she ever said to me was, "This is my last year here, so I'm outta fucks to give." The first time I sat down with Megan to watch water for hours, she grilled me for information like an interrogator. After she found out what school I went to, she asked if I knew "so-and-so." I had seen him around when I was a freshman and told Megan as such. Megan then pointed over to the supply shed and said, "He used to work here. Me and him fucked in that shed once. He was kinda clingy after though."

In response, I said, "That's pretty cool," because it was pretty cool, and "Congratulations" would have felt sarcastic.

Megan smiled with big white teeth and said, "Thanks".

I think I passed some kind of test by accident because Megan was friendly to me from that point on.

As head guard, Megan had the privilege of setting schedules and had the option to occasionally "supervise" pairs of guards on their shifts if she wanted. She abused this right maliciously. When given the opportunity, Megan would clock-in to work a "supervision" shift, leave for six hours, and then come back to clock-out and leave again. Who knows how much money she made with this method. Whenever Megan did actually work she would show up slightly high and sometimes sleep in a lounge chair. Megan was my hero.

When Megan was at the pool, the son of the gated community owner would show up as well. He was a tall dark-haired teen named Mikey. I was amazed to see that whenever I worked with Megan, Mikey would appear no less than ten minutes later in a golf cart. I'm pretty sure he had access to the lifeguard schedule from his Dad.

Mikey had a massive crush on the twenty-two-year-old Megan and she would constantly use him for free shit. The first time I saw Mikey pull up in his golf cart, Megan immediately yelled, "Mikey! Go get me an ice cream and an aux cord for music! Get the new guy an ice cream too!"

Like an idiot, Mikey gave her a thumbs up and left to get the items. After Megan told me about Mikey's crush, I asked her why she would lead him on by asking for stuff. She responded, "He's asked me out a hundred times. I told him it's never gonna happen. If he's gonna

keep bothering me I might as well get some free shit out of it.” Mikey returned fifteen minutes later with the ice creams and aux cord.

Another guard I worked with was a twenty-year-old named Hannah. Hannah was a university girl with Mediterranean skin and dark wavy black hair. She was also the daughter of the economics teacher at my school, Mr. M, who was a small Sicilian-descended man with a bushy beard. While Mr. M taught at my school, Hannah went to the wealthier school a town over because her Dad didn’t want her to catch my school’s case of stupid.

Mr. M was a relaxed hipster type and seemed to be fully entertained by his job. He would also never shut the fuck up about his semester abroad in Sicily. Hannah on the other hand was a natural partier. She laid around hungover every time I saw her. She would always tell the other guards and I what event she was going to that week and what drug she was going to do whether it be weed, molly, or coke.

One day that summer, Hannah got a nipple piercing. I know because I worked with Hannah that day and when we arrived at work, she walked ahead of me to the two guards we were relieving and said, “Guys check this out!”, as she quickly flashed them. The pool had no patrons in it, but I don’t know if she noticed. After the flashing, I guarded the pool with Hannah and my awkward teenage boy hormones as she explained the nipple piercing process.

I don’t know if it was the drugs or her personality, but Hannah had the tendency to tell white lies a lot. One time, a guy who was a pilot swam over and talked to her about flying. Hannah told the pilot her uncle taught her to fly and she flies his plane often. The pilot and her talked about flying and all the places they visited for twenty minutes. After the pilot left, Hannah looked at me and said, “I have no idea how to fly a plane”.

When I asked Hannah why she lied, she giggled and said, “He looked like he thought he was hot-shit, so I wanted to mess with him.”

I asked Hannah if her father, Mr. M, knew about her drug use. She scoffed and told me he had no clue. Her father was a well known and exemplary teacher at my high school, so the idea that his daughter was a wild girl and he had no idea made me laugh.

The following fall, during senior year of high school, I talked with my friend Anthony after gym class when the subject of my summer job and Hannah came up. He and I were walking out of the boy’s locker room towards the next hallway when he asked, “What’s Mr. M’s daughter like? Is she hot?”

To which I responded, “Yeah! She does like... a lot of drugs,”. Then Mr. M himself walked by us from the adjacent hallway. To be clear, Anthony and I were in the basement outside the boys’ locker room, a subterranean part of the school apart from everything besides the gymnasium. The social studies wing, cafeteria, head office, and teacher’s lounge were all on the exact opposite side of the school. Mr. M had no business being there.

The only reasonable explanation for Mr. M appearing in front of Anthony and I is that he was summoned by the pure mentioning of his name and was a Sicilian Beetlejuice. Or perhaps he was taking a walk and I was just unlucky. I stand by the Beetlejuice claim though.

After he saw Anthony and me, Mr. M stopped in his tracks and turned to face us. His face contorted around his hipster glasses as he asked, “Who does drugs?”

In a panicked mindset, for some reason, my natural response was to look Mr. M dead in the eyes and say, “Snitches get stitches, Mr. M”.

Mr. M and I held eye contact for what felt like an eternity. Then he nodded, possibly to say, “Damn straight”, and walked away. I think Megan and Hannah rubbed off on me.

The most interesting part of lifeguarding was the patrons. It’s shocking what someone will tell you if you are at work and can’t run away. Whenever someone swam up and talked about the wrong things for too long, I felt like a trapped coyote wanting to chew their own leg off to escape. People would overshare with the guards constantly and thirty-something-year-old men would flirt indiscriminately with the female guards, whether they were sixteen or twenty-two.

The majority of the patrons ignored me in favor of the female guards. I generally noticed that if someone had an administrative question about how the pool ran or wanted the pool temperature set higher, then they would ask me about it. But if they simply wanted to make small talk, they would focus on the female guards and ignore me entirely. Sexist fucks.

One time, an old man swam over to the other guard and I and happily told us his wife died two weeks ago and he just bought a plane ticket to Thailand to “buy a wife” in exchange for a green card. I had so many questions, but was only able to nod my head in response. Looking back, I wonder if that man murdered his ex-wife. I hope his new wife is okay. If she disappears I know the culprit.

Another time, during the fourth of July weekend, an overly drunk woman in her sixties alternated between squirting Hannah

and me in the face with a water gun. Then she would tell us about her grandchildren. Then go back to squirting. The old woman cackled as she sprayed us, showing off her toothless gums. My only joy was that Hannah was far angrier about the spraying than me. I suppressed a grin while Hannah debated murdering a grandma.

When you imagine the scenario “Older woman squirts all over teen lifeguards”, a drunk toothless granny with a super soaker may not come to mind. After she was done with her fun, the older woman gave me my first ever Klondike bar. A reward for being the good little whore I was.

One of the greatest anomalies at work was a woman in her forties named Beth. Beth was a lady who genuinely believed rules did not apply to her. She was a mom of three children, with two different husbands, at the same time. Beth and her two baby daddies were in a three-way relationship, a throuple, where she would routinely switch between the two men. She would get off by telling all the guards about it.

One of Beth’s lovers was a large whale of a man, while the other was a scrawny little meerkat. You could easily guess which of Beth’s children were made by which boy-toy from the noticeable physical differences. The family dynamic was surprisingly pretty nice in public and both husbands acted fatherly towards the children.

However, both husbands seemed to ignore each other’s presence and refused to make eye contact, possibly to avoid the reality that they were both plowing the same woman at the same time. I don’t blame them. What can you really say to another man that lives in your house, helps raise your children, and routinely fucks your wife?

Even with all the awkward scenarios I experienced, the worst part of lifeguarding was dealing with the man who ran the pool, Bill. Bill was an old man in his seventies. He would routinely stop by the pool to add chemicals to the water, talk with the guards, and take a swim here and there. Whenever Bill took his shirt off to swim, he sported a thick coat of furry white hair across his body. He looked like an elderly sasquatch.

The first time I ever met Bill, I was working with Megan. The pool was littered with about ten children, the toys they brought, and their parents. Bill pulled up to the pool in a golf cart and Megan just said, “Fuuuuuck”.

Bill got out of his cart, walked over, and talked to us for a bit. He was dull, but I failed to see how Bill irked Megan so much. He then took off his shirt, showing his combable white body hair, and dove

into the pool. I asked Megan why Bill bothered her so much.

She responded, "Give it a bit you'll see."

While watching Bill and the children swim I saw what she meant. Apparently, Bill had been teaching swim lessons for years and had a tough time knowing when it was appropriate to approach and touch other people's children. Bill would swim up to children, advise them how to improve their swim stroke, and then hold onto their waist as he positioned their bodies.

What Bill failed to realize was that parents don't like it when you approach and touch their kids and what he was doing looked fucking creepy. In response to Bill's actions, parents would become extremely uncomfortable and either call their children over to them or look at the lifeguards for help.

Seeing what Bill was doing, I asked Megan, "Should we... talk to him?" Megan replied, "Dude, we've tried, we've tried so much, he brushes us off every time and insists what he is doing is fine. Creeps me the fuck out". After my first couple encounters with Bill, I called my boss to suggest he talk to him, but they insisted everything was fine despite what I said.

I think Bill saw himself as a grandfather figure and didn't realize he looked like a predator in reality. That's what I like to think anyway. But that didn't stop the shiver down my spine whenever he placed his hands on a kid's waist.

One of my favorite reactions to Bill was from a group of five Columbian women who would often bring a little girl to the pool. When Bill started talking to the little girl, the oldest of the women let out a piercing whistle, snapped her fingers, and pointed down next to her. The little girl quickly swam over to the group and the women eyed Bill down like a pack of lionesses. Bill talked to the women to smooth things over, and though they nodded in understanding, they seemed very suspicious of him after.

The greatest reaction to Bill I ever experienced though, was on a particularly hot day in July. I jumped into the water to cool off and when I started to get out, a short portly man in his fifties swam over to me with his hand raised.

After I stood still for him. He got close to me, pointed at Bill who was talking to another little girl, and asked, "Does that guy work here? Or is he a pedophile?"

I think about the question to this day. Having never gone over that question in training, I paused for a few moments to consider what the man had asked.

How is one supposed to respond to that question? It's definitely a good question to ask. But the question had only two options, either Bill worked at the pool or he was a pedophile. An odd process of elimination to make. At the time I wanted to say, "Both". But I couldn't be sure. It was a pool, not the catholic church, so I doubt that answer would have sufficed.

I was mainly stricken by the bluntness of the question. I had been asked similar questions about Bill before, but never so directly. Usually, parents would ask, "Does that man work here or something?" or "So what's that guy's deal?". But this man had no time for bullshit and it threw me off.

How many jobs can the question, "Does that guy work here? Or is he a pedophile?", even apply to? Not many I assume. It would be odd if you went out for fast food, walked up to the cashier and asked them, "Hey, does that fry cook over there work here? Or does he wanna fuck kids?" The question was philosophical in a way.

Eventually, after much stuttering, I was able to look the pedophile-alert man in the eyes and tell him that Bill was an employee. Though I purposely did not confirm or deny Bill's child molester status. After the man was satisfied with my answer he said, "Oh good, If he didn't work here I was going to kick his ass".

I felt guilty because I was concerned that my words could possibly lead to something horrible. But I was more upset that by acquitting Bill, I had just thrown away my opportunity to see a fat fifty-year-old and a hairy seventy-year-old duke it out. Would've been quite the day at the pool.

Bill got fired after the summer was over. No one wondered why.

I had complaints about being a lifeguard, but I miss it nowadays. Outside of fishing diapers out of the water and accumulating melanoma, I rather enjoyed my time there. I had a lot of time to think and it helped me figure myself out. But after all the years that have gone by, there is one thing I still do not know. How do you respond to the question, "Does that guy work here? Or is he a pedophile?"

Self-Care Villanelle

Eliana Horning

Inhale through the nose, out through the mouth
they always make it sound so easy, like I can just
allow the breath to move throughout.

I haven't slept a full eight hours in about
a month, maybe more, but that's fine, I'll try to
inhale through the nose, out through the mouth.

Every night I collapse onto my bed without
putting toothbrush to teeth, or soap to face, and I
allow the breath to move throughout.

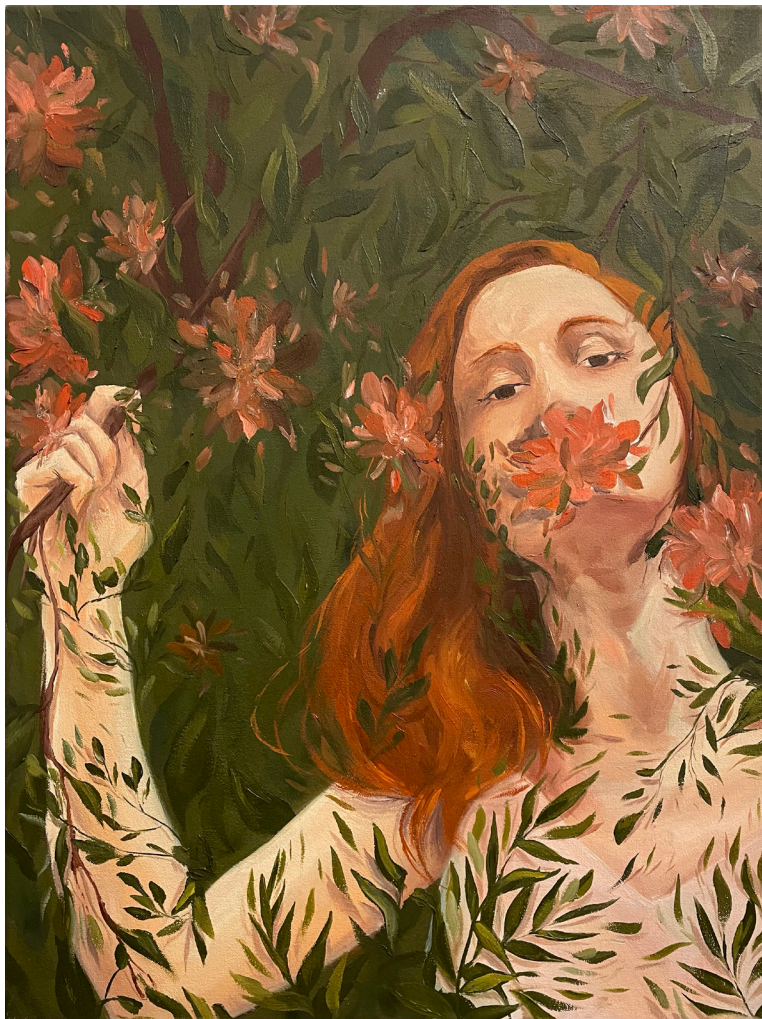
No one ever told me how incredibly loud
being an adult was. I am drowning in public each day so I inhale
through the nose, out through the mouth.

I do not feel cared for, I'm barely living. I doubt
that a bubble bath or glass of wine will help me
allow the breath to move throughout.

How can I keep doing this? I want to get out
of this cycle, my hands are too heavy and my eyes are blurry and —
Inhale through the nose, out through the mouth
allow the breath to move throughout.

I Should Just Be Quiet

Shannon Reals



The Island in the Middle of Barren Lake

Quinnlyn Cox

Tye held the kayak steady as I got in. He was standing in the water, bare feet curling in the muddy silt, shoes discarded on the shore and jeans rolled up to his knees. I clambered in, and double-checked I had everything I needed. I felt like a marshmallow in his old life jacket, but there was no way in hell he was gonna let me go off without it. He handed me the paddle, and stared at me, long and hard.

“You don’t have to do this, Flick,” he said. His arms were folded over his chest, looking more like a disapproving parent than my best friend.

“You know I do. The island’s only accessible for a few more days. If I don’t go now, I’ll have to wait over a year.”

“Maybe you should wait.”

“I gotta do this, Tye.”

“You don’t even know what to expect. You could be killed or something.” “Tye.”

He sighed, and ran a hand through his cropped hair. “I know. Just, be safe.” “I will be. Who knows, maybe I’ll be back here in a few days.”

“We both know that if you head there, you’ll either be back in over a year when the island is accessible again, or you won’t be back at all. I just... I hope you know what you’re doing, Flick.”

I grinned at him, and began to slowly paddle off. “I never do.”

It was a cool morning, maybe fifty degrees. The pond water was still, and a heavy fog hung about me. Soon, I could see nothing but an endless haze, and I had to keep checking my compass just to make sure I was on course. After a few hours, I paused for a snack. It was eerily quiet, the water like glass. There were no sounds. No birds in the distance or frogs croaking. The water was dark but I could see no fish, and no bugs buzzed around or skated across the water. It seemed like the world was in a permanent state of limbo.

I don’t know how long I paddled before the island rose up before me, a beacon of emerald, lush with trees untouched by the autumnal weather. My arms were numb, and the sleeves of my hoodie were damp. I rowed faster once the island was in my sights, splashing

myself more and more with my reckless and hurried strokes. I was so close.

I made my way to the shore of the island, a small stretch of silt and grass. I awkwardly climbed out, nearly flipping the kayak in the process, and stepped into the cool water. I pulled the kayak ashore, leaving it by the treeline and trading the puffy life jacket for my pack. Walking down the shore, my shoes squelched with every soggy step. It was so green here. There was a staircase carved into the earth, and I made my way over, eyeing the sigils and figures carved into each step.

Like the lake, there was no discernable life present as I made my way slowly up the steps. There were plenty of trees and plants, but no noise, no birds or chipmunks or even mosquitoes. Something about it all made my hair stand up on end. The air was heavy with the scent of petrichor, a headiness to it that made my head spin. I kept walking, one soggy foot in front of the other, searching for something.

I saw a flash of movement, and paused, staring deep into the woods, wondering if it was some figment of my fatigued imagination. It was a skeleton, held together by vining plants and picking fruit from the overladen boughs of a tree, placing them into a sack at its side. It moved with an odd stiffness, and I felt like if I was closer I would see the vines moving with every motion the skeleton made. Part of me wanted to whip out my notepad and take notes, but I kept moving, trying to keep my footsteps quiet.

The deeper I got into the woods, the more skeletal beings I saw, all held together with plants and vines. None were idle, all doing tasks of some sort, whether it be picking fruit, farmwork, or collecting firewood. There was a peacefulness about them. I don't know if they didn't notice me or just didn't care, but they stayed focused on their task. They were methodical, never stopping or hesitating. They were beautiful. Some had flowers blooming in their ribs, and plants protruding from their eyesockets and the gaps between their teeth. The staircase flattened out into a curving path that led me to a small hut. Smoke was puffing gently out through the chimney, and it was wrapped in vining plants, a few colorful flowers visible through the net of green. The door opened, and a figure stepped out. The figure was a little shorter than I, and was shrouded in a cloak of moss.

"I was wondering if you would come this year," said the figure. The moss hood slipped back, revealing a tangled mess of hair topped with a crown of thorns and flowers. "I'm Sermire. We have a lot to talk about."

Sermire led me around the island, side by side, damp hoodie

sleeve brushing against moss cloak.

"Is this... necromancy?" I asked, gesturing to a skeleton tilling a patch of earth with precise, even movements.

"Not exactly," said Sermire. "I call it necrobotany. The plants act as muscle and ligaments, keeping the skeleton together and allowing a certain degree of mobility and strength. Using plants instead of just necromancy also allows me to easily control multiple skeletons. I have 20 under my control now."

"And they do farmwork?"

"Farmwork, as well as taking care of the land in general and the boring necessities of life."

"Where are all the skeletons from?"

"Here, the land. This island was once a graveyard, you know. There are hundreds of bodies buried beneath our feet. Can you feel it?"

I frowned and closed my eyes, trying to sense the bones beneath the earth. I could sense the skeleton of a mouse a few yards away, under an inch or so of topsoil, but that was about it. Finally, I shook my head. "I'm sorry, I can't."

Sermire gave me a calculating look. She grabbed a plum from a nearby tree, and took a bite.

"I suppose it's to be expected. I'm guessing there are not too many places to practice, where you're from."

I sighed. "No, there's not. Some laws were passed, and there's a new push for cremation." "So, why is it you're here?"

"Isn't it obvious, Sermire? I want to learn from you. I want to be your student." "Why me? I'm not a very good role model. I'm trapped here, living in exile." "We both know you're strong enough to break the enchantment over the island if you choose."

"If that was the case, dear Flick, then why would I stay?"

Sermire was smiling slightly. Her plum was half-eaten, and the juice dripped down her wrist.

"Because here there's bodies to use and no one to restrict your research. No one to question the ethics, or why some of your skeletons don't look as old as you said they are," I said, gesturing to one of the skeletons. It had some smears of blood, and one of its legs still had some flesh left.

"What's stopping me from killing you, then?"

I grinned at her. "Admit it, you're a little curious. And there's a part of you dying to show off and teach what you know. You've been here since you were young, you're bound to be bored and, dare I say,

lonely.”

Sermire smirked, and stopped walking. “You’ll be here for over a year. There are no modern luxuries, and you will have chores.”

“I know what I’m getting into, Sermire. I did a paper on you, in high school. Sermire the necromancer, who stripped the flesh from the body of the new king and made his skeleton dance.”

“Necrobotanist,” she corrected, with a sharp grin.

“Necromancer sounds scarier, and you know the government, always trying to make so-called enemies of the state ‘scarier’.”

“Oh, is that what you think of me, Flick? An enemy of the state?”

“Nah. You’re hardly the villain people claim you to be.”

She hummed, and tossed the plum pit into the woods. “What’d you get on that paper?” “C-. And a referral to the school counselor. Apparently flattering essays on criminals who committed regicide is ‘concerning’ or something.”

Sermire huffed a laugh, and led me to a building of stone and moss.

“Well, dear Flick, if you are determined to be my student, let’s see what you got.” She opened the door and flicked on a light, revealing the corpse of a man. It looked to be dead less than a week, most of the flesh still intact and the stench not overpowering yet. She turned to me, and leaned against the doorframe. “Impress me.”

I grinned at her, all teeth, a feral thing, before slinging off my pack and getting to work.

Enough

Natalie Archibee



An Eighth Love

Ashley Perretta

I want to tell you something
But don't get weird about it. Okay?

I do not love you, Ludus
It is not flirtatious, but it is
Playful

I do not love you, Agape
It is not charity, but it is
Understanding

I do not love you, Eros
It is not romantic, but it is
Passionate

I do not love you, Philia
It is not intimate, but it is
Authentic

I do not love you, Storge
It is not familial, but it is
Unconditional

I do not love you, Philautia
It is not for me, but it is
Involuntary

I do not love you, Pragma
It is not arranged, but it is
Permanent

I love you
I don't know how to tell you
I don't know how to show you

Regardless,

I know that you know
This a love like no other
A primitive construct

I shouldn't question.
I shouldn't overthink.

I shouldn't attempt to name it.

If it was given a name, it would mean other people could feel it too.
Selfishly, I do not want them to
I do not want anyone else to understand, to feel this love.

The eighth love the Greeks failed to name
I like to believe it has never been felt before, until us
Although that's probably not true
I blind myself in it

i've never known patience 'til you

Libby Morel

i think something in the stars aligned that night. it couldn't last, don't get excited. they'd twist themselves around sooner or later. but for a time, they fell flush. and if i had to paint a picture of the sky, it'd take the shape of your fingers splayed across my back, the rumble in your throat as you hummed, and the feeling of your feet guiding mine.

something in the mountains sighed that night, they sent mudslides onto highways to halt the hurried drivers. a weight was lifted from the clouds, lining them with silver 'til they eased themselves across the sky just enough that the moon could find a place to settle in and watch. a milky spotlight on the moment, freezing it in time.

and then it ended, and they shifted. all of it, everything. and i'd never see anything like it again. but for a moment, there it was, the whole world making way for just one minute of us. and god was it something to witness. something for the books, i think, and the movies, and the songs. and all the little poems about you still waiting in my head to be written.

you know, i sewed your name into my favorite songs. bloodied thumbs, pockets of yarn, needles piercing sheet music. the thickest threads in the world couldn't tether you to me, so i did what i could to keep you. i hid you in the sky, embroidered the constellations myself. then i hid you in the songs, tangled you within the strings, tucked you in beneath the keys.

we could try again, maybe, and hope the stars play along. and the mountains and the clouds, if we're

POETRY

lucky. at the very least, if the stars never find their way back to that spot, we can be ghosts in the same house. silver-skinned and bony fingered, you can kiss my scarred thumbs and we can dance our way around the home we let time build for us.

Drifting Away

Alison Hibbert



That's Ruff

Destiny Crossway

INT. APARTMENT ENTRY WAY - DAY

HAZEL, 26, exhausted business women, comes barging through the door. JACKET and hair drenched, RAIN BOOTS making a SLOSHING and SQUEAKING sound as they hit the hardwood floors.

She fumbles with the door, throws her BRIEF CASE on the floor, and slips off her RAIN BOOTS.

HAZEL

I'm home Broady!

Hazel hangs her KEYS on the hook, opens the closet door and hangs her jacket up. She runs her fingers through her hair, and gathers it into a messy bun on top of her head.

BROADY (O.S)

It's raining cats and dogs out there today.

HAZEL

That it is. How was you day today?

BROADY (O.S.)

It was alright. Hey, I was wondering if we could have a family meeting?

HAZEL (O.S)

Family meeting? It's just you and me Broady.

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

DRAMA

Hazel moves around her room, she goes to her dresser and pulls out a HOODIE and SWEATPANTS. She slips off her wet clothes and tosses them into the LAUNDRY BASKET.

BROADY (O.S.)

Well it would have been three of us
if you could have kept Joel around. But
whose fault is that?

HAZEL

You didn't even like him! But thanks for
that low blow.

BROADY (O.S.)

I did too. In fact I called this meeting to tell
you I want to live with Joel.

HAZEL

(shouting)

You what?!

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Hazel storms into the living room. Broady is seen sprawled out on the floor, dog toys scattered everywhere.

HAZEL

You... Joel?! When did you get this
idea?

BROADY

I saw him at the dog park yesterday
and told him about what has been going on
here lately. And it got me thinking.

Hazel plops herself down on the couch, grabbing the blanket off the back and draping it over her legs.

HAZEL

And what exactly has been going on
lately.

Broady gets up and starts passing back and forth.

BROADY

You leaving me here all alone to
keep myself company for 12 hours a day.
And when you finally get home you don't...

HAZEL

I don't what Broady?

BROADY

You don't give me any kind of
attention at all. All you want to do is put
comfy clothes on and veg out on the couch.
No walks, no park, no nothing, just sitting
here watching you sulk.

HAZEL

Broady, I started a new job where I
can't work from home. I know I don't do
much when I get home, but I am exhausted
and just don't have time anymore.

Broady stops pacing and looks at her. Growing furious in the reaction he is getting.

BROADY

Well you need to make the time! I
can't be cooped up here in this small
apartment all on my own. Joel would take
me to the park, and on walks, and give me
the best pets as soon as he gets home. You...

Hazel throws the blanket on the couch and gets up, standing in front of Broady.

HAZEL

I give you as much attention as he
did! I even hired Jasmine to come over
twice a day...

BROADY

Jasmine?! You think Jasmine coming over twice a day is enjoyable?

HAZEL

I hired her to come take you on walks and to the park, so you could get all your energy out.

Hazel begins pacing around the room, collecting all the dog toys and tossing them into the BASKET by the DOG BED in the corner.

BROADY

Okay first off, she doesn't even let me talk, and second, she takes me to the park on South Willow Street. No one likes that park Hazel, it's awful. People bring their cats, their cats to a dog park!

HAZEL

She doesn't let you speak, wow a dog that doesn't speak, how abnormal is that.

Broady walks over to her and snatches the toy out of her hand.

BROADY

I could do without the sarcasm thank you.

HAZEL

What do you want from me Broady?

BROADY

Some attention, some love, some kind of something that doesn't involve Jasmine!

Hazel stops picking up the toys, and bends down next to Broady, he lays down and puts his head on the ground.

HAZEL

(petting Broady)

What did Mr. Joel have to say about your idea?

BROADY

He said he was going to talk with you, and see if he could take me, maybe just during the week and you get me on the weekends.

She stops petting him and lifts his chin so he is looking at her.

HAZEL

Is that what you want Broady?

He pulls his head away and stands up, he starts pacing around the room.

BROADY

I mean, he lives in the country, with so much space to run around. He's so good at giving belly rubs, and he smells good.

HAZEL

Joel is not taking you during the week Broady. You are not a child, and we are not coparenting a dog. That's out of the question.

She stands up and starts walking towards the kitchen.

BROADY

I mean if coparenting is off the table, then I might run away. Hazel turns around abruptly.

HAZEL

Oh?! You're going to run away to him huh? And how do you plan on getting

from here to his house?

Broady begins prancing in place, as if to mock her.

BROADY

On these four legs thank you very much.

A look of amusement rushes over her face, she stands staring down at Broady, arms crossed and laughs at him.

HAZEL

And how do you plan on getting through the doors, and when you get there, how are you going to get his attention to let you in?

BROADY

I will bark, I can do that quite well actually. I also have been getting pretty good at opening doors, not that you would know since you aren't here often to see.

HAZEL

(laughing)

Oh that's the best idea you've ever had Broady. I'd love to see you try that.

BROADY

Oh yeah?! Well I just might!

Broady stomps away, making his way towards the door.

HAZEL

Go right ahead.
He stops, looking back at Hazel.

BROADY

I will... but can you just open the door for me?

END

Of Sleepless Nights and Soup

Hailey Tredo

My mother sits on the couch with me, worry evident in her dark brown eyes. Those eyes aren't passed down to my sister or me, she is unique in this way. It's two in the morning, far past her usual 7pm bedtime. She can be found downstairs, any day of the week, mouth open and quietly snoring to the sound of an old horror movie that somehow lulls her to sleep. "How are you feeling?" she asks me. You can hear the tiredness in her voice. I simply answer her with a snuffle. Her mouth forms a straight line as she tries to not let her sadness show. They say that a mother is only as happy as her unhappiest child.

She fixes my blanket before getting up, hangnail from her calloused hands snagging on the old material. Something that would send me reeling in pain doesn't even cause her to wince. Her body is worn from a lifetime of hard physical labor and when she stands her knees crack. Exhaustion is not good for her. Years ago she suffered a spontaneous tendon rupture in her right leg from stepping off a porch. She discovered she had an autoimmune disease after that, something she reminds us of whenever she's tired. Tonight she hasn't said a word about it.

When she leaves the room I am alone. I can't help but feel guilty for how much worry and stress I've put her through. I can hear the pots and pans shifting in the kitchen, a cupboard slamming, a hushed, "son of a bitch," followed by a sigh. I'm flipping through movies to watch when she returns. The light from the television illuminates the strands of grey hair she can't stand. When she sees them in the mirror she is reminded of her mother, someone she hasn't spoken to in years. She hasn't had time to dye them while taking care of me. She passes me a warm cup of soup, steam rising off the top. Delicate is not a word I'd use to describe my mother, but when she replaces the remote in my hand with soup it feels like the most gentle gesture I've ever received.

"Please no horror movies," I beg. Our love for them is something we share but in the past few weeks I've been plagued by sleeplessness and nightmares. Her inability to find absolutely anything else in another genre is both irritating and endearing. After what seems like forever she settles on a movie she's seen before but I have not, a rare occasion, called Jojo Rabbit. It's about a mother

NON-FICTION

trying to take care of her son during World War II. Despite how it sounds, the movie is a comedy.

I'm taking small sips of my soup while she laughs, a throaty chuckle that I'm sure can be heard from upstairs. I look over to her, buried in a nest of blankets that she's made for herself. She looks to me every once in a while to make sure that I'm eating. "Dancing is for people who are free. It's an escape from all this," the mother says on screen. And mine repeats it to me. She shimmies her shoulders although she can't dance at all. I've never seen her dance in the twenty-two years I've known her. Not a bone of rhythm in her entire body. She has lines around her mouth, not from laughing, but from chronically frowning. But this time, when the screen lights up her face, I see the wrinkles outlining a warm smile.

It's nearing four in the morning when the credits roll. The soup is long gone and my mother is miraculously still awake. She said she was determined to see the ending with me. And then the words fill the screen:

Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.

Just keep going. No feeling is final.

-Rainer Maria Rilke

"No feeling is final," she says softly.

Mother of five

Kacie McKeever

We used to play this game
back when our hands were sticky
and juice stained
where we'd look at the way our veins
would bend and split
and that would tell us how many children
we would bare.

On my right there was a river
that differed in the moment
and diverged right where the wrist
connects to the hand.
Twins.

On my left
was a chicken's foot
or an abnormal fork.
Triplets.

And we would prattle on and on
about what type of mothers we would
be. How we would scold them if they
took candy from the jar
or what special dinner we'd make on sundays.
They'd turn to me and ask
"What mother would you become?"

I didn't know then
and I don't know now.

I just hope
if it's true
that if I bore five
The middle won't secretly resent me the same way I resent mine
and my mom resents hers.

Erin McCollough

Self Portrait



spring cleaning

Libby Morel

oh, how quickly we scrub the floors to hide
the shine of where we danced, throw down rugs to
bury the memories of clumsy feet too sure to learn
the steps, too committed to stop. a dizzied spinning
through the halls to songs hidden under laughter.

and how calmly we start fires to burn letters and photos,
to watch smiles curl up into themselves and turn black
with bitterness. paragraphs crumble with the cities they
once built, turn to soot and sit patiently beneath wood
and flame for a breeze to stir them to the stars.

how long it takes us to dust fingerprints from the shelves,
a just-in-case waiting game coated with hopes of return.
layers of disappointment build up, must be wiped down
but never are. piled high are the losses, stacked up in
cobwebbed corners, fighting the skeletons for space.

and how quietly we stoke the flames, hoping the embers will
spark a memory of what the letters said. shadows of their
promises sit next to us, enticingly warm. wave a hand to
them and watch them turn to ash. mustn't remember, wasn't
that the point of cleaning the house?

The Burning

Rayne Polkowski

iDate: May 17th, year 20. This emergency alert has been issued by the government of Reinheit. The outbreak of Char variant 12 has caused a rise in infection rates. Today, Burning number 2,983 will be executed. Important instructions will follow: Stay inside at all times unless otherwise instructed. If you receive a Notice of Termination, stay inside. If you are in need of supplies, alert Provision Services at 0 26. Do not go outside. If you have been exposed to Char or believe you may be infected, stay inside and call 0 26. Emergency Order 39 has been extended until the end of July. This is WBOE, serving the Bane region. i

I released a small sigh as the radio fizzled into static and I twisted its volume knob all the way down. *Extended.* I shook my head and rolled my eyes in annoyance at the word. I always found it humorous that they mentioned the order's extension as if the community still had an ounce of hope of it ending. My eyes glanced down to the electronic band locked around my wrist. There was no extension. There would be no life without the virus.

Ash still seemed to hang in the air, my sheer curtains billowing from the gentle wind that crept its way in through my cracked window. I snuck a look outside.

Looks like another show tonight.

And it was about to start.

I shuffled over to the cardboard box I had lodged in the corner of my room, its sides bent in and damaged from constant abuse. Our rations were beginning to run low, but my mother wanted to interact with Provision Services as little as possible. I didn't blame her. The less they came to our front door, the less suspicion they may have of us being infected. We didn't want to risk anything. We couldn't risk anything. Not after what happened to my father.

I selected one of the nicer lumps of bread; I considered it a treat for myself. It was my birthday, after all. I also grabbed the canteen of water that I always kept on my bedside table. I gave it a slight shake.

Half full. I would have to sneak out to the well again soon.

Without any more time to waste, I tucked them underneath my arm and unlatched my window. The warm nighttime breeze hit my face with a smile and a welcome. I took a breath. And to think, breathing this air was forbidden.

I had left my window so many times that there seemed to be a faded trail along the fire escape. I made sure my surroundings were clear, leaning my body forward just enough to see all the way down to the street. No matter how many times I would look, my vision never failed to dance in fear each time. My mother and I lived at the very top story of the building—floor 30—where we got the perfect view of the city.

The perfect view for the show.

I kept my feet as quiet as possible as my hand clutched the small ladder and the only way to the top of the building. I gritted my teeth. No barrier. No protection. I had gone this route probably a thousand times, yet the fear was always the same. I couldn't help but think of the worst. Though I had climbed this ladder a thousand times and had survived a thousand times, perhaps this time a gust of wind would catch me off guard and I would fall to my unfortunate death. I grimaced.

The sounds of government officers yelling their commands broke out in the distance, and I instinctively whipped my head around to look for the source. Seeing the wide array of buildings and the shrunken, unused city streets below, I immediately regretted it. My grip tightened, my knuckles whitening. Invisible fuzzy spots bounced around the corners of my eyes. I could feel my legs stiffening, but I would have to hurry. I shoved my bread in my mouth and the canteen under my armpit, taking one step at a time and refusing to look down. Heights had never become my friend.

Relief rushed over me like a waterfall when I secured myself to the top and threw myself past the edge. I took a celebratory bite of my bread, brushing away a few rogue red locks that draped over my forehead.

"Get over here!" I heard a harsh whisper to my left. It was Anker, and although he had tucked himself in the shadows, unseen, I knew it was him.

I gave him a more confident smile now, suppressing a laugh as if walking on a tightrope of my impending death was all a joke. I brought myself over to him and set myself between the two septic tanks where he hid, the shadows of their large stature only blending

us into the darkness of the night even more. The only thing that exposed us were our wristbands, which each glowed a bright yellow to announce our status: uninfected.

“You almost missed it,” he continued as I handed him an untouched corner of my loaf. I gave him a lighthearted chuckle. He was always so dramatic about time.

“Oh, come on,” I dismissed. “It hasn’t even started yet. Look.” I motioned out in the distance, where we could now get a nice glimpse of the event: the Burning. It was a small, singular home, with only two floors and probably housing only one family. Those were the best ones, because it meant the whole house would be scorched.

I noticed all the tiny people making the proper preparations, their dark red uniforms making them appear as fire ants from way up here. And then it made me realize just how high up we were. I cringed again.

“Bleh,” I shivered in discomfort. “I hate it up here.” I tried to distract myself by opening my canteen and taking a sip, and Anker leaned up against one of the tanks. His dark brown hair seemed to be swooped perfectly at the front as he scratched at the scruff along his jawline and looked to the sky.

“But up here, you get a perfect view of this,” he pointed, guiding my eyes upwards towards the stars.

And as much as I wanted to get down and once again be in the comforts of my bedroom, he was right. The stars lay out before us in millions, the blanket of black space wrapping around our planet, revealing its specks of fiery treasures to us and making all the troubles of Bane seem inadequate.

The one good thing about the electricity crisis here was the very little light pollution at night. With a tragedy revealed itself a beauty.

And it really was beautiful. However, I couldn’t help but find myself drawing back down to Anker’s face, whose nose was still pointing to the heavens. I smiled, watching his eyes soak in every star and his lips part ever so slightly in awe. He seemed lost in it all. I wondered what it must’ve felt like to be lost in his wonder. Anker’s mind was just as beautiful as the stars—though he would never know it—and it was so beautiful and powerful, in fact, that as the specks in his irises fused with every speck of twinkling white in the sky, he was no longer here. And the longer he would look at them, the more and more the city seemed to fade behind him.

The closer and closer the stars seemed to get.

But the universe would never be reachable for Anker. He would

remain in a state of here and there forever.

A sudden yell down below whipped me back to our intended sight, and I elbowed him softly. "And a perfect view of that," I said. Fire.

Windows were broken, and those that regulated the fire, the Torches, launched oil-drenched rags into the first-floor room. Blinding yellows and oranges already billowed out from the rotting awning of the house, disintegrating every board of the scaffolding as it made its climb. Each fiery arm of the blaze crawled through every crevice of the building, and as hopeless as the sight seemed, there was silence. Perfect silence. No one ever screamed when they were burnt.

It was as if they all had long been waiting for their demise.

And the flames came to them with sweet release.

I watched on quietly as the fire quickened, my eyes glued to the scene. It had always amazed me how a single spark could turn into an inferno, and you could miss it all had you blinked. "Those poor people..." Anker murmured. "Why do we watch this again?"

All I could do was shrug as I watched the reflection of the yellow glow in his pupils, equally as hypnotized. I didn't have an answer for him. But perhaps we were drawn to the frequent catastrophe like moths to the light, or perhaps hickory to a flame; how could we not be burnt when we were standing there so flammable?

Alphabet Soup

Natalie Archibee



Monstario

Alexander Case

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

In a fairytale fashion, we see a book named Monstario laying on a stand in the children's section of the library. It magically opens and we are sucked into the book.

The art inside of the picture book resembles the style seen in Disney's Sleeping Beauty.

The first page is a drawn version of the Oswego power plant.

NARRATOR

In a land far, far away, near
Canada... lies a power plant.
Hidden within the dark mysterious
lands of Upstate New York.

We zoom in more to the power plant.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

In life, many things require power.
But like many of us, we don't all
see the repercussions of how we
acquire it.

The book magically flips the page.

We now see a drawing of a sewer system that is attached to the plant.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Leaking out into the sea, is
harmful radiation, deadly to most
species.

We zoom in more to the radiation.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

But occasionally, it causes some...
other effects.

The book magically flips the page.

We now see a drawing of a fish.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

But for this particular fish, it
experienced something ungodly.

We now see the evolution of the fish turn into a SEA MONSTER. We
zoom in on the sea monster.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The MONSTER of a fish has been
swimming beneath Lake ONTARIO for
decades. This creature has been
named MONSTARIO.

The book magically flips the page.

We now see a drawing of a campus being built around the already
drawn power plant.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

You can imagine the creature's
frustration with humans. I mean
after all, we are the ones who
turned him into a monster.

We slowly zoom into the campus.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

So when the humans decided to build
a campus near its home, it decided
to strike back. Taking one
sacrifice each year. To anyone who
dares and tries to tamper with
where Monstario slumbers....

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

As the page flips, a hand SLAMS the book shut. Jahbouris, (19) wearing a Britney Spears t-shirt who likes to play it safe, is sitting down irritated.

JAHBOURIS

Brooks, I can't keep hearing about this anymore man.

Brooks (19), who has the confidence of a tiger but brain of a toddler, is sitting at the other side of the table. It looks like he's been contemplating for a while.

BROOKS

Jahbouris please, man, this is the last time, I promise...

Jahbouris cuts him off.

JAHBOURIS

Dude, I am not helping you find this lake monster. It's not real.

BROOKS

Bro, I'm telling you it's real. Why do you think so many people have gone missing?

Jahbouris rolls his eyes, and Brooks picks up the book.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

This book found me for a reason. It's trying to tell me something.

JAHBOURIS

You literally found it in the children's section.

DRAMA

Brooks slams his hand on the table.

BROOKS

Whatever, bro. I'm going to look
for it with or without you.

In the dark corner of the room we hear a faint sound of a janitors bucket SQUEAKING towards them. Appearing from the darkness is TEDDY (37), a creepy custodian who is humming his favorite tune. He's been eavesdropping on their conversation.

TEDDY

Lake monster, you say?

He slowly approaches the boys to inquire more. He looks at Jahbouris for a little too long.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

Have you boys heard the tale?

JAHBOURIS

(confused)

Ugh not again...

BROOKS

(oblivious)

What do you mean, tale? It's the
truth!

Teddy slowly turns his head towards Brooks.

TEDDY

You think so? Well, I do plan on
hunting this thing down, or these
kids are just gonna keep going
missing.

Jahbouris snaps his fingers and points at them.

JAHBOURIS

Yeah word, you two have fun with

that! I'm going to stay parked
right here.

BROOKS

Come on man, it'll be fun!

TEDDY

Mysteries can't remain unsolved,
boy.

JAHBOURIS

Sure they can.

Jahbouris continues to do his homework, pretending like Teddy's not there.

TEDDY

Seems like your friend is set on
not going. But if you boys change
your mind...

TEDDY PULLS OUT A POSTED NOTE WITH AN ADDRESS ON IT. HE PLACES IT NEXT TO JAHBOURIS.

Brooks immediately picks it up, reads it, and stuffs it into his pockets.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

You know where to find me.

BROOKS

(confidently)

We'll be there!

JAHBOURIS

No, no, we definitely will not.

Teddy pats Brooks on the shoulder.

TEDDY

See you there.

DRAMA

He grins at both of them and walks away.

JAHBOURIS

Brooks, are you on crack?! We're not meeting up with this creep.

BROOKS

Well, if you're not gonna help me, maybe he will.

Jahbouris gets frustrated. He sighs.

JAHBOURIS

Alright look, if you're dead set on doing this then fine... I'll come with you. Just don't blame me when we get killed.

BROOKS

(excited)

Fine... you got a deal.

EXT. LAKE - NIGHT

We are watching Brooks and Jahbouris walking to the lake from behind a bush. Brooks is geared up with make shift armor made up of kitchen appliances. Jahbouris is completely disinterested of the entire thing.

They walk past a sign that says "DANGER, NO TRESPASSING". Jahbouris points at it.

JAHBOURIS

What did I tell you. Killed.

BROOKS

Nobody said it was going to be safe, you should have suited up.

Brooks and Jahbouris start to slowly walk towards the lake. Jahbouris halts before the shoreline.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

What are you doing man?

JAHBOURIS

Oh, I'm not going with you. I'm just here so you'd shut up.

BROOKS

C'mon man, you said you'll come look for it with me.

JAHBOURIS

Looking, watching, same thing.

Brooks begins to have a big brain moment.

BROOKS

Ohhhh I see, you're scared aren't you? You're afraid it's real, and it'll come eat us.

JAHBOURIS

Yeah, man. Shaking in my boots.

BROOKS

Don't be shielded from the truth Jahbouris!

As Brooks and Jahbouris are arguing, we are watching them closer now, from behind a tree. Jahbouris turns his head towards the tree, and we duck behind it.

Jahbouris shakes it off, Brooks continues to argue.

Brooks grabs Jahbouris by the arm and tries to pull him towards the lake. He reluctantly follows at a short distance.

Brooks grips the pot in both hands, like a bat. Jahbouris grabs his wooden spoon and starts smacking it in his hand.

A twig SNAPS, they both snap their heads around. Brooks is ready

DRAMA

for war, and Jahbouris is growing nervous, for real this time.

They slowly go down to the rocks, we see the deep sea and all of it's mysteries. We see the smoke stacks in the distance.

They see A SHAPE in the water, it has the form of a sea monster. Brooks begins to run at it, releasing a battle cry.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
AHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

As he gets closer he RAISES the pot, ready to swing.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
(shouting)
We're almost there man.

He turns to look at Jahbouris. He is no longer next to him. Brooks looks around frantically. He is GONE.

Brooks once again raises the pot with agency.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
(yelling)
Jahbouris?!

He slowly creeps towards the shore.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
(screams)
JAHBOURIS?!

It's eerily quiet. Brooks looks at the water with hopeless.

We hear a trunk of car SLAM shut. Brooks WHIPS around.

Through the trees, we see Teddy holding a bloody hammer. He gets into the drivers seat. Brooks glances down and sees...

THE WOODEN SPOON ABANDONED ON THE ROCKS.

Brooks looks at the car in horror. He looks back at the monster, then back to the car, back at the monster, back to the car, and back to the monster.

The car peels off. Brooks looks at the monster once again. He then starts to CHASE after the car.

He tries to frantically climb up to ground level as quickly as he can. He begins booking it after the car, as if his life depends on it. Jahbouris' life actually does.

UPON CLOSER LOOK, WE DISCOVER THE ALLEGED MONSTER IS ACTUALLY A ROCK.

INT. TEDDYS HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Through a series of blinks we slowly start to see Teddy pacing back and forth in a run down basement. Teddy resembles Hannibal Lector, from his face mask to the way he speaks.

Behind Teddy is a staircase, the way out. Jahbouris frantically tries to escape. He quickly realizes he is tied up. Jahbouris begins to scream.

JAHBOURIS
HELLPPPPP!!

Teddy presses his finger up against Jahbouris lips. He shushes him. He begins to stroke his face.

TEDDY
(whispers)
Shhhh, shhhh. There, there.

Jahbouris does not stop screaming. Teddy gets irritated.

TEDDY (CONT'D)
SHUT THE FUCK UP!

Teddy takes out duct tape and wraps it around his mouth.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

There we go, we can finally be together, in peace.

Jahbouris has terror in his eyes. Teddy lurks closer.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

You look so beautiful in the moon light.

Jahbouris tries to speak, but it's muffled because of the tape. Teddy rolls his eyes and starts to take the tape off.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

Ugh, what?

JAHBOURIS

WHAT THE FUCK MAN? What are you doing?!

TEDDY

I'm... performing. Tradition, you see. You have been selected.

JAHBOURIS

What are you talking about man??

TEDDY

The book chose you for a reason, no?

JAHBOURIS

What book, man?! I don't even read!

Teddy SCREAMS and slams his hand.

TEDDY

THE MONSTARIO BOOK GOD DAMN IT, YOU BEGAN THE STORY, SO NOW WE MUST FINISH IT.

JAHBOURIS

That wasn't even me man, it was
Brooks!

TEDDY

Well your friend... not my taste,
per se.

Teddy starts to laugh maniacally. Jahbouris stays silent.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

You see, I love a good folk tale.
But no ones ever made a good movie
about the loch ness monster.

JAHBOURIS

What about "Scooby-Doo and the Loch
Ness Monster"?

TEDDY

(yells)
I said a good movie!

Teddy begins to wrap the tape around Jahbouris' mouth again. He
then starts to walk towards an old boom box.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

LETS CONCLUDE THIS STORY SHALL
WE!

Teddys presses play. We hear Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots are made
for Walkin'"

Teddy starts to awkwardly dance to the song, and sing along.

CUTTO:

EXT. TEDDYS HOUSE - NIGHT

Brooks, approaches the house out of breath. He's been running this
entire time. He has the post-it note Teddy gave them in the library.

DRAMA

It's his address. He double checks to see if it's correct.

A car pulls up to the side walk, it's an Uber. Brooks knocks on the passenger side window.

The UBER DRIVER (25), a dude just looking for extra cash, rolls down the window.

UBER DRIVER

Uber for Brooks?

Brooks, still wearing his suit of armor, GRIPS the car with all of his might.

BROOKS

LISTEN YOU HAVE TO DO AS I SAY. MY
FRIEND JUST GOT KIDNAPPED AND I
NEED TO RESCUE HIM AND I NEED
YOU
TO BE THE GET AWAY DRIVER...

The Uber Driver cuts him off...

UBER DRIVER

Woah, woah, woah chill out GI JOE I
ain't doing shit. I came here to
pick your ass up and that's it.

Brooks starts to plead with the driver.

BROOKS

All I ask is for you just to stay
parked right here and wait for me
to come out. If I'm not out in 10
minutes, call the cops.

UBER DRIVER

Homie I ain't your Baby Driver, I'm
boutta cancel your ride.

BROOKS

I'll give you a four dollar tip.

UBER DRIVER

(clicks tongue)

Oh word, say less.

The Uber Driver puts the car in park and goes on his phone.

Brooks starts to slowly approach the house.

He creaks open the door, all of the lights are out. He whips out his flash light from his tool belt.

He shines it inside, there appears to be no one there. Brooks enters to take a closer look.

INT. TEDDYS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

He can hear faint music coming from the basement. Brooks slowly opens the basement door and now the music is much more clear.

He starts to creep down the stairs, making sure no one can hear him.

INT. TEDDYS HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

He peers his head in, to find Teddy dancing raggedly, and Jahbouris tied up. Teddy pulls out lip stick and starts to apply it to Jahbouris' face over the tape.

Brooks cringes and looks away. Brooks looks down at his pot and then at Teddys HEAD.

He looks up at the top of the stairs to find a LIGHT SWITCH. Brooks knows his plan. He pulls NIGHT VISION GOGGLES out from his tool belt. He walks back up the steps slowly, still making sure no one can hear him.

Teddy, still dancing, approaches Jahbouris and whispers in his ear.

TEDDY

I'm gonna make you my wife.

DRAMA

Jahbouris starts to bug out.

TEDDY (CONT'D)
(singsong)
Say I do...

Jahbouris continues screaming, muffled by the tape.

Teddy pulls out a POCKET KNIFE. Jahbouris eyes widen with fear.

TEDDY (CONT'D)
(screams)
AHHHHHHHHH!!!!

Jahbouris keeps screaming through the tape, fearing for his life.
Suddenly...

THE LIGHTS SHUT OFF.

Teddy pulls out a lighter and shines it on Jahbouris. He rips the tape off of Jahbouris.

TEDDY (CONT'D)
DON'T PLAY GAMES WITH ME BOY!

JAHBOURIS
I don't know man, I've been tied up
this whole time!

We see from Brooks POV the night vision goggles in action. He's slowly treading down the steps with his pot raised, ready to swing.

BROOKS
Hey!

Teddy turns around and shines the lighter on Brooks. We see him wearing night vision goggles.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Hope this solves your mystery for
you.

TEDDY

WHAT?

Brooks SWINGS the pot at Teddys face, he's knocked out!

Brooks rushes over, to untie Jahbouris, the lights TURN ON.

The Uber Driver enters the basement.

UBER DRIVER

Yo, you ready yet? I got shit to do.

The Uber Driver sees Teddy on the floor.

UBER DRIVER (CONT'D)

DAMN, why did you whack this fool?

BROOKS

Don't ask questions, we got to go!

UBER DRIVER

Pfff, say less.

Brooks finishes untying Jahbouris. They run out of the house.

EXT. TEDDYS HOUSE - SUNRISE

They all get inside the car. Brooks and Jahbouris get in the back.

JAHBOURIS

Hey man, I gotta give it to you.
You were right, the lake monster
really does exist...

The car drives away into the sunrise, and in the background is the power-plant. Which turns out just to be a water plant after all.

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END

1:49 AM

Edward Sourby

With a parched mouth and empty stomach,
I rise from the comfort of my chair.
I open the door, golden light leaks into the hall
for a moment. Then I creep downstairs.

The house yawns with each step.
I never learned which floorboards
will stay silent beneath my feet;
even the carpeted stairs creak.

Beyond the window at the base of the stairs,
there is an endless void. A quiet abyss.
A chill emanates from the glass,
thin material between myself and the black.

A white light comes from the kitchen,
LEDs illuminate the space I need.
A slight scent of pot roast lingers from dinner.
The toaster pops louder in the stillness.

An ethereal spotlight shines on my hands
as I spread butter and apricot jam.
I eat toast in the company of cold air
and swallow water in silence.

So, I am sold into
the life of the impure,
purchased with silver
and forced to marry my
own secrets, for no one
believes the unclean,
the drunk girl, unseen,
clouded by a concept,

virginity's scheme.

Genesis 19:8

*"I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please
let me bring them out to you, and do with them whatever you like"*

I just wanted a choice.

Yet, that cop's laughter
still lingers in my dreams,
and I still feel his spittle
that landed on my cheek.

I am damned to drink fine liquor
from a broken bottle
and repent, repent
for a sin that was never mine to commit.

Delusion

Haley Farrands

She wasn't sure how much time had passed. Days, weeks, and years all began to feel the same after he left her alone on the boardwalk.

She'd known it was coming. Her hair was swept up and away from her face, her fingernails uniform and pearly pink, courtesy of his sister. Her mother had asked about her future, how long they had been together, and did they want any children? He wore her favorite blue tie, and when he got down on his knee, the breeze lifted it up and over his shoulder. The ring was beautiful in its simplicity; a single tear-drop-shaped stone over weaving white-gold bands. It almost made it onto her finger.

She thought that knowing it was coming would make it easier to say no.

It didn't.

The moment before she said no was long, silent, excruciating. His eyebrows raised and his lips trembled in anticipation. Her mouth opened, closed, opened again. An elderly couple passing by stopped to point and look, and almost clapped until they saw the look on her face. He thought that she loved him. She did. She loved him so much that she couldn't bear to subject him to a lifetime of sobbing in bedsheets, of leftovers growing rancid in the refrigerator, of shades drawn, lights off, music low.

A lifetime of her.

He left before she could see him cry without asking her to come with him. She could only imagine how heavy the ring must have felt in his pocket as he dragged his feet back toward the car. How many people must he have told? How many people would he have to deliver bad news to?

She broke down, but only after he was thoroughly away. Her sobs came in hiccups that she didn't bother trying to hide when other people passed her. She wanted to apologize to them; to say she was sorry for the display of emotion during what was surely no more than a Saturday evening walk for them. She didn't. She sat on the splintering bench overlooking the water and wept for her lover, now long gone.

By morning, she was still on the bench, her face damp and salty

with tears, sweat, and ocean spray that came up from beneath her. It was on the bench where she stayed, her hair never falling out of its braids, her dress never wrinkling, her nails never chipping. Her cries varied from silent tears running down her cheeks and into her lap to screaming sobs that seemed to pierce the air around her.

The sun rose and fell more times than she could count, and nobody ever sat next to her. Nobody asked her what was wrong, or how they could help. Didn't give her so much as a cock of the head or a blink. They just walked by. People she was used to seeing every day stopped coming, and were replaced with new ones; teenagers holding hands, families walking dogs.

Seasons refused to change, the same warm breeze rustling through trees and creating waves under her feet day after day. Children built sandcastles, but they were all swept away once they left with their parents. She had no way of knowing how long it had been before he came back. She reached for him, waving, standing up, calling his name, but he looked past her.

The woman he was with wore a red dress, and her dark hair fell down her back in waves. He kissed her cheek before he got down to his knee

the breeze lifted his tie

he pulled out the ring, a single teardrop laid in white-gold
and she said yes.

They left together, hand-in-hand, the ring sparkling in the moonlight on her left hand. Before they got off the boardwalk, he looked over his shoulder to the woman on the bench, no longer crying. She gave him a watery smile and swiped at her eyes with her fingers. He mouthed *thank you*.

He left her again.

When he was gone, she returned to the water. Her salty tears fed the ocean waves that blew through her salt-waved hair, and when she looked up, there were no bubbles fighting their way to the surface.

The Floating Islands

Hoang Pham



sit down, settle in

Libby Morel

the sweetest part of settling will always
 be trying to spruce up the bare walls
 of your promises. i'll fill the halls with
 pictures and hang curtains, throw down rugs
 and fluff the pillows and you can tell me if
 you like how it looks. the door unlocked
 because you never grab your key before you
 leave, and i never know when you'll be back,
 and what if i'm out when you return?

the jokes on me for finding solace in the
 salted lines of your palm. for tangling
 myself into the hair that sits atop your head
 each morning and letting the strands wind
 themselves around my throat. two inches deeper
 i fell into a basement between your teeth, i heard
 the echo when you said my name. i sought
 promises in the maybes, found comfort in the
 empty space you left behind.

this sick sort of always tastes like metal,
 a bitten tongue left to bleed just so i could
 keep you. i can't help but think this is how
 persephone felt, hades gripping her hand on
 the way down. she must have seen it in his eyes,
 how he looked at her like she was something
 he thought he could love. find the positives, i guess.
 that's one way to ignore how the bad creeps up
 behind the good, grows a little fatter, finds its
 bearings in a single weed sprouting.

thank god you found me when you did,
 planted a garden from a rotten seed and called it
 a masterpiece. admired it like it was something
 you could love. muddy footprints through the
 kitchen, i've never seen you take your shoes off.

that must be how you always sneak out so quickly.
i've always wondered why you hide mine when i
leave them by the door, why the suitcase i tried
living out of ended up inside the attic, buried and
hidden, my clothes still neatly packed inside.

and god forbid you ever tempt me to beg
you to stay. i'm so comfortable in the
settling, living in the warmth you leave
behind every time you walk away. i wouldn't
hesitate to drop, cracked bones and skinned knees,
to clasp my hands and pray. i won't regret it until
later, when you're gone and i'm unlocking all the
windows just in case the door gets stuck. when i'm
replaying the conversation and wondering if it was
something i said when i asked you to love me.

the saddest part of settling is in the fall at the
start, when i decide i'd like to try landing
on my feet and i feel your hands on my back,
sending me sailing again. it's the sinking
realization that the curtains are getting dusty,
and the rug is growing mold. that the promises
in between your lips, living beneath your tongue,
will always be locked up. i'll never forget the day
i tried to pry them out by hand, my fingers got
caught between your teeth. you swore to death
you hadn't meant to bite down.

Flare

Edward Sourby

Destruction is cathartic. Watching something go up in a blinding bright orange is infinitely more satisfying than throwing it out. Sure, everything gets burned eventually, but isn't it so much better to do it yourself? To throw something worthless onto a flame and give it a new life? I've tossed my fair share of garbage into our rusted fire pit in the backyard. Things I'd rather forget, things I didn't need anymore, or things I just wanted to watch *burn*. I'd stare at paper as it curled up, shriveling into ashes as the fire overpowered it. It was one of the simpler joys to be found in the summer.

Tegan had a bonfire in mid-June to celebrate her graduation. I graduated the year before, but she told me she really wanted me at her party. Having rarely heard anyone express desire for me to be at a social gathering before, I was excited to go. She also invited several members of our old club, many of whom I missed and was excited to see again. I wanted to spend some time with my friends and eat some free food, so I was happy to attend.

She lived on the opposite side of town; in a part I rarely went to. I could see the houses getting progressively less maintained as I approached her street. Her house wasn't falling apart, but it was messy. There were tools and old pieces of wood scattered around the yard, miscellaneous junk long forgotten and caked in dirt. I parked my car on the opposite side of the road and got out. I could smell the smoke immediately. Eager to get in on the party, I hurried across the street and up the wooden staircase to her porch.

I was greeted by Tegan and my friends from school. It was relieving to feel welcomed so quickly. I embraced everyone I knew and exchanged casual greetings. People milled around the yard, playing with sticks, shooting arrows into an old kiddie pool, or relaxing by the bonfire. It was just getting started; barely any logs had caught yet. Wanting little to do with the weaponry my friends were creating, I sat on a tree stump a few feet from the fire and chatted with my friend Collin, who I'd known the longest.

While we talked about our lives - his college plans and my terrible retail job - Tegan brought over a wood pallet and tossed it

onto the flames. I could feel the excitement building around us as it began to smolder. Tegan told us there were plenty more to be burned, that her dad wanted to get rid of all of them by the end of the night. We were more than happy to help.

Two hours into the festivities, Tegan's dad gave us firecrackers and bottle rockets, which came as a surprise to me. I could barely convince my mother to trust me with sparklers, and here Tegan's dad was, slapping the mini explosives into my bare hands and telling me to go have fun. So, I did. We threw them into the fire, and they began to pop, a loud noise cutting through the chatter. One firecracker shot out of the bonfire, bursting inches from my head, and I found myself laughing rather than recoiling in fear.

Collin went for the bottle rockets. They shot up and exploded in the air with a crack. Our friends screamed in surprise, and then screamed even louder when he aimed at the ground and the rocket bounced towards them. It exploded before it hit anyone, but we made sure he wasn't as close to us for the next round.

It was another hour before the storm started. It was a heavy summer rain that soaked through my emergency umbrella and eventually my clothes. The fire persisted, completely unaffected by the downpour as the rest of us became weighed down by the wetness. Tegan added an old dresser to it to give it more fuel, which caught quickly and began to burn. Some people gave up on their umbrellas and let themselves be drenched, joining me by the fire to keep warm.

Then Collin yelled, "Everybody get back!"

This was met with us shouting "why" and "what are you doing," though we all cautiously backed away. Collin shot past us with a can of spray paint in his hand, hurled it directly into the flames, then ran back to safety. I looked between him and the fire in shock and confusion. Before I could ask him what he was thinking, there was a sudden rush of heat. From ten feet away, I felt the power of the explosion. The burst of orange and yellow shot high into the air and was gone just as quickly. The bonfire, which had already been holding strong through the rain, was even bigger now. The dresser was engulfed.

Everyone was *thrilled*. We needed to do it again.

Sick of being wet and worried about getting burned, I retreated to the porch to watch as more junk got added to the fire. Collin threw in another paint can and we all waited, holding our breath and bracing for the noise. It took a minute for us to realize he had missed the fire completely and it was laying on the ground. Someone,

probably him, would have to go nudge it in. After a minute of indecision, he used a long stick to push it, and again we waited.

It was breathtaking.

Explosions aren't supposed to be beautiful. They're destructive and loud and if you're too close, it could hurt. But from the safety of the porch, I watched a burst of light shoot twelve feet into the air in the middle of a torrential downpour. Everyone erupted in cheers. The fire didn't go out. It became stronger. It was like a solar flare, giving us life. Giving a bunch of teenagers something fun to do on a summer weekend. Allowing us to feel like gods for a blissful moment before we had to move on with our lives and into adulthood.

Growing Pains

Abby Blamowski

No love is quite like a mother's,
whole and
powerful and
blazing.

[I scrape my knee, the tears
flood the floors.]

I remember the last time
her hand grazed my cheek,
or the last time her hug
dissolved into
me.

[Burning fever of 102 degrees,
A cold washcloth.]

I wish I knew what getting older meant.
One final forehead kiss,
one last song to be hummed
underneath the moon.

[Sticky grape runs down my throat,
I grimace.]

How do you tell a child
in their mother's arms,
that eventually
the river runs dry?

[A band-aid heas all wounds,]

but maybe not this one.

Sprout

Kaileah Decker



Vita Mortem

Elizabeth Mann

Over black, we hear the WAILS OF SIRENS. Then...

FADE IN:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The center of a multi-lane highway, surrounded by forest. We now see that there has been a massive pile-up; flashing ambulances and police cars crowd the scene.

From the distance, a DARK-CLOAKED skeletal figure- almost like a living shadow- slowly approaches the accident. It is DEATH, and it is unseen by anyone else.

Death moves to a bloodied and unconscious WOMAN sprawled on the ground outside the remains of a car. She is being worked on by two PARAMEDICS.

Death looks at the Woman with sadness. Then, slowly...

...It waves its hand, and a small GLOWING ORB floats from the Woman's chest. The SOUL floats over to Death, who holds it with extreme care.

PARAMEDIC #1

We're losing her! Start
compressions, McBrady!

The other Paramedic begins desperately performing CPR. Death turns and walks away, unable to watch.

DEATH

I'm... sorry.

Death crumples to its knees, clutching the soul to its chest. The

DRAMA

sounds of the sirens fade away. Suddenly, a floral-covered hand grasps Death's shoulder. Death raises its head- it recognizes this touch.

GENTLE VOICE (O.S.)

Do you need a hand, my love?

DEATH

...I'm surprised that you'd be in a place like this.

Death turns its head, and we now see LIFE. The stark contrast to Death, Life is beautiful, vibrant, and wearing several kinds of colorful flora. It smiles warmly down at Death.

LIFE (GENTLE VOICE)

Even in utter destruction, life always finds a way. May I?

Death holds the soul up, and Life takes it. Life kisses the soul, and it glows vividly with warm light.

Suddenly, it quickly floats away from Life and back into the Woman's chest. Life watches as the Paramedic stops CPR and checks the Woman's wrist.

PARAMEDIC #2

We got a pulse!

Grinning, Life turns back to Death. But... it isn't there. Life looks about, finally spotting Death sulking off into the forest. Puzzled, Life follows.

EXT. FOREST - DAY - SECONDS LATER

Death moves through the dense forest, being mindful not to touch any of the trees. Life pursues close behind, running its hands along the different trunks.

LIFE

My love, are you alright? You don't seem like yourself today.

DEATH

I... I cannot do this anymore.

LIFE

What?

Death stops and turns around to face Life.

DEATH

This! I cannot... I-I will not do this any longer! Reaping innocent soul after soul, I cannot bear to cause any more harm!

LIFE

But this has always been your purpose. What has brought this change of heart all of a sudden?

DEATH

Love, we've done this dance for an eternity. An eternity that you spent bringing joy and love, and an eternity that I spent spreading fear and pain.

LIFE

Death is nothing to fear.

DEATH

The creatures of this realm would disagree. Those that know of me... they only know me as something to flee from. They all loathe me for what I do, and for good reason!

LIFE

Please don't talk about yourself like that, my love. You know that isn't true.

Life approaches and puts its hand on Death's cheek. Death turns away from its touch.

DEATH

You don't know what it's like to be scorned. All creatures adore you. The humans, they constantly praise your name!

LIFE

Oh, humans are such silly creatures. They hardly notice anything that goes on around them.

DEATH

They notice enough...

LIFE

You are far more important than any creature realizes. Your worth isn't valued by their approval. Life cannot thrive without death!... Follow me for a moment. I want to show you something.

Life takes Death by the hand and leads it further into the forest. Death follows gingerly.

EXT. LAKE - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Life leads Death to a clearing in the trees. Life suddenly drops to its knees by the shoreline and cups its hands around something.

LIFE

Oh, you poor thing. Seems it fell out of its tree.

We now see that Life is holding a severely injured CHIPMUNK. Death sits down besides Life.

LIFE (CONT'D)

My powers are capable of so much,
but I cannot end the pain.

Life holds the chipmunk to Death. Death hesitates for several moments, watching the creature struggle. Life gives a reassuring nod.

Doubtful, Death waves its hand. A tiny soul floats out from the now-still chipmunk. Death takes the soul into its hands. When suddenly...

...The soul begins to playfully circle around Death, as if it were saying "thank you." Death smiles and lifts the soul up into the sky and it floats up and out of sight.

LIFE

You love life too much to be
malicious. You are a mercy, my
love. You bring peace to those
that are sick and suffering.

DEATH

And what of those that aren't
sick, that aren't suffering?

LIFE

...Yes, sometimes there are those
that are simply gone too soon, and
it's unfair, I agree, but...

Life places the body of the chipmunk onto the ground and waves its hand. All at once, beautiful, colorful FLOWERS begin sprouting from and around the body.

LIFE (CONT'D)

...Wherever death goes, life is
never far behind.

DEATH

...Sometimes I wish that things
didn't have to die.

LIFE

I've found that when the living
realize that their time is
limited, it can inspire them to
truly live through every day.
... We share our equal burdens in
this life, my love. Please don't
forget your worth again.

Life kisses Death on the forehead, then stands up and
walks away. Death looks at the flowers, smiling softly.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - SOMETIME LATER

A dying OLD MAN lays in a hospital bed, surrounded by his
FAMILY. Death stands beside the Old Man, unseen by anyone. The
Old Man's GRANDDAUGHTER begins to cry.

OLD MAN

It's alright, my dear, please
don't cry. I've lived a good, long
life. And I'll even get to see
your grandmother again... Isn't
that nice...

Death waves its hand and the Old Man dies. His soul floats out and
Death takes hold of it.

WOMAN

It's okay, Jennie, it's okay...
He's at peace now.

DEATH

(Quietly)
He is, I promise.

Death kisses the old man on the forehead. It steps through the wall as
if it were not there.

HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY - SAME TIME

Death moves down the hallway, passing by several rooms. Passing by one particular room, we hear a BABY CRYING, coming from inside. Death stops to look and Life steps out through the wall. It spots Death and beams with pride.

LIFE

It's a boy!

Death looks down at the still glowing soul in its hand.

DEATH

“Wherever death goes, life is
never far behind.”

Life and Death begin walking together down the hallway; side-by-side, as equals.

FADE TO BLACK.

Saint Kateri

James Davis

Her round face is shaped from red clay,
framed by two braids,
one red ribbon, one white.

Biting her lower lip
to keep her quivering voice
from oxidizing into tears

she holds her grimace in place
with the upturned corners
of her dry, swollen mouth.

She sits surrounded
by the sickly thuds of flesh
and the cracking of charred bones

Her skin boils into pustules
seeping into brown and black furs,
over a white satin nightgown.

She whimpers a prayer to her God
over and over again as he swings
back and forth, between her heart
and the world, tying her hands together.

Jim and Chris' House

Alison Hibbert



You Could Have Phrased that Better

Edward Sourby

Crimson seeps through pale fabric,
a dark splotch in the middle of my torso.
You release the heavy handle.
Reeling backwards, you swear it wasn't
intentional. You tripped.
But why were you running with something
so sharp in the first place?

I drip onto the linoleum,
stagger forward, one hand to the wound,
and the other on the blade.
I yank it from my stomach and pour
myself out in front of you.
Entrails fall to the ground.

You believe it can be fixed
with duct tape.

I collapse in a puddle of myself,
writhing and squirming
You observe my struggle, apathetic.
The taste of copper overwhelms
me; I spit it out.
Then I pull myself together.

You gawk as I gather my guts,
and stain the floor behind me
with stark rusty drops.
You stumble back in horror
as I carry myself, unwavering.
My organs bound not with tape,
but with strands of spite.

carved from stone just to crumble

Libby Morel

don't worry. she'll never tell you what she's thinking.
she wouldn't dare waste your time
like that, forcing poetry into closed fists.

such sharp words clawing their way out of a handmade
aphrodite body, marbled wannabe
masterpiece, pale skin and cold blood.

comforting, never comfortable, exhaustion peeks out
from the poems she wrings dry from
riverbeds, finds inspiration in the drowned.

tiptoed footprints have never been so heavy, where the tired
creeps up behind her back, spilling out
of cracked ribs and calloused soles.

don't worry. she'll never tell you what she's thinking.
she swallows a pen and writes stories
in her stomach, calling it an appetite.

Deep Space



92ND EDITION

WITHER

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