

GREAT LAKE REVIEW

Overgrown



GREAT LAKE REVIEW

SUNY OSWEGO'S LITERARY MAGAZINE

Fall 2022

93rd EDITION

Overgrown



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SUNY Oswego's Literary Magazine
Fall 2022

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Overgrown

Caitlin Marx

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!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ART

Overgrown by Caitlin Marx	5
Nothing Will Ever Go Wrong by Ethan Gallo	8
My Vessel by Caitlin Marx.....	9
The Last Night by Diana MacMorris	10
Memory by Caitlin Marx.....	24
Luna Moth by Caitlin Marx.....	25
Sanctuary by Caitlin Marx	26
Blackest Bile by Ethan Gallo	41
Stagnate by Alison Hibbert.....	42
Experimentation by Tessa McCain	43
Spirit by Diana MacMorris.....	63
A Symphony of Yellow Petals by Greg Hartman-Sounder.....	64
The Withering Dawn by Ivy Ligon.....	65
Let Go by Ethan Gallo	90
Angel's Trumpets by Melanie Tunkey.....	91

NON-FICTION

Starlight by Haley Farrands	13
The Death of Daredevil by Hailey Tredo	16
Droughts and Floods by Haley Farrands	19
Where My Dogs Rest by Emily Bond	22

POETRY

Grapefruit Spoon by Lily Paddock.....	29
A Villanelle On Stuttering by Tatum Capodiferro	30
Along the Way by Horane Daley	31
Bloodstream by Linnea Ceilly	33
stormchaser by Eli Kublius.....	34
Feasting Foliage by Kimberly Supliski	36
It Dies with Me by John Riley	38
Head of a Skeleton With a Burning Cigarette by Francesca Spica	40
Crime Scene by Noah Rust	41
My Mother's black swan by Eli Kublius.....	42

FICTION

Her Last Birthday by Charles Burton	46
Aoife by Leilhana Abu-Sbaih	49
Petrichor by Cori Jessup	51
Dull by Charles Burton.....	53
Giants by Gabrielle Kroeger.....	61
Eulogy by Madalyn Herron	63

DRAMA

Say No To This by Chloe Hill.....	68
Riding Out by Jacob Calta	72
Eating For Two by Chloe Hill.....	85

Nothing Will Ever Go Wrong
Ethan Gallo



My Vessel
Caitlin Marx



The Last Night
Diana MacMorris



Starlight

Haley Farrands

I don't know what made us think that we would have had fun at a party. Maybe we could have if we had had any inkling of what the environment would have been like, but we were both of the social status that assumed high school parties were a myth perpetuated by John Green novels and *Pretty Little Liars*. Still, I had assumed that I could force myself to become the type of person that would find joy in a sweaty room full of teenagers by simply immersing myself in those situations. I don't think he'd had much hope, but he was nice to humor me.

We had been dating for half a year by college decision day, and while we told everyone that we didn't decide on the school because of each other, we both knew the truth. Neither of us could bear the thought of being apart for months at a time. We were finally together after four years of being strangers, then acquaintances, then friends, and neither of us wanted to risk it.

Neither of us knew which frat house we were going to, and we were both too afraid of standing out to ask. We walked out of the building and trailed just behind a larger group who looked like they knew what they were doing. The streetlights were on, but the cloudless August sky was so full of stars that we almost didn't need them to see where we were going. Eventually, we made it to a dimly lit two-story house playing music that I couldn't make out the words to, but I got the impression that there wouldn't be many other people who didn't know it by heart.

Inside was a haze of cheap perfume, cigar smoke, and hormones. It couldn't have been more than two minutes before our eyes met, and I was immediately grateful that we had mastered the art of communicating without speaking.

You wanna get out of here? He seemed to ask.

Absolutely.

We turned on a dime and walked back out to the front door. I was vaguely aware of someone's eyes on my body as we left and

HALEY FARRANDS

I couldn't help but wonder, even then, if I knew that I wasn't yet eighteen. I wondered if he would care. I ducked my head and quickened my pace, needing to get out of the seemingly shrinking house as quickly as possible.

"I'm sorry," I said once we were safely in the glow of the streetlights. "I know you were excited."

"Don't be," he said.

We trudged along quietly for what felt like ages. Somehow, the walk back to campus seemed to take a lot longer than the walk to the party. I couldn't figure out if it was because the excitement had worn off, the exhaustion was setting in, or because we were no longer traveling in a group. Regardless, by the time we reached a sprawling field barely on campus, I was ready to kick off my sandals and give up.

"Do you want to take a break?" he suggested. There were no benches around, but neither of us pretended we were above sitting in the grass.

We stayed like that for a few minutes under the glimmer of the moon, the grass very slightly damp from the previous night's rain. Far away from the houses downtown, the air was quiet aside from the soft nighttime breeze and a few birds singing back and forth. He leaned backwards until he was flat on the grass, tugging on my wrist so I would join him. "We're going to get wet," I said, lying down despite myself.

"You'll dry off," he said.

"And we'll get grass stains."

"You look pretty in green." We laid side by side in silence for a moment before he spoke again. "There are so many more stars out here than at home."

He was right. Back home, we were in a suburb just outside the city, and we were lucky to see any stars at all. In comparison, the campus felt firmly in the middle of nowhere. It was past midnight, and with everyone's house lights off until morning, I had never seen a brighter sky in my life. Before I could agree out loud, he pointed a finger up to the sky.

"You see that one?" he asked. "It kind of looks like a teapot?"

I squinted and tried to see what he saw, but it had never really made sense to me. The only constellations I could ever make out were

STARLIGHT

the Big Dipper and Orion's Belt. Nothing else ever looked like they were supposed to.

"I don't think so," I said.

He reached for my hand, and it surprised me how, even after almost a year of his touch, it was still enough to shoot sparks through my entire body. He pointed my finger in the general direction that I was looking and connected a few dots.

"Sagittarius," he said. "The Archer."

"I think I see it," I said. "But I definitely don't see Katniss."

"Not Katniss," he said. "Think more like a dude riding a horse and holding a bow."

"So there's an entire horse that I also can't see?"

We passed the time quickly, lying in the wet grass and listening to the crickets chirp. He'd try his best to show me the different star patterns and make me guess what they were supposed to look like before he told me what they actually were. We stayed in the field until I stopped thinking about the party, or what my highschool self would have thought about the night. Instead, I let myself fall into the gentle rhythm of the sound of his heartbeat, the cadence of his voice, and the soft touch of the stars.

The Death of Daredevil

Hailey Tredo

The day Jacob passed I wished the world would just stop. I sat numbly on the porch watching the cars go by. The people walking their dogs. A woman in a blue Prius drove by sipping a Big Gulp, talking away on an earpiece. How could she be so carefree? Didn't she know the most important person in my entire life just died? I wanted to scream his name from the rooftops. I wanted to spell each letter out to the stars, to whatever god had taken him away from me.

He used to read comics.

"Check out this issue of Daredevil," he told me with a wide smile when I went to visit him after he moved out.

I took it from his outstretched hands, perched on the side of his single mattress that sat in the middle of the floor of his small apartment. A box television was carefully balanced on a stack of college textbooks he certainly wasn't reading.

It's ironic, looking back on it. Death of Daredevil. The book was battered from how many times he'd read it, corners worn white where his thumb turned the pages. Worn like the corners of his eyes, exhaustion evident in them.

When a hero dies, the whole world mourns them. Citizens gather in Times Square dressed up in their suits, hand in hand with complete strangers in mourning. That's what I wanted for him. That's what he deserved. But the unfortunate truth of it all was that he wasn't that significant. He was an addict.

And as he got older, that was all people saw when they looked at him. They didn't see the boy who cradled me with beaming eyes when I was born. They didn't see the boy who'd peel back the covers of his bed for me to hide in during thunderstorms. They didn't see the boy abandoned by his father. Discarded by his mother. Cheated on by his wife. Ignored by his whole family. The boy who never hurt anyone but himself.

A few years ago he asked me to take him to treatment. I dropped what I was doing, emailed my professor that I would be missing class

HAILEY TREDO

that day, got in my car, and drove forty minutes to pick him up. This was the first and only time he'd try to get better. He was scared, talking too quickly, picking at his fingernails in the passenger seat. I held his hand the entire way to the hospital, like he held mine when we were younger. And with every squeeze I tried to pour my strength into him, to tell him silently that he could do this, that he could get better before it was too late. He was out less than a week later. I wasn't mad, or disappointed in him, I was just sad because I knew what was to come.

I saw him stumbling in the middle of the road one evening while I was driving home from doing laundry, in nothing but pajamas and a pair of socks. When I reached the stop sign I closed my eyes and I pictured him younger, less sick, tiptoeing in his too large socks to the kitchen in the middle of the night to get me a snack. Everyone else he walked by must have just seen him at face value, looking the other way.

That is the nature of addiction. Everyone looks the other way until it's too late. Until the boy is too sick to be saved. Until cirrhosis has taken over and the boy can no longer walk on his own. Until they find cancer in his liver and bones. Until he is under the care of hospice with weeks left to live. And even when he is laying there, dying, he is still just an addict. Dying from cancer. But still just an addict.

The last time I saw him I gave him a stack of comics. He must have been bored out of his mind laying in bed all day. He told me he'd been watching movies we watched as kids. Doogal... He was obsessed. We agreed that the next time I visited we'd have a movie night and watch those movies together. We laughed and cried (of course he only let one tear fall before wiping it away because he was tough) and reminisced about growing up. About how even though we didn't have anything else we always had each other.

That movie night never came.

They say that addiction affects the entire family unit. And it does, in a way. But in the wrong way. Everyone turns bitter. They fight. They get selfish. We should have come together. We

THE DEATH OF DAREDEVIL

should have been there for him more, supported him more, told him we loved him more. We should have given him a fighting chance. Everyone deserves a fighting chance.

His mother gave us some of his most prized possessions a few weeks later. A sign he made out of wood that he had written—keep this until I am better—on. She was going to burn it.

“He never got better, he was never going to get better,” she huffed.

But until the very last moment he believed he would. And isn't that all that matters in the end? That he always had hope. She slid his biker helmet that he messily painted red across the table. The significance of the color is lost on everyone except me. It can be our little secret.

It sits on the mantle. I pass by it countless times every day. And I smile. Because he was a hero. And his helmet was red, just like Daredevil's.

Droughts and Floods

Haley Farrands

People are supposed to drink water eight times a day. When you don't, you dehydrate; fatigue takes over, you forget where you are, and simply breathing becomes a Herculean task. You begin to think of nothing but your dry mouth. You long for a cool rush of liquid to run down your throat and through your body. You think, perhaps, that you've never been so thirsty before, and your life will surely end if you have to hear the rattling of ice in someone else's bottle without the water ever passing your own lips. More than three days without a sip of water and you'll die.

We went too long without seeing each other. Sure, we talked every day. You called me late most nights, tucked under covers in a nearly black room to tell me about your ideas for the future; what you'd do and where we'd live, the kids we'd have and how we'd be better to them than our parents were to us. We said we loved each other back and forth over and over until we forgot who had started it. As I listened to your voice or watched the way the streetlights outside your window sent shadows across your face, I could almost feel your arms around me, but it wasn't enough to keep us from falling out of sync.

It's not enough to simply see that it's raining. If you check the weather and just see the word "rain," you're unlikely to be any more prepared than if you had not checked it at all. Does rain mean a fine mist of water from the clouds, too light to justify windshield wipers or a raincoat? Or does rain mean blustering winds, a flash flood that you have to wade through, and no electricity for days on end? Is it the rain that you welcome after weeks of drought, or the rain that makes you paralyzed with fear inside your house, watching the clouds roll in through your window?

Our fights were never predictable. What started as a simple request

HALEY FARRANDS

to have a mature conversation would escalate faster than we could ever make sense of. A question of why one of us hadn't responded to a text message turned to accusations of distrust, and a naked truth became twisted into unhappiness. If I went too long without responding to you, you insisted I must be ignoring you. Instead of calming your accusation, I'd fire back that I didn't owe you an explanation. Throughout it, we'd assure each other of our love and promise that we weren't fighting; just talking, debating, arguing, assessing, fixing, anything but fighting. When friends in new relationships looked at us, awestruck, and asked if we ever fought, we'd beam and say that we didn't. I was never sure if we were lying on purpose, or if we truly believed that.

Water moves in waves and ripples. A gust of wind at the northernmost point of a river is enough to send waves that multiply and grow in size all the way down. The waves last far longer than the gust of wind ever did. If you throw a rock into the middle of the ocean from the deck of a ship, it sends rings of movement around it. But if you throw a rock into the middle of the ocean, you'll probably be the last human being who ever touches that rock.

I like to think that we changed together, moving rhythmically with each other so that neither of us were ever left behind. We went from cocky teenagers trying to pretend that they knew who they were to frightened young adults who weren't afraid to admit that they didn't. Somewhere along the way, you truly figured it out. You became more sure of yourself; you stood taller, held your shoulders wider, learned to quiet a room with a glance. I had to keep up with you, and I started to become the person that I had evolved from. I shrunk in my seat, set myself inward, learned to let you speak since you always had more to say. I wish I could pinpoint exactly when I became more an accessory to you than an individual.

When it rains, we look forward to a rainbow. It's comforting to know that despite the wet clothes, the downed power lines, the car accidents, that science will win out and flash an arc of color across the sky. Sometimes it hardly rains at all and we're left with a rainbow

DROUGHTS AND FLOODS

that we don't quite feel we deserve. Sometimes the colors come out before the rain has even finished. But sometimes, the sun doesn't shine after it rains.

I have scarcely felt more pain than when we were apart, or more relief than when you came back to me. The bliss of being held in your arms again, of seeing your face in the morning, of hearing your voice in my ear was almost enough to make the time apart worth it.

They say that love is fiery and passionate, that love is exciting and scary and keeps you on your toes. They say that to love is to take the biggest risk; that is, to risk being burned to the ground for the chance of feeling something. They say that we should fire away, burn it down, set fire to the rain, that love is burning red.

But you are my water.

And I can't live without you.

Where My Dogs Rest

Emily Bond

I

Britney was something of a wedding gift for my mom. At the age of nineteen and newly married, she found herself crying most days from homesickness. My dad, knowing that neither of them were ready for kids yet, figured that a dog would be the next best thing.

My parents love watching the National Dog Show on Thanksgiving. It's a tradition that still stands; my favorite part of the holiday. While watching it together in those first few months of married life my mother pointed out one of the dogs—a fluffy little thing in the toy breed category. A pomeranian.

Some would call it fate that, when my dad found a farm advertising cheap puppies, he was shown to a small herd of pomeranian puppies huddled together in a cage outside. It was cold, the beginning of December, and the puppies backed away when he approached them. One came forward, a tiny thing with beady eyes hidden by dark fur. My dad tells me now that he picked the puppy because she was the only one who would go near him.

She was \$50. No papers, she simply came wrapped in a towel. My dad placed her in the car, amongst concrete splattered shoes and a cracked hardhat.

My mom cried when he put the puppy down in the small trailer's living room. My mom was quick to settle on the name Britney, which would have been my sister's name had it not been for the dog's arrival.

Britney was an odd dog. Pomeranian puppies have trouble running at first, as their round bodies tend to gain momentum faster than their little legs are able to keep up with. Despite this, Britney took it upon herself to become my mom's personal guard dog.

The little fox-faced puppy would snarl and snap at anyone who dared to look at my mother the wrong way, actively attacking my dad when he would joke and pretend to hit her. Britney grew into an odd dog with odd tendencies. She didn't look like a typical pomeranian;

EMILY BOND

she was all dark, scraggly fur with an atypically long face. She would get after the sucker fish that traveled up the crick to lay eggs and chase chipmunks into the pile of firewood. She didn't like strangers and would hide under my parents' bed when they had company. Britney was well into adulthood when my sister and I came along. I was one, and my sister four, when Britney got fleas. My dad, not wanting the fleas to get onto his young kids, put her in the garage. He forgot to close the door and my parents found her dead in the busy road the next morning. She was ten years old.

They buried her up on the forty acres. In the field where we caught fireflies in June and watched monarchs in September. I think Britney would have liked to chase the bugs with us.

II

We got Bailey when I was six. I don't remember much about her, but I remember picking her out of the litter.

The breeder was respectable and the puppies were purebred, papers and all. The barn that houses the puppies was cozy and warm, with large paw prints painted onto the outer wall. I remember my mother sitting my sister and myself down, telling us firmly not to pick the puppies up, that they were very fragile.

Adult Pomeranians have over three hundred bones in their bodies. Puppies have even more. One of the nurses who worked with my mom had a pomeranian puppy that jumped off her lap and broke his leg. He looked so sad in the bright pink cast, thick and covering even his little paw.

I remember how little the puppies were. I remember my mom holding one of them easily in one hand. I remember the feeling of their fur, almost like a sherpa blanket on my skin. Their tiny teeth were like needles as they nibbled on our fingers.

Bailey couldn't get up the front steps when we brought her home. We made sure to shut the door to the basement when we carried her inside. It was the middle of summer and the pool in our backyard was fairly new. My sister and I spent most of our time in it, so Bailey was quickly introduced to the area.

My mom set out a bowl of water for her, which Bailey wet her face in with no hesitation. She proved the theory that Pomeranians

WHERE MY DOGS REST

are the clowns of the dog world when she climbed into the bowl, small enough to treat it as her own miniature pool. My mom has a photo of the moment framed in her office.

Bailey was a good dog. She was dumb, which was unusual for a Pomeranian, but a good dog. She hated the smell of her own collar and would snarl and bite at it if we took it off her. She would chase cars and bark at dogs ten times her size. That big-dog attitude that all Poms seem to possess.

She was barely a year old when it happened. I was home, for reasons I can't remember, waiting for my sister to get back from school. My grandmother was at the house, ensuring my dad that Bailey was fine to go out without a leash.

I didn't see it, but I was told that Bailey saw a bird and ran into the street after it. Cruel coincidence would have it that our neighbor was speeding down the quiet side street at that moment, his motorcycle tire seeming to be aimed at our small dog. My poor sister, ten years old, had been walking down the hill towards the house. She saw the whole thing. I remember hearing her scream from the living room, running out to climb onto the bench and look out the front window.

My dad was hurrying up the driveway, holding Bailey under her armpits. She was limp and dripping blood onto my dad's shoes.

I ran outside, but Katie was there to intercept me. To protect me from the horror she had seen. She carried me into the house where we laid on the green couch and cried until our mother got home. I can't forget her words as she came into the room.

"What happened?" she asked, but it was not a question. It was an invitation. Katie jumped up and ran to her, sobbing out a vague explanation. I didn't move, my face rubbed raw from the couch's tear-wet fabric.

When we buried her in the backyard we planted a nursery tree. A red maple. It is grown now—not an adult yet but I can wrap my hand around its trunk without my fingers touching. I like to imagine that the grass is greener around Bailey's tree.

III

Molly came into our lives a year later. The breeder, having felt

EMILY BOND

so sorry for our loss, gave us our first pick of the litter—the same mother as Bailey, but a different father. I remember my jealousy when Katie got to hold the puppy, wrapped in an old towel, for the drive home.

Unlike her predecessor, Molly was able to triumph over the porch steps—after several tries, mind you. I took this as a sign, but of what I wasn't sure.

Molly went through the puppy uglies stage. I regard it as a Pomeranian's teen years. Their legs grow out before their bodies and their fur is in the between stages of growing that double coat.

She became a beautiful dog. She's orange sable and as close to a fox as you can get. Her face and chest are cream colored and her tail has a hint of black. When she gets her coat cut short for the summer you can find a silvery blue-gray on the back of her neck.

"Put your tail up!" we say to her. When her attention is lost and she looks sad her fluffy tail droops, barely dragging on the floor. At the sound of our encouraging voices her tail curls up to rest on her back and her mouth opens in that trademark Pomeranian smile.

Molly is thirteen years old now and, while the cream on her face has turned to gray and she can no longer hear us when we speak to her, she is still the most beautiful girl I have ever seen.

Her favorite place is in the garden, soaking up the sun amongst the daffodils as my mom weeds. She places a flower in Molly's fur and her mouth opens in a smile.

Luna Moth
Caitlin Marx



Sanctuary
Caitlin Marx



Grapefruit Spoon

Lily Paddock

Loving you is like this,
Serrated edge on my tongue
Bittersweet dripping from my lips

Loving you is like this,
Scraping at pith
Eating with sugar packets

I wish you would go back to being a pomelo
Delicate, mild
I wish you would go back to being an orange
Bright, my favorite color

Instead, you are a grapefruit
And I have to eat you like this
Trying to acquire a taste

A Villanelle On Stuttering Tatum Capodifferro

My vocal cords are an ancient antique,
resting alone to degrade,
a cool and unmoving, mud-thick creek.

Every interaction is a mystique,
misunderstanding is easily conveyed,
my vocal cords are an ancient antique.

Tongue twists, chokes, weak,
against the teeth that blockade
a cool and unmoving, mud-thick creek.

Click my tongue, press tongue to cheek,
defeated and completely afraid,
my vocal cords are an ancient antique.

Conversation makes me a freak,
I miss how bubbling laughter used to sway,
a cool, unmoving, mud-thick creek.

So I'll stay silent, for I can't correctly speak,
let the words clog my throat like marmalade.
My vocal cords are an ancient antique,
a cool and unmoving, mud-thick creek.

Along the Way
Horane Daley

my words got thwarted
by a secret frequency.

the words they corrected me with,
were the ones i
mouthed.

but only to my ears.

so i heard "Dutchmon,

Dutchmon"

because of my sp ee

ch.

but really myself, and

Ideals were on the fringe. my identity a conjecture with

society.

so i kept my

hums low,

an

god

sought

no achilles heel

doctor to scribe.

so my words were pent,

up until||9.

leaving me only the ability

to mimic

my native dialect.

the first elementary school, no help,
in its sake another school 5 miles away,
so that

"Boston road" was no longer

"Battum roon"

HORANE DALEY

in their ears.

along the way.

i learned to pronounce the right pitch, toning
the frequency to theirs but still

i'll *words up my.*
Mix

whenever i speak to home.

Bloodstream

Linnea Ceilly

I wish this pain was an easy fix
Something small
That could blow away in the wind
But instead
I stand here
Wishing to carve out my heart
from between my ribs

To leave it on the cold
hard floor
To beat its lonely rhythm
without
infecting my bloodstream

I wish I stopped fighting for you
I wish I stopped wanting you
when you told me
of your selfish acts
that cut deep into me
Although I did not have the strength to feel it

So instead
I reached for you
kissed you
As my tears ran in silent streams
Down my face
Imbedding themselves between our lips

stormchaser
Eli Kublius

I like it when the waves are grey
as opposed to their usual blue-green hue
and I like it when the sky is grey, too
the thick clouds quilting us from
the outside atmosphere, the suns radiant though
harmful beams, usually reflecting off of
puddles in the divots of seaside rocks
though today tamed by the clouds
(our silent protectors),
just a little lighter colored
grey than the waves,
and the puddles muddied now
as we walk along the bay,
the rocks carved and caved
by the forceful crashing of storm waves
the ground nearly shifting beneath our feet
molding to our presence
the wind whistling our silhouettes into the air,
reminding us;
we are alive.

I always liked the stormy days better,
found a sort of comfort in the chaos,
(just as I found a comfort in our chaos)
so there was never any question about a walk together
defying the imminent rain and
throwing caution to the wind
as we watched the waves ravish each other between the trees
and still moved closer,
desperate for a taste of their passion,
sliding down dirty jagged rocks
just for a better view
unbothered and uncaring to any harm
but still our hands found each other

ELI KUBLIUS

(a sort of comfort in the chaos)

gripping so tightly the crescents of your nails are still
embedded

into my skin

(not that I'm complaining)

and gripping tighter still when the smoothness of the rocks
betrays us

sends us tumbling down

an offering to the rage filled froth of the sea
a punishment for moving too close,

and still we moved closer

ignoring any sort of warning,
deciding the view was worth the danger,

until it wasn't,

until you slid too far and I
couldn't pull you back in, just
tucked my tail between my legs
and ran.

Feasting Foliage Kimberly Supliski

Flowers blooming in the night
along a forest path
their leaves unfurling
to soak in the light
of the moon beams.

Humming and whistles
coming from two different directions
one up and one down.

Sickly sweet aromas
sticking to her feet and clothes.
Pepper in the air,
her tongue smacking
against the roof of her mouth,
trying to extinguish the taste.

Eyes on her back,
skin warming as they watch.
From left and down,
right and up,
this way that
and nowhere.

Flowers stretching their limbs,
catching on her clothes
and toes,
wrists and fists.

Daisies squeal,
petals fall.
Roses cry,
thorns pierce.
Tulips scream,
roots rip.
Orchids blush,

KIMBERLY SUPLISKI

but they do not
shy away.

Flowers blossoming under the stars,
where the girl now lay motionless.

It Dies with Me John Riley

I am my father's son
I share many a same traits
I am my father's son
I look like he did at my age
I am my father's son
His opinions, his genes, his anger are all a part of me
I am my father's son
But that doesnt mean I want to be like Him
I don't want my mouth to let loose hate
Nor my hands to talk with anger
I am my father's son
But I will not hurt the ones I love
I am my father's son
But his anger dies with me
His trauma dies with me

I am my mother's son
I carry with me her anger and her sadness
Passed down like genetics
I am my mother's son
I have been both a sword and a shield to her
I am my mother's son
But that doesnt mean I want to be like Her
My faults are my own, no one else will take the blame
I am my mother's son
But her trauma dies with me

I am a Husband
One day I will be a father
My wife and children will not hear hate from my mouth
Nor pain and anger delivered by my fists
I will not pass it on to another generation
As it was passed to me
I am the product of my parents,
Their trauma anger and pain are all a part of me
But for my wife

JOHN RILEY

And for my future children
Their trauma dies with me

Head of a Skeleton With a Burning Cigarette

Francesca Spica

Puffing polluted air,
The ash sticks to my lungs,
Making them blacker than my heart.
I forgot what it feels like to breathe.

The smoke touches the base of my skull,
Down to the branches of my lungs,
My alveoli invited it in.
I forgot what it feels like to breathe.

My bones feel weak,
As the ash starts to caress them,
Ash and bone are now one in the same.
I forgot what it feels like to breathe.

One last hit,
One last escape,
And then maybe,
Just maybe,
I won't forget what it feels like to breathe again.

Crime Scene

Noah Rust

By telling this story,
I am a lost child
running up to you.
You saw me,
a little girl,
standing in her
nightgown, roadside.
This is a forest;
there's no service, and
nobody for miles.
I can't tell you how
long I've been stuck here.
You shine a flashlight on me,
what I'd always dreamed,
hoped someone would.
You see me.
And I have something.
I have something to show you.
I take your big hand
and lead you into the thick.
I lead you to a clearing
with a big ferocious crater
where sizzled stuffies lie
with burnt diary pages
and a broken pair of glasses.
Your stomach rots
as did mine.
I'm asking you
to discover me,
the crime scene.

My Mother's black swan

Eli Kublius

My mother's black swan comes first ,
and that's okay
Because my mother's black swan is
what keeps her sane
She spends hours in the bathroom
primming and
plucking its feathers
(no more shivers and sweats when she comes out)
a person anew ,
eyes bright and
glowing (her face radiating eternal bliss)

The black swan locked back
into its cage
tucked away under her bed
where it huffs and haws with rage

back to mom now ,
ready for games and
movie night, we three cheer
Mom goes first, moving her silver Mustang
(her palms stained black from the tar of its feathers)
we go round and
round , circling three times before
the black swan breaks loose
wings flapping hard and fierce
feathers drifting downdown ,
down
all moms hard work of
primming and
plucking its feathers gone to waste
(the crooks of her elbows bruised purple from the struggle)
It destroys our game in its path
rearing its sharp beak and needle teeth
high as it holds its head
(swallowing mom whole.)

Blackest Bile
Ethan Gallo



Stagnate
Alison Hibbert



Experimentation
Tessa McCain



Her Last Birthday

Charles Burton

The cone-shaped birthday hat, heavy with drops of partially dried blood, sat idly in the golden rays of the dying sunlight that crawled through the window in slivers. She sat there, wanting to reach out and grab it, to let the now scar-riddled flesh of her hand dance across the cheap cardboard. She longed to feel something, anything, other than pain. Other than the mangy, blood dried hair scraping against her scalp. But her muscles were tired, and her thoughts were stuck in a never ending loop of fear.

He's going to find me.

The creaking of the sloppily placed floorboards shivered through the house.

He's coming.

She focused on the hat.

Please, God, don't let him find me.

She focused on before. Before the blood. Before the pain.

Don't let him find me.

The singing, even if it was like nails scratching a chalkboard.

Please!

The drawn out words, lacking all sense of melody and rhythm.

“Ha-a-a-a-happy Birthday-a-day dear-”

I'm...

But then it was over. The air went silent for just a second before the kitschy little candle in the shape of a bloated, cartoony 9 was blown out. And then the frantically enthusiastic cheers. And then...

I'm too young to die.

And then the knife.

The brief sojourn to the before was over. With the memory of the knife came reality. With the knife came the pain. And with the knife came the milky emptiness in her brother's eyes as the blood spurted from the back of his neck and his body went limp, crumpling into the cake like a ragdoll. Her mother was next. Then her friends. And then...

And then she was the only one left.

He had come so close. The blade had nearly slashed through the skin on her face, but she blocked it with her hand as she dove for the

floor. She was quicker. Smaller.

Some part of her wished she wasn't. She wished she didn't have to live with the memory of her brother's body etched in her mind. She wished she didn't have to live knowing that he could be there at any moment. She wished she didn't have to live knowing that all of her friends were dead, and that they wouldn't have been there if it wasn't for her. And most of all, she wished she didn't have to live wondering how her own father could do this.

"Don't hide, baby girl. Daddy's here. I'll protect you," his voice was soothing, sweet, familiar. She wanted to run to him but... but there was something sinister lurking under the words, like a shark waiting under water for its prey, creeping beneath the crest of the dark, foamy waves. It sent a shiver down her spine.

The footfalls came closer, closer, closer.

The split skin of her palm still refused to hurt for now, but it promised it would later.

She focused on the birthday hat again. She focused on the time before.

"Ha-a-a-a-happy Birthday-a-day-"

Please, God, don't let him find me. Don't let him do to me what he did to them.

"It'll be alright, baby girl. Daddy's here for you."

"Happy Birthday to... yoooooooooooo."

God, please. Please, I'm so scared.

"Have I ever let you down before, pumpkin?" he said, his voice mingling in the air, accompanied by the pungent scent of blood. His round, pudgy face peered around the doorframe, beady, broken eyes scanning the room like some inhuman machine. His snaggle tooth grin was curved, twitching every few seconds. His head would jerk to the side at times, snapping like a rabid dog. The knuckles on his meaty hands went white as he viciously clutched the bloodied knife. He turned the corner and-

"Ah, there you are."

"Please, Daddy! Don't hurt me," she said, quivering, hiding her face as she felt her father's shadow drape over her like some hellish robe.

"Hurt you," he knelt down, still grinning, even with specks of blood scattered on his face and over his once pristine white under shirt. "Why would I want t-t-to h-hurt you? W-w-why would y-y-you th-th-think that?"

"You killed the rest of them."

HER LAST BIRTHDAY

There was a pause. "I did?"

She uncovered her eyes for the first time, and saw her father, looking horrified at the knife, just as stunned as she was. His grin bent down, his eyes sank a little, and his shoulders slumped. His head snapped to the left, then to the right, and then back forward.

"I-I-I-I did," he said, looking at the knife with a strange cocktail of curiosity and horror. "H-h-h-how d-d-d-d-did that happen?"

"I don't know," she shook her head, voice still shaky from sobbing in fear.

"Why... why w-w-w-would I d-d-d-do such a thing?"

"I don't know," she repeated, voice hushed. "I don't know."

And her father just kept looking at the knife. Turning it in his hands, watching his reflection in the crimson blood, completely mesmerized by something visible only to him, something that could only be seen by eyes hazy with madness. Then he gave her one last sad, pleading look, before lifting it up into the air and jamming it into his own eye socket. He shuddered backward, head slamming into the floor, body falling limp as life faded from it and blood violently spurted from the wound, cascading down around him like a waterfall of crimson.

And she sat there, head in hands, not knowing how to cope, or what to do. All she knew was how to cry.

Aoife

Leilhana Abu-Sbah

Damp crinkles of fallen leaves hushed the thrumming in his ear. As the door shut behind him with a slumbering groan, jingles from overhead bells welcomed him into the shop. A patron by the window nestled a gemstone the color of honey and syrup in her palm as she picked over woven baskets filled with metal trinkets. With every swell of his chest, he was comforted by wafts of mossy undergrowth and burnt sage. The shopkeeper had always refused to pluck the lifeless leaves out of the topsoil of the hanging plants, even when mildew began to grow.

She said it brought good fortune.

Basking in the hearth of the sun's glow—when bearing the burden of customer service became too overwhelming—Sophie, the shopkeeper's truest gem, would hide her whiskers behind soft paws, far away from the must of unkempt indoor foliage.

He wandered around rickety shelves of leather books and inkwells while other patrons of the store watched in wonderment as the shopkeeper masterfully wrapped their herbs and stones in thick paper. A soft smile graced his lips as she introduced herself with the same radiant charm to each guest.

She had always said that she has had many names.

Cordelia. Juniper. Odette.

It did not matter which sun had shone upon her or which name colored her presence. She would always be one to cradle the stars and whisper to the moon like a—

“I've figured you out,” he told her once. His voice was as gentle of a whisper as Sophie's sleeping breath.

She had been wrapping slender candlesticks at the time. “Have you?”

Eda. Sparrow. Rowena. Calliope.

“You're a witch.”

The shopkeeper had only laughed.

The gentle softness of withering candles reflected in the vitric sheen of her eyes in the same way a sunset glowing betwixt parting clouds painted the puddles of a rainy street in archaic gold. He watched a bead of candle wax pearl down the stem in opaline raindrops.

She had always scrawled illegible notes—spells, perhaps—on the back of unwanted receipt copies. She sketched mushrooms and trolls and sea ghouls. That day, the ink of her quill swirled in thick lines as a portrait of Sophie bloomed onto the paper.

“That’s quite an extraordinary thought,” she said. Her smile lifted her cheeks to the lower crease of her eye.

Willow. Isra. Talulah. Circe. Hyacinth.

His mind fluttered in a mirage of dried flowers homed in glassine and threaded with twine. He thought of a toad croaking between reeds which have been yellowed and hardened by autumn’s breath and owls that haunt the vesper realm beneath flickering freckles of stardust. His peripheral vision was veiled in strokes of walnut and olive as vines and ivy crawled up the wooden walls.

Eithne. Mar.

She held new stones in her hand like pearls in a clamshell and gushed over the newest herbs as she tied them with ivory thread.

He had never known what it felt like before; to be so consumed by the thoughts of her that it felt like there was nothing more to do than bring cassettes full of October Country and drop them by the shop register like a crow bearing gems and shiny gifts in its beak.

When the sun dipped below the horizon and the sky was cast in an umbrage akin to ink and coal, the shop’s bell bid him farewell with a melody as light as the moon. The chill bit his skin and hollowed his bones, nearly carving them into chimes that whipped and whistled in the autumn wind.

The gems of her gilded rings sparkled like the midnight sun in the dim light as she waved to him behind the window. Sophie wandered between her ankles and the bristles of her broom.

Aoife.

“Indeed,” he whispered to himself. “Extraordinary.”

Petrichor

Cori Jessup

Fluorescent light glared down from the ceiling. Freezing air rushed through the open window. An alarm screamed behind their head. They were small things, but there were so many of them, each one adding to the other, coalescing into a mess of discomfort. They hadn't eaten yet today; they had gone to sleep late the night before, and there were so many things they needed to do, be doing, have done. Their hands shook; their whole body shook, but the hands mattered most. The shaking slowed down their work, prevented their rhythm, prevented their focus. They continued, through the trembling; they could not leave, not until they were finished. They pushed through, each tap on the keyboard a struggle; despite how familiar the keys were to them, the inability to do something integral to their nature added to their pain.

Until the final keystroke. And then they were done. Only for this moment, there would be more tomorrow, and the next day, and beyond. Despite being done in that moment, they knew it would not and could not last, so they continued shaking, even as they left the source of the tremors.

They closed the door as quietly as possible, slipping away into the unlit room. It was completely silent. They walked over to the bed and collapsed, wrapping themselves in their favorite blanket, melting into the soft, fuzzy fabric, still warm from the dryer. They closed their eyes, listened to the sound of their own breathing.

In, and out.

Inhale, exhale.

Then, they opened their eyes once more, and grabbed a book from their nearby dresser. The words were blurry, incoherent, their eyes burned. They put the book away, and again closed their eyes, hoping that this time sleep would come easy, even though it hadn't in far too long.

A quick flash, then a deep, roaring boom as the sky unleashed endless waves of aggressive rain, attacking every exposed surface. The sky was black and streaked with lightning. The thunder was deep and powerful. The rain was relentless. With this storm, the silence

CORI JESSUP

had ended.

They turned their head to the window, eyes wide, as they stared at the rain, each flash allowing them to brace for the next roar. They let out an exhale, deeper this time, as they watched the rain pour down. The rhythm eased their tension, just enough to force it aside. They closed their eyes for the final time that night, sinking into a wonderful, deep sleep.

Dull

Charles Burton

I held the blade to my wrist.
I pressed down, dragging it across my skin.
My hand shook, palm sweaty.
This was it.
I winced, expecting pain.
Expecting *something*.
Anything.
Nothing.
Nothing?
Nothing!

Oh, sure, the skin was a little sore, I guess, but the damn knife was too dull. Why was I surprised? Our silverware, which was probably older than I was, already made steak night a difficult little hell in its own right. Why did I think it would fare any better against...

Whatever.

I set the knife down on the edge of the sink, letting it waddle precariously a little. Would it slide into the basin? Would it tumble off, falling into the abyss/onto the bathroom floor? Or would it settle, staying right where I put it?

Who the hell cares?

I needed something better. *Stronger*. There had to be some knife or something in the place that would do what I needed it to do. Strong enough to...

I don't like saying it. Saying it made me think about how bad it was. In the crappy little two-horse burb I begrudgingly called home, it was bad enough that it might even make the front page of the paper. It would be the talk of the town. There would be whispers in churches and all the little get-togethers that the bored stay-at-home moms cobbled up.

Did you hear about the Phillips kid?

His poor mother. Found him right on the bathroom floor.

He was always quiet, but I never thought...

But this... I mean, I wasn't doing anything bad. I wasn't doing *that*. I wasn't. It wasn't going to be like in a movie or some sappy

DULL

book. This wasn't worth a sob story on the *Today Show* or even one of those "everybody needs help sometimes" school assemblies. I was just going to be... helping myself. Helping others, too, really.

It wasn't bad.

It wasn't what it sounded like.

I gripped the edge of the sink hard, my knuckles going white, as I stared right into the mirror. Right into myself. I didn't like what was looking back. Hated the guy, actually. Shaggy, messy so-dark-brown-it's-almost-black hair. A lumpy face that looked like it could have belonged in an old *Peanuts* strip. Pockmarked, pasty, almost paper-like skin that looked like it was papier-mâché'd over a dusty pre-*homo sapien* skull that had been found in a museum somewhere. A nose that...

Okay. The nose wasn't all that bad. The nostrils were a little big, I guess.

I looked at that not-so-hot mess and had to, one more time, convince myself that it was time. The stupid, dull knife was a set back. I'd just run back down to the kitchen and find something else, something a helluva lot sharper, and do what I'd wanted to do to begin with. It wasn't bad. It wasn't *that*. It was the last resort. The escape pod C-3PO and R2 get on at the beginning of *A New Hope*. It was the only option I had left. My only way to escape from a suffocating, spiraling loneliness that was slowly but surely eating away at me.

Right?

Right.

So I would go back down stairs and I would--

"Finn!" Mom's sing-songy voice danced up the stairs, through the carpet-lined hallway, and past the old oak door into the bathroom, stopping me dead in my tracks.

Oh. Bad choice of words.

"Uh... yeah, Mom?" I croaked awkwardly, almost shivering the words out of quaking lips. It was only now that I realized my cheeks were damp with tears. I wiped my nose on my sleeve and sniffled, trying to rebuild whatever meager amount of confidence I was normally equipped with.

There was silence for a moment, and I worried that she had caught on. Maybe she knew something was wrong. She couldn't... I wasn't doing anything wrong. It wasn't wrong. There was nothing for her to figure out. It didn't matter. But she still couldn't know. I couldn't face her and say that I was about to... that if it weren't for

CHARLES BURTON

that stupid knife I would probably be... I couldn't tell her. I just couldn't. Even if it wasn't as bad as it sounded.

"Your dad and I were thinking about going out for ice cream," she finally replied. I breathed a sigh of relief. "Do you want to come?"

"I..." I looked down at the knife. Apparently, it decided not to fall either way. It still teetered uneasily, the threat always there, but so far empty.

"Honey?"

"Yeah, sure." I finally called back, stiffening my voice as much as I could. Monotone was better than sobbing. "I'll be... I'll be right down."

It was just ice cream, right? Where I was going, a few more calories wouldn't matter much. I'd just find that replacement knife when I got back home. Or maybe something even better.

I had the rest of my life to die.

You could practically cut the tension in the car with a knife. I mean, not one of our knives. We've already gone over *that*. But like a knife with a good, hearty steel blade. The kind Gordon Ramsey would wave around in his kitchen while screaming absurd insults at fumbling wannabe chefs, or the kind that Jason Vorhees would stab a couple of horny summer camp counselors with. Point is, it was *thick*. Palpable. Painful. And all too familiar.

Mom and Dad, bless their hearts, were trying. Maybe they even thought I didn't notice the sharp stares in the middle of otherwise pleasant conversations, or the heated arguments that would pound out of their bedrooms in the dead of the night. But it was obvious to everyone that, despite giving it their all, or their twenty year long relationship, this just wasn't going to work. All the ice cream in the world couldn't fix them. Not that I wasn't perfectly happy to go along trying. Ice cream is ice cream, even in the ever looming inevitability of divorce.

And it wasn't their fault. They were perfectly lovely and loving people, and I'm sure they would have said the same thing about each other. There was a time when they'd been a perfect couple, the kind that walks out of the end of a *Hallmark* movie. Like they were made for each other.

Life is much suckier than a *Hallmark* movie, though. Things get tough. Family happens and... well, I'm not entirely sure what happened to them. But it was like a switch went off one day. A

DULL

sudden press of a trigger and... boom. The stronghold of their relationship crumbled. And that's part of what's so frustrating about it all. It was like my whole world was starting to fall apart and I couldn't even ask *why*. Instead we had to just go along playing make-believe.

Dad fiddled with the radio station, never quite finding what he was looking for. Mom stared out the window, head tilted back and leaning against the door. Then there was me, the nearly six foot tall high school senior, stuffed in the back, eagerly awaiting frozen desert like a five year old.

And then there was Liam.

Liam was only about a year and a half younger than me, but he was easily a full foot shorter. His hair was choppy and uneven, since no barber or hairdresser knew how to get him to sit still. His brown eyes were wide, although slightly slanted, the irises flecked with green. His face was flatter, rounder than most, and his mouth was split into a massive, settled grin, splaying his crooked and scraggly teeth like a deck of playing cards.

Down Syndrome. It's a helluva thing.

"I-i-i-i-ice cr-cream," Liam stuttered, smile somehow widening even more. He lurched forward a little, rubbing his hands together gleefully, his head bobbing to a song that only he could hear. I couldn't help but wrap my arm around his shoulders, pulling him into a quick hug, which he easily reciprocated.

"We'll be there in a minute, bud," Dad said, passing the local jazz station for the billionth time.

"Ch-ch-ch-ch-choc'lit," Liam chuckled, finally overcoming the impossible mountain that was the "ch" sound.

Mom sighed. "You bet."

"Yay!" Liam clapped his hands wildly, yanking me in for another hug.

I looked down at him with a strange mixture of love and what I guess you might call embarrassment. This little guy, who had honestly stopped being a little guy quite a few years ago, had been my best friend for as long as I could remember. He didn't judge me, didn't give me those cursory glances that decided what I was doing wrong. He just loved me. He was so pure and so perfect. He made every moment of life worth living. And here I was, twenty minutes before, standing in my bathroom with a knife in hand, seconds away from...

What the hell was I thinking? That couldn't have been me. There's no way. There's no way in hell I could have possibly been that

selfish. I mean, what would *it* do to Liam? I tell myself he wouldn't care, he wouldn't care just like everyone else on the planet, but I *knew* that wasn't true. I could see it in the look in his eyes, hear it in the bounce of his laugh. Maybe everyone else could care less, but *he* needed me just as much as I needed him.

Besides, things weren't as bad as they seemed. In the moment, sure, it was rough. But things get better. They always get better.

Weak.

There was that voice in the back of my head. It crawled out of the woodwork in moments like this, the post-manic moment of clarity, whispering poison to me. I'd say it hissed, but that would make it sound too cool. I didn't have Lord Voldemort in my head, I had depression. No, the voice was more like a dull, heavy *thwap*, like a piece of raw meat being slapped down on a deli counter. It was heavy and blunt and it made my skin crawl.

Weak.

Shut up, I told it, focusing on Liam's smile. Liam's smile could fix anything.

Too weak to live.

Shut. Up.

Too weak to die.

I flinched, trying to fight it. Things were better now. I knew that. That moment in the bathroom was a lifetime ago. I was practically an entirely different person now. I hugged Liam tighter, calling on his strength, knowing he wouldn't think twice about it. When it all came down to it, even when I felt like I didn't have a place in the world, when I felt like everyone would be better off without me, I knew that *he* needed me here. It wasn't a cure, but it was some damn good medicine.

The car jostled over a bump in the road as we entered the gravely ice cream shop parking lot. The rusty old sedan groaned to a slow halt as Dad stopped torturing the radio for five seconds to pull into a shady little spot close to the door. The engine grumbled to a halt, its roar turning to a whisper as its power died.

Whoops. There it is again. You'd think that the English language was big enough that it'd be easy to avoid running over the same word again and again, but you'd be dead wrong.

We got out, Liam fumbling with his seat belt before bursting out like a wobbly cheetah. He laughed and laughed, and we couldn't help but smile. It was good to see Mom and Dad smile together again. It wouldn't last, obviously, but as long as Liam's chuckles

DULL

carried themselves off into the night, it would be okay.

We slammed the doors shut in almost perfect unison, all of us probably more aggressive than we needed to be, for all the reasons I've already gone over, and then some. Liam's wasn't out of rage as much as it was all the four year old giddiness in the sixteen year old body. Our motley little crew meandered over to the window of the vaguely '50s-ish edifice, Liam tightly clasping my hand in his as he caught up with me. An old Elvis tune rang out into the night, crooning notes weaving in and out between chirps of cicadas.

"Ch-ch-ch-ch." Liam's body jerked forward a little with each stutter.

"You know it, dude."

"Oh. Good."

As we entered the bell above the door sang like it was Christmas and a burst of cool air pulled us into its embrace. The girl working the counter, a pretty blonde who made me think thoughts that were not at all in keeping with the mood of the night, leaned over the cash register and flashed a smile that said she'd been on shift for about an hour too long.

"What can I get for ya?" she asked with the slightest tinge of what I guessed to be a Brooklyn accent. Figured. Kirby Creek could never produce someone who looked like her.

We went down the line, asking for our regular orders— we were all too boring to dare branch out beyond Rocky Road or mint chip, honestly. Liam was last, absolutely giddy as he waited to ask. The girl scrunched her face a little, like she was inspecting him, like she was unsure of what she was looking at. I braced myself for some terse comment or glib remark. Those weren't too common, but it happened enough that the worry managed to stick in my head. I was never someone who liked confrontation all that much, but I liked to think that I'd be willing to get into a full blown brawl for Liam.

Luckily, it didn't come to that, thank God. If she was thinking the things I thought she was thinking, she didn't say them out loud. Instead, she shrugged it off and got us our orders. We left and trudged our way over to a little picnic bench on the side of the road. Cars whizzed on past, completely obliterating the forty-five mile an hour speed limit. Not that I could blame them, of course. Kirby Creek had approximately two real police officers, and that late in the night (around eight) they were no doubt half drunk at the old Irish pub on Main Street. Who would commit crimes that late, anyway? And on a *Monday*? Heaven forbid.

Still, I placed my hand on Liam's back nervously. He wasn't exactly Usain Bolt, but his little waddle-walk could carry him faster than it had any right to, and the idea of him speeding off into traffic...

Yeah, that was a place I didn't need my mind to go.

"Hehe!" Liam dug his little plastic spoon into the chocolate ice cream, shoveling it into his awkward little mouth. "Ch-ch-ch-ch-choc'lit!"

Mom grabbed Dad's hand, but it was like touching a rock. He didn't move, not even a flinch, instead enraptured by whatever was on his phone. Mom's hand slowly slid off as she looked down into her ice cream. It was an incredibly frustrating sight to behold. They were both good people. Neither one of them had, at least to my knowledge, done anything wrong. But then again, if one of them *had* done something, would they even tell me?

It was probably you, the thwaping voice said. Because that was *exactly* what I needed to hear.

Shut up, I thought back, probably twisting my face in some mildly embarrassing way that would have aroused suspicion if anyone had been paying attention.

But why would they pay attention to you?

Oh, for the love of--

We ate in silence. A year prior—before their marriage became a frigid hole of despair and before my little spiral had really picked up speed (trust me, we'll get there when we get there)--and we would have been laughing, cheerfully listing out summer plans. Things change. People say that all the time, but I guess I had never really seen it for myself. A rapid deterioration of everything good. Things don't seem to change much in Kirby Creek, so I guess I had always thought of it as being in some little bubble that kept time away.

But I was very quickly realizing that there was no such thing. It wasn't that there was *no* change, it's just that the people of the town ignored it. As far as they were concerned, it didn't matter. Things were the same as they had ever been. And if there *was* a difference? Eh, it would be back to normal sooner or later. Like there was always a rewind button.

But there wasn't.

I wasn't sure if I knew how to live without that. Even in the quiet, even as things seemed to be getting better in that moment, I felt an ache in my gut and a soreness in my skull. I thought about how things used to be. I thought about how I didn't know if I

DULL

could've stood up to the girl at the counter for Liam.

I thought about how hopeless I felt.

I thought about how the dull knife still felt like a setback, not a conclusion.

I thought about how I didn't know if I'd live to drink or even vote.

And I kept eating my ice cream in that bitter silence, not knowing anything but thinking a lot. I wasn't sure if I was still the same person as the guy in the bathroom twenty minutes before. I wasn't sure if that guy would get the better of me one day. But in that moment, Liam beside me, ice cream cone in hand, I realized I hoped not.

And hey, that's a start.

Giants

Gabrielle Kroeger

I never was afraid of storms. Growing up, we'd watch lightning streak across the sky while we sat on the porch swing. Rain pounded on the metal roof above our heads, creating a relaxing sound after a long day. I remember staring at the river, just wanting to swim in the rain, despite the danger that comes with lightning and water.

I remember my grandmother calling us from inside. She was terrified of the sounds brought to us by the storm. The crack of thunder, soon followed by a flash of lightning. She didn't understand that it brought us comfort. To her, it seemed like someone in the sky was angry at us. Or maybe it was just giants bowling in the sky.

I remember the days on the porch, calling out "One Mississippi, Two Mississippi..." until there was no more time in between the crack of thunder and the flash of lightning. By then, our grandmother made us come inside. Our parents would tell her to leave us be, let us enjoy the storm, but she couldn't stop thinking about the giants.

I never truly believed there were giants bowling in the sky, but it was nice to have an explanation for the loud noise. The thunder representing the ball being thrown down the lane, the lightning the flash of the ball hitting the pins. I never actually thought I would see a bowling ball rolling across the sky.

But then I did. A ball of lightning flashed in the sky. It was only there for a second before it flickered out. Of course it happened when I was on the porch alone. Everyone else had grown bored of staring at the rain splatter across the river. I wanted to tell my grandmother that she had been right. That there really were giants bowling in the sky.

However, I didn't tell anyone. I wanted to keep this between me and the giants. Why should I be the one to tell everyone this secret they shared with me? I wanted to let them continue their games in peace, without the world continuously trying to get a glimpse of them. They deserved their privacy.

I continued to watch the storms throughout the years, silently begging for another peak at their game. How many of them were playing? Why were their games so infrequent? I thought about my grandfather who went golfing on the same day every week. He

GABRIELLE KROEGER

would never be as irregular as the giants.

Maybe I would never see their bowling ball of lightning ever again. I would be okay with that. I had seen it once after all. But something in me couldn't shake the feeling that they were going to show me again. Maybe show me something *more*.

As I got older, the porch slowly disappeared as the camp was renovated into a house. I could still hear the rain sprinkling the tin roof, creating the most satisfying sounds. I still sat by the window, counting the seconds between the thunder and lightning to see how far away it was. Watching, and waiting, for the day the giants decide I'm worthy again.

Eulogy Madalyn Herron

My grandmother always told me what she thought her death would be like. Like riding an airplane into the clouds. But she wouldn't say air-plane, she would say "arrow-plane."

"My arrow-plane will be big and blue. I'll be in first class, and served champagne with little croissants. Grandpa will be there, too, you know. In his brown pea coat and loafers, and his tall socks, the green ones, with the geese on them. And they'll play our favorite music. Right into the clouds." She'd always sit back in her little wooden chair that only fit her tiny frame.

Everything in her house was always personal, fitting to only herself and grandpa, and that's the way she preferred it, I think.

My sister and I would sit criss-cross applesauce directly in front of her, on the round yellow carpet that I'm fairly sure used to be white, and listen about her arrow-plane.

"Well my airplane is gonna have a chocolate fountain, and leopards, and butlers-" Amelia had a way of making everything more extravagant than it was. Older, but never wiser, she didn't realize where her airplane was going.

"Sounds more like a private jet, darling." She smiled and would always glance at me, waiting to hear what my airplane looks like. I never answered.

"But I have more grandma. I want peacocks on it, the big blue ones with the giant feathers, and I want entertainment! A magician! No, a juggler maybe..."

That night she tucked us in, under her homemade quilts that always felt a bit too chilly despite being so heavy. Amelia slept a couple feet away from me, snoring, as always, and Grandma sat at the side of my bed and petted my hair. She'd whisper about her arrow-plane some more, and describe the music. Classical, but sometimes jazz, because grandpa needed some entertainment too, you know.

There was something so special about sitting like that with her, at night. It was quiet, and always dark, except for the small night light in the corner, the one shaped like a tulip. Sometimes she would ask me what my arrow-plane looked like, when she was sure Amelia was asleep, because she thought I didn't tell her because I was

MADALYN HERRON

was asleep, because she thought I didn't tell her because I was embarrassed in front of my sister. I just never had an answer.

Two weeks ago, when I got the call, I must've imagined one million arrow-planes. Some big, some small. Red, yellow, purple. Some had chocolate fountains, and maybe a peacock or two. Never a magician, but the occasional jaguar in a bow-tie. Today, I think I've decided what mine will look like. It'll be big, and blue. I'll be sitting next to grandpa, in his little green geese socks, because grandma will have the window seat, so she can see the clouds. We'll all have croissants and a glass of champagne. And wouldn't you know it? I think there will be music, too.

Spirit
Diana MacMorris



A Symphony of Yellow Petals
Greg Hartman-Sounder



The Withering Dawn
Ivy Ligon



Say No To This

Chloe Hill

(LIGHTS UP on the office of PRINCIPAL FITTS, a middle-aged man with a good heart that's been worn weary by the daily trials of his job. He sits behind his desk, flipping through a thick stack of printer paper and shaking his head.)

(Across from him is AMELIA, a precocious sixteen-year-old student. She sits with her feet tucked up on the chair à la James Spader in Wall Street.)

(Principal Fitts drops the papers onto the desk.)

PRINCIPAL FITTS
(bewildered)

I have to be honest, Amelia, I really have no idea how to punish you for this.

AMELIA
Sounds like we can call it a day, then.

(She moves as if to stand up, but Principal Fitts stops her with the point of a finger.)

PRINCIPAL FITTS
Our school has a strict policy against sexually explicit content. It's clearly listed in the student handbook. You agree to those terms of service before using our technology.

CHLOE HILL

AMELIA

Right.

PRINCIPAL FITTS

Right, and yet you used a library computer to write pornography.

About our Founding Fathers.

AMELIA

First of all...

PRINCIPAL FITTS

Yes?

(Amelia becomes increasingly confident as she speaks, picking up speed and gesticulating emphatically.)

AMELIA

First of all, it's not pornography. I'm pretty sure that pornography is strictly photographic. When it's written, it's erotica. And this isn't even erotica, because erotica is a publishing genre. It's fanfiction.

PRINCIPAL FITTS

Fanfiction about the Founding Fathers having graphic sexual intercourse.

AMELIA

Second, I didn't write it on a school computer. I wrote it on my laptop at home, and then I needed to print it out so I could give it to my editor to proofread. I don't have a printer at home.

PRINCIPAL FITTS

And you left it in the printer for Mrs. Graser to find.

AMELIA

Accidentally! Because it wasn't working while I was there, so I

SAY NO TO THIS

signed off and left. I didn't realize it would still print when she refilled the paper.

(Principal Fitts stares at her for
a long moment.)

PRINCIPAL FITTS

Amelia, do you know the meaning of "missing the forest for the trees?"

AMELIA

Sure.

PRINCIPAL FITTS

The forest, in this case, would be the graphic sexual intercourse. That is why you are in my office.

AMELIA

...Also, it isn't technically about the Founding Fathers. That's actually really important. It's about the fictionalized versions of them from Hamilton. Writing fanfiction about actual, real-life dead people would just be weird.

PRINCIPAL FITTS

(dryly)

Oh, I'm sure.

AMELIA

Although, if you read their letters to each other there's actually a lot of historical basis that—

(Principal Fitts holds up a hand to
silence her.)

PRINCIPAL FITTS

Look, I am thrilled that you're expressing yourself, and that someone your age is writing so passionately in her spare time. I really am. But you just can't do it in school, okay?

(Amelia glows from the compliment,
finally placated.)

CHLOE HILL

AMELIA

Sure, okay. Why didn't you say so in the first place?

(He pinches the bridge of his nose
and sighs deeply.)

PRINCIPAL FITTS

Okay, you know what? I think this has been enough of a punishment for both of us. Why don't I let you go with a warning and we can call it a day?

AMELIA

Oh, no, Principal Fitts. I don't think that'd be fair at all. I'll do a week's detention.

PRINCIPAL FITTS

A week?

AMELIA

That's my final offer, though, take it or—

PRINCIPAL FITTS

You're asking for a week's worth of detention?

AMELIA

Sure.

PRINCIPAL FITTS

Okay. Okay, fine. Week's detention. Please go back to class now.

AMELIA

Fantastic.

(She rises from her chair and
collects the papers from his desk,
then strides towards the door.)

AMELIA

I've got a 5k cookie-baking chapter to write and I could use the extra time to work on it.

Riding Out

Jacob Calta

EXT. FARM FIELD - DAYBREAK

The rising sun has yet to light the field, leaving the scene a misty blue. The field is an automotive graveyard, full of old clunkers from years gone by. The one most noticeable from the others is a white, withered 1957 PLYMOUTH BELVEDERE.

From out of the mists comes a darksome figure. The figure, clad in black denim and leather, is LEARA (30s), a tan brunette with a soft countenance.

She ambles through the field, side-eyeing the cars as she passes, giving a solemn nod to each. She is about to move on when she spots the Belvedere.

She takes a moment before crouching down to look at the car's front end. A subtle grin works its way across her face, and a smoky voice greets the derelict.

LEARA

Always wanted a bad boy like
you...you think you're ready?

There is no reply, but Leara nods as if there is.

LEARA (CONT'D)

Let's get you going.

She throws open the hood and starts tinkering around inside. Once content, the hood is closed and she opens up the driver's side door.

INT. PLYMOUTH BELVEDERE - CONTINUOUS

Leara looks inside to see that the interior is good as new.

JACOB CALTA

LEARA

Looks like the trick's still working.

She slips into the driver's seat and closes the door behind her. She carefully sets her hands on the wheel, giving it a pat.

She looks around the car, searching for something before an epiphany hits her. She looks down at the sleeve of her jacket, and with a quick jolt, the KEY slides out.

LEARA (CONT'D)

Alright, here we go.

She slides the key into the ignition and turns. The Belvedere's engine rumbles and grumbles, but doesn't turn over. She tries again. Nothing.

LEARA (CONT'D)

C'mon old man, I ain't taking you for scrap. It's the open road I'm after.

She gives it a third go, this time gently pressing on the accelerator. The car's engine finally turns over, purring like a kitten.

LEARA (CONT'D)

There he is.

She revs the Belvedere up before slipping him into drive.

EXT. FARM FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The white beast slinks away out of the field.

FADE TO:

INT. PLYMOUTH BELVEDERE - DAY

The speedometer sits at 70.

Leara, jacket now in the backseat, flicks her shades up. She has a look of "you can do better" in her eyes.

RIDING OUT

LEARA

I know you've got more in you.

She shifts up a gear.

The speedometer climbs to 80.

She gently nods, lowering her shades.

LEARA (CONT'D)

Doing better. How about a little more?

She shifts up again; it's the highest the gear lever can go.

The speedometer ascends to 90.

She shakes her head. Suddenly, another epiphany.

LEARA (CONT'D)

Lemme give you a hand.

She gives the gearshift a tap before yanking it into place and pinning the throttle down.

The speedometer rockets up to 120.

Leara is beaming.

LEARA (CONT'D)

There's my man.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Belvedere buckets along the desolate road, kicking up dust as he passes by the vast plains and distant mountains.

On the side of the road stands a tall man, TOM (30s), clad in dusty harness boots and weather-beaten blue denim. He's not drawing attention to himself; he's merely there.

JACOB CALTA

The Belvedere whizzes by before coming to a screeching halt. Tom looks puzzled.

INT. PLYMOUTH BELVEDERE - CONTINUOUS

Leara is ogling the image of the wanderer in the rearview mirrors, her shades tipped down. She is mesmerized.

LEARA

(to herself)

Helloooooooooo handsome.

She throws the Belvedere in reverse and backs him up.

EXT. HIGHWAY - SIDE OF THE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Tom steps back as the Belvedere backs up. Leara brings him to a stop before locking eyes with Tom. She plays it cool best she can.

LEARA

Hey there stranger. What you doing out here?

Tom lets out a gruff chuckle before replying.

TOM

Tell ya the truth, I dunno.

LEARA

Bit the big one?

Tom chuckles again.

TOM

How am I suppose to know?

LEARA

Well, we can always go looking for it.

RIDING OUT

TOM

For what?

LEARA

Your body.

Tom pauses.

TOM

Not sure I want to know then.

LEARA

Either way, legging it ain't too much fun. I should know, spent all night doing it. Hop in, me and my friend here
(pats steering wheel)
Could do for some company.

Tom looks over his shoulder to the vacant view behind him. He turns back to Leara before letting out a sigh.

TOM

Hell, I'll bite.

The tall wanderer struts over to the passenger side and hops in. He sticks his arm out the window and pats the car door. The Belvedere peels off down the road.

INT. PLYMOUTH BELVEDERE - CONTINUOUS

Leara, boot planted on the floor and wind blowing her hair about, chats casually with her new companion.

LEARA

I like saving guys like these. Always a gas to run 'em flat out.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CURVE - CONTINUOUS

The Belvedere drifts around a corner.

JACOB CALTA

INT. PLYMOUTH BELVEDERE - CONTINUOUS

Tom clings tight to the assist grip.

TOM

Christ, you'll ki--

He catches himself and lets go of the grip, defeated.

Leara bursts out laughing.

LEARA

Had to think for a minute, didn't ya?

She composes herself.

LEARA (CONT'D)

Look, I'm not in the business of unpacking the stuff emotionally, right? I come get 'em, I bring 'em over, and that's that.

TOM

Hell of a gig I guess.

LEARA

Boring as sin. Depressing too. They get checked in at an office. No rivers, no harps, no brimstone. It's like a retirement home after your retirement home.

She leans back, easing up on the throttle.

LEARA (CONT'D)

(to the Belvedere)

Alright bad boy, I think I've shown you off enough.

She sighs and pats the steering wheel.

RIDING OUT

TOM

You don't seem like the type though.

LEARA

It's the way I handle myself, right?

TOM

Pretty much. I mean...y'know what? You actually remind me of a chick I macked with once.

LEARA

She hasn't kicked it yet, has she?

TOM

Nah, she's over in Toledo last I heard. Hubby, kids, and all.

LEARA

High school sweetheart?

TOM

Nah, prom date. She was good.

There's a moment of silence, only the rumbling of the engine filling the void.

Leara pipes up.

LEARA

Y'know, I don't pry, but what had you wandering?

TOM

Don't remember. I can tell you everything from the moment I was born to about two weeks ago. The rest's a blur.

LEARA

Sounds like a bona fide Kentucky Bourbon bender.

JACOB CALTA

TOM

(snickering)

How would you know?

LEARA

Two words: office party.

The two start guffawing. Leara gets herself under control long enough to pull the Belvedere over. She puts him in park before turning to Tom.

LEARA (CONT'D)

Can I be completely on the level with you?

TOM

Sure. I've got nothing to lose.

LEARA

God you are fucking handsome.

Tom blushes a little.

LEARA (CONT'D)

Look, I get this whole thing is kinda weird. When we get there ('cause I might as well help you to the place while I'm with you), you'll get to figure out the whole deal, but I'm not gonna lie, I'd just like to be with you. Y'know, really be with you.

TOM

What, you want a posthumous marriage or something--

LEARA

--Not at all. Just...y'know...a little time.

It finally clicks for Tom and he moves in real close.

RIDING OUT

TOM

You sure?

There is another bout of silence before Leara proffers her reply: a tender kiss. So warm yet so cold.

When they pull away, they look deep into each other's eyes before he reciprocates. A chill runs down her spine, and before he knows it, she falls right on top of him.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Belvedere subtly rocks, almost as if nudged by the desert wind, which is all that is audible.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The Belvedere is stationary, with the soft green glow of the dashboard filling the interior.

INT. PLYMOUTH BELVEDERE - CONTINUOUS

Tom is now behind the wheel, with Leara resting in his lap. He breaks the silence with a soft, playful query.

TOM

What the hell are you really?

LEARA

I'll give you the mystical mumbo jumbo, alright?

TOM

(chuckles)

Shoot.

LEARA

I take many different kinds of shapes, alright?
A lot of people know the cloak and scythe

thing, but that's played out. So I kinda just take all sorts of forms now. You'll see me on the beach, I just look like the kind of gal you see there. Y'know the type: blonde, thin. You'll see me at a bridge table at a home. I'm just another pensioner.

(giggles)

But this is what I like the most.

TOM

Little Miss Grease Lightning, is it now?

LEARA

I can save any one of these tough old goats I want, ride 'em into the sunset, and hey, entertain

(pecks Tom on the cheek)

Company. I like that freedom. You don't get that on the job. It's always this somber, drab, "woe is me, your time has come" crap. Like this ain't bad, is it? Even when you're stuck filling out the paperwork and shit, you can enjoy yourself afterwards. Just takes a little legalese to get there.

There's a beat of silence as Tom ponders this revelation.

TOM

You wanna run away?

LEARA

Don't tempt me, it just doesn't work like that. I can be out for as long as I need to, but I always have to come back. It's a drag the moment we get there, I walk through the door and the shoulder pads get plopped on.

She sighs before perking up.

RIDING OUT

LEARA (CONT'D)

I do get to keep the cars. I got a little fleet going. Once you get through all the crap, come on over, take one of 'em for a spin.

Tom looks down at her perplexed.

TOM

Why the hell you whinging then?

LEARA

I don't get time to drive 'em. I'm always out and about, picking up the codgers and old bags. And this getup isn't exactly appropriate for picking up a centenarian.

TOM

Well you picked up me.

Leara's eyes shoot wide open. She gets up and looks right at Tom. She places her hand on his cheek, thumbing it gently.

TOM (CONT'D)

Born in '47, got to live all that good stuff.

LEARA

Damn...your prime self is...whew!

TOM

Was kinda surprised to see myself like this. Must've gone into a coma or something for those two weeks. Felt good when I woke up, so good that I went for a stroll. Kept strolling 'til I found you.

Leara takes a beat to just marvel at the man she's with.

Tom gently kisses Leara's forehead.

TOM (CONT'D)

Mind if I drive him?

JACOB CALTA

LEARA

Go for it, the night is young. I'll just have to bring you to the office in the morning.

TOM

Fine by me.

Tom turns the key and the engine roars to life. He revs up the car. Before shifting, he goes and turns on the radio. A mellow doo-wop tune comes over speakers.

TOM (CONT'D)

He knows what I like.

Leara smiles.

LEARA

Alright, let 'im rip.

Tom drops the Belvedere into gear and hits the gas.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Belvedere thunders off down the road, fading into the distance. In the still of the night, only these words are heard.

LEARA (V.O.)

It's a hell of a thing, ain't it?

TOM (V.O.)

I guess so. You just never know 'til it comes for you, right?

LEARA (V.O.)

Except for us of course. Doing the taking and all that. But fuck the shuffling off shit, if there's one way to get off the mortal coil, it's like this.

The sound of the Belvedere's engine echoes into the night.

RIDING OUT

The sound of the Belvedere's engine echoes into the night.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END

Eating For Two
Chloe Hill

INT. AMANDA'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

The cramped but cozy living space of a college student.

AMANDA (early 20s, quirky, cool, and a touch awkward) stands at the stove, cooking ramen.

Across the room, her older brother, HENRY (early 20s, protective with a neurotic streak) sits at the table.

He fiddles with his fork and spoon, stealing conspicuous glances at her.

Amanda turns halfway over her shoulder to speak.

AMANDA

Mom says that Dad's talking about renovating the basement again.

HENRY

Dad's been talking about renovating the basement since 2003.

AMANDA

I think he means it this time.

She shuts off the stove.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

Apparently he went out and bought a tool today.

HENRY

A tool?

EATING FOR TWO

AMANDA

Yeah. A drill, I think.

(sarcastic)

Sounds like he's getting serious.

Amanda finishes preparing the ramen, stirring in the seasoning and spooning the soup into two bowls. As soon as she turns away, Henry stares at her anxiously.

We see his gaze single in on her stomach.

Amanda walks the bowls over to the table and sits down across from her brother.

HENRY

Thanks.

They eat for a moment in silence. Henry tries to meet Amanda's eyes, but she is too nervous to look at him. They speak up at the same time.

AMANDA

So--

HENRY

What did you want to tell me?

Amanda takes another bite and stalls by chewing. Then she drops the spoon into the bowl and leans back in her chair.

AMANDA

I guess we're doing this. Okay, uh.

So I'm like...

Henry watches her impatiently.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

And it's like totally not a big deal at all, so we don't have to make a whole thing out of it. I just thought I should--I mean, I

CHLOE HILL

wanted you to know. It's important
to me that you--shit.

She buries her face in her hands.

HENRY

(gently)
It's okay. I already know.

Amanda peeks up at him through her fingers.

AMANDA

You do?

HENRY

It was pretty obvious. I guessed as
soon as you said we needed to talk.

She visibly relaxes. Her arms fall back at her sides.

AMANDA

Oh.

HENRY

Have you told Mom and Dad yet?

AMANDA

No. I wanted to tell you first.

HENRY

Okay. That's okay. They're pretty
progressive, so I don't think
they're gonna freak out too badly
or anything..

AMANDA

You think they're gonna freak out?

HENRY

Probably a little? But it'll be
okay. It's not like they'd ever,

EATING FOR TWO

you know, disown you or anything.
They're not like that.

Amanda remains uncomforted.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Do you want me to be there when you
do it?

AMANDA

I don't really know. It might be
something I have to do on my own.

Henry hesitates. He knows that he hasn't been doing this
right, and he desperately wants to.

HENRY

You know that no matter what
happens, I'm always gonna be your
brother, right?

Amanda's listens to him carefully.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I love you. And I will always have
your back.

Amanda smiles, finally, as she blinks back tears and nods.

AMANDA

Thank you.

HENRY

This is your choice. Whatever you
decide to do, I'll support it.

Her smile falls. She shifts uncomfortably, puzzled by his
phrasing.

CHLOE HILL

AMANDA

I mean...thanks, but it's not a
choice, though?

HENRY

(alarmed)

What?

Amanda starts to speak again, but Henry cuts her off,
suddenly looking panicked.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Have you told Brandon yet?

The sudden change in topic catches her off guard.

AMANDA

(casually)

Oh...yeah, of course I did. We
broke up about a month ago.

Henry slams a fist down on the table. Amanda jumps in her
seat.

HENRY

That son of a bitch!

AMANDA

What?!

HENRY

What do you mean, what? What kind
of bastard breaks up with his
girlfriend when he finds out that
she's--

AMANDA

Gay?

Henry freezes, his mouth agape. Amanda is utterly perplexed,
staring back at him and shaking her head slightly.

EATING FOR TWO

HENRY

You're gay?

AMANDA

Didn't we just go over this?

He burst out into relieved, near-hysterical laughter.

HENRY

(overjoyed)

You're gay!!

AMANDA

Henry, what the hell--?

HENRY

I thought you were pregnant!

Amanda freezes. Then, she begins to giggle as well.

AMANDA

Oh! Oh my God, no.

HENRY

Thank Christ. That's fantastic! Gay is so much better than pregnant.

AMANDA

So when you said it was my choice, and--holy shit! *Brandon!*

They laugh together for another few moments, both positively giddy with relief. Eventually, Henry does his best to compose himself.

HENRY

You know I meant what I said, though, right?

Amanda quiets down, looking at him curiously.

CHLOE HILL

HENRY (CONT'D)

About having your back. No matter
what.

She smiles, takes another bite of ramen, and gently kicks his
foot underneath the table.

AMANDA

(fondly)

Same to you, dumbass.

Let Go
Ethan Gallo

LET GO

Letting go is the process of freeing yourself, from obsessing thoughts and unhappy feelings. This might seem difficult to do but with some training and practice, it becomes possible. If a certain item of clothing is old, torn, or of no use to you, there is no need to hold on to it.



Angel's Trumpets
Melanie Tunkey



A NOTE FROM OUR EDITOR IN CHIEF

I would like to thank everyone who makes this journal possible: my peers for their submissions, the Creative Writing staff with special thanks to our club advisor Soma Mei Sheng Frazier, and the river's end bookstore for their support and collaboration. I would also like to thank our Public Relations Coordinators Kirsten Hirt and Ally Gero for their hard work in the formatting of this semester's edition.

We congratulate our graduating seniors: Shania Bumbury, our Secretary, Matthew Smearing, our Head Drama Editor, and Rachel Valente, our Head Poetry Editor—and wish you all the best with your future endeavors.

We are open for submissions throughout the year and publish a new edition every Fall and Spring semester. Please submit your fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry, and art pieces as an attachment to glr@oswego.edu.

The Great Lake Review is a product of our Student Association fees.

Thank you for reading and supporting our journal,
Kiley Kerns

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