



APOGEE

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(***) *Apogee* runs a high school contest which selects aspiring writers to publish alongside Franklin College students. The contest officially honors Kathy Carlson and Emily Stauffer, former professors of English at Franklin College.

(**) indicates that the selection was awarded a prize of distinction.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE SILENT ONES

Benjamin Fears

.....

A woman sits in a crowded room, playing “Canticle of the Sun.” The piano notes boom on the PA system. My classmates and I trudge through each note. Her piano is tied to imaginary strings, fastened tightly around our vocal chords, pulling us through each line. We don’t seem to mind. We are all apathetic to what this exercise is: forced singing. The air smells of incense and dust. As the song resolves itself into a major chord, our priest rises, we ascend with him. As I extend up from my kneeling position, my clunky skirt tears below my knee. My classmates chuckle slightly. I’m twelve years old, but I already know too well that any deviation from complete perfection deserves every bit of ridicule. I am a budding outcast, a long time in the making. However, the onset of puberty, a ticking time bomb in all of our bodies seems to have propelled that fact forward. I’ve learned to hide my symptoms of difference well. My Catholic school peers have all but forgotten the time in first grade I demanded to be called Alex. The times after school that I would perfect my free-throw so I could finally play ball with the boys. Mimicking the way their triceps dribbled the ball seventeen times before taking a shot, seventeen. “Nice job Fears!”, Max would shout over the running bodies as they swiveled, all taller and more solid than I. If I could play as well, if I could bring the intensity, the heat, for just a moment, my green skirt would melt away as we all moved back and forth on the court. Our bodies all became like a tidal wave. I’d come to associate with this seeming chaos, and with the brotherhood that came along with it.

They begin dismissing us from the church by class. The assembly line of students plugs the doors and trickles out into the mist of the oncoming spring. Father John, the priest in a prestigious white robe calls out “Sydney!” Adrenaline races through my veins. Father John has always been like a TV personality to me, like a caricature. In calling my name, the one adults use for me, he has reached out of his screen and grabbed my arms. He carts me away to the back room where people go to pray the rosary. He begins without hesitation. “God has given you a wonderful gift, Sydney.” My ears burn at the sound of my name. “I’ve heard from your teacher you have learned to play the guitar. She even mentioned that you have started writing your own songs. She has sent me a few of them. Will you play in church?” I don’t respond, like I’ve been taught. “Okay, great! I have one request. Your songs are really sad. Can you write

some happy songs? I really picture you singing something about praising God's glory on the mountaintops! Think of how many practitioners we could bring to service! I'm so excited!" My heart burns in protest. Music was my escape, but it seemed that the church would have that too. "Okay, I will write a song about the mountain tops," I answer robotically. I am quickly ushered back into my pre-programmed line. A new fire burns inside me, exasperation at being limited so long by arbitrary boxes. I decided on this day they could not have this part of me. I could be forced into dresses. I could be shown pictures of premature fetuses. I could be brainwashed to call the women who aborted them murderers. But they couldn't have my music. It seemed the most influential act of rebellion was the telling of stories, my story. Here's my song about the Mountaintops:

“Run to the Mountaintops,
Run to the Sea
Run to the desert, build a boat, you and me
And we'll sail to the ocean's edge, where the moon and
stars sleep
And there
Only there
May you weep.

Little one, how'd you get so bright?
Your eyes shine, like the dead stars in the sky
So open them, let them see in
They'll judge you for your apparent sin

Run to the Mountaintops,
Run to the Sea
Run to the desert, build a boat, you and me
And we'll sail to the ocean's edge, where the moon and
stars sleep
And there
Only there
May you weep.

Send me tears, I will write you a song
Send me your dreams, and I'll go along

It will be alright, I promise it will be okay
When their white, Lenten robes come to carry my body
away

Run to the Mountaintops,
Run to the Sea
Run to the desert, build a boat, you and me
And we'll sail to the ocean's edge, where the moon and
stars sleep
And there
Only there
Will I be free."

As I begin the process of coming out as a Trans-man, in a time in history that love hasn't quite caught up with prejudice, I think of moments like these. It's true that we shape our pasts as our present selves dictate. I look back on these moments as symptoms of my differences. The short hair, the longing for brotherhood, the need to define myself as rebellion. And maybe I look at my own narrative too simplistically, blame the adults around me for prizing their comfort over the well-being of a child. Does telling a narrative even matter? If the words, the stories, or labels that I give myself, I do so without certainty that I know who I am. In the words of my mother when I came out to her, "How do you truly know? We are elusive, even to ourselves." My chest burns the same as that fateful day in church, finding chains in the pockets of my school skirts, and holes in my mother's alibis. I feel the heaviness of myself too difficult to bear. My mother prizes her ambiguousness. Her queerness had taken its place in the cognitive dissonance I wish not to live in. So for those of us who have been silent for too long, know that we have a responsibility to ask the world for humanity, and this starts by giving it to ourselves.

With Sincerity,

THE STRANGER AT THE WAKE

Karly McPherson

.....

You have a distant relative that you never shared a table with but are expected to grieve with the same passion you would as if it was your own mother in the casket. You are there regardless, dressed in grey at the pink carpeted funeral home. There are too many lamps on the end tables next to couches and armchairs that force people so close together that you can't tell whose limbs belong to who in the overlapping mass of funeral clothes. Mourners are frozen in time. When they move it is slow and calculated as if trying to delay the inevitable – the reason you have all gathered like a flock of ravens in this morbid house of grievers. The grandfather clock moves at half the speed it should, only chiming once you've assumed it broken. You're lost in a sea of black-clothed individuals whose blood you share but whose memories you don't. The person in the casket no longer has this blood, but one of the other mourners could replace the embalmed corpse and you would be none the wiser. You've come alone and are ignored – a stranger among family. Sipping room temperature water out of a plastic cup in the corner, you nod to passersby trying to communicate that you are sorry. You are sorry for their loss, the loss of which you can't feel to the same extent as the others. You approach the casket out of obligation to say goodbye to the stranger only to see yourself laid to rest in your Sunday best. You lay in the casket – someone's distant relative to clumsily grieve in the near future.

THE BLESSED INHERIT THE EARTH

Samantha Fain

.....

The blessed inherit the Earth,
bleached. Eden cries for lives
she cannot birth and suns
she has buried. Her heart: a landfill.

There is no firmament here.
Oceans touch petroleum skies,
wash up cigarette butts as burnt stars.
Ultraviolet children beg for breath,
but their prayers can't reach God
through the smog. Tongues out,
they catch sulfur, sip lead,
hook strangled fish in cyanide rivers.

The blessed empty God's quarries
of miracles and walk on brackish water.
They are shorter. They cannot grow
their stunted roots. They look down.
They see their reflections in oil slicks
and recycle plastic bottles for nooses.

TO BE LIKE MARY

Jessie McClain

.....
Her name was Mary Magdalene,
she was the lucky one.

She stood on holy ground, tasted salvation, and
succumbed to her knees.
She washed your feet with sweet perfume,
and cleaned them with her hair.
True love,
And true love's witness.

Sweet Jesus, Your crucified feet,
the soul remembers what it feels like to kneel.
I pull at the blaze,
away,
from my own fragmented body and lay-waste world.

I am not of it.

So, I choke on pollution, ankle deep, in plastic chains.
The oceans are made of bottles.
Some, nailed to the trees, just like you.
This will not change a thing.
As there is nothing left,
untouched by man.

Not even my brittle heart.

Some say the rich are lucky,
others say, no,
it's success.glory.fame.gore.truth.love.beauty.wooden dolls with
cloven hooves and eyes of
muted green.
I don't want to be beautiful if that's what it means.

Oh God.

I want to be like Mary.
But the diamonds are dripping from desert mouths,

I gag and vomit up gold,
silver clogs my arteries,
my collar is made of fine rubies.

I have chained myself,
to a crumbling world,
that was never meant to last.
It runs through my fingers,
It's quietly becoming my past.

Yeshua, I want to taste just a bit,
of absolution,
to feel it in my marrow.
I will stay on skinned knees,
until you answer,
me.
Until you see,
me.

Mark the map
With a pin.
I.
Am.
Here.

SISTER DEAR

Camryn Phelps

.....

They found her body rotting in the dark space under the abandoned bridge.

Her eyes, once a startling blue, were long eaten away by the hungry creepy-crawlies whose home had become her deathbed. All that remained of her luscious golden curls were stringy bits of greasy fibers clinging to the bare bone of her skull.

Her clothes were nearly gone; what was left was decomposed and badly molded until the pink flower pattern on her dress was unrecognizable. It was her favorite dress; she wore it out often, as it would always grab the attention of many passersby.

“Pink is definitely my color.”

Sister twirled in front of the mirror in the room we shared, the edge of her dress rising just above her tanned thighs as the air lifted it. Pink suited her nicely, but there was hardly enough fabric to the outfit to give its color any significance.

“You should wear more dresses, you know,” she added. “I mean, you are a girl, aren’t you?”

Mumbling and rolling my eyes, I replied, “Not a girl like you.”

Stopping for a moment to glare over at me, Sister put her hands on her hips and sneered.

“You wish you were a girl like me.”

It had taken them almost three years to find her.

The coroner had ushered Mother and I into a dimly lit room to view the body and confirm Sister’s identity. We had seen our fair share of misidentified corpses, but Mother’s face drained of all color when the thin sheet was removed and the body was revealed. A high-pitched shriek lodged itself into her throat and stuck there, so she was gasping for air as she hit her knees.

Even in death, Sister’s smile was wide and mocking. It was the same damn smile that made my blood boil and bubble under the surface, and, even now, I wanted to slap it off her smug face.

“Ma’am,” the coroner addressed Mother. “Is this her? Is this your daughter?”

A low moan of despair escaped her lips.

“Yes,” Mother sobbed, “that’s her. My baby, my poor, sweet baby...”

She buried her face in her hands as the tears came freely, her frighteningly pale skin in stark contrast to her red-rimmed eyes.

Turning his gaze to me, the coroner asked, “And is this your sister?”

“Yes, sir,” I answered, trying to look past the sight of Mother on the floor.

The coroner promptly replaced the sheet back over the body and sighed.

“You ladies can leave now. We’ll take it from here.”

As he turned to leave, the sound of Mother’s pained voice halted his departure.

“How did she die?”

“Ma’am, I can’t-”

“How did my baby die?” she bellowed.

After a moment’s hesitation, the coroner looked back at Mother, his eyes not meeting hers or my own.

“Head was beaten in. Skull shattered. She didn’t stand a chance.”

A tense pause filled the room, like a rubber band pulled so far it could snap at any second. Mother spoke again, her voice cracking.

“Who...?”

“We have no suspects. No leads. No murder weapon. I’m sorry.”

He left before she could ask more.

Mother stood between Sister and I, her face beet red. Sister peered over Mother’s shoulder to scowl at me, her arms crossed over her heaving chest.

“Apologize to your sister,” Mother demanded for the fifth time.

“No!” I responded once again. “I did nothing wrong, and she knows it!”

I saw the flash of movement in the corner of my eye before I felt it. The sharp SMACK! filled the room as I recoiled from the blow, my hand involuntarily reaching up to cover the now growing pink welt on my cheek. Mother froze for a moment

and stared at her palm, as if she was shocked at her own actions. She recovered quickly, however, and sighed.

“Now, you know that I hate resorting to violence, but you have to learn somehow. Your sister has done nothing to deserve such hatred from you.”

Sister smirked out of sight from Mother, subtly flipping me the bird before turning and strutting out of the room.

Hot tears rolled down my face as I clenched my jaw and advanced in her direction. Mother stopped me, gripping my forearm tightly. I turned on her, yanking my arm from her grasp.

“Are tears really necessary?” she said, sighing once more as she shook her head.

I walked through the doorway and mumbled, “Fuck you.”

Unsurprisingly, Mother, with her freakishly sharp hearing, caught my words.

“What? What did you just say to me?” she yelled, stepping closer with a furious expression.

I calmly turned to face her, ignoring the throbbing pain in my cheek.

I said, “Fuck you, Mother. Fuck. You.”

The funeral contained a closed casket. Family and friends from all over came to pay their respects and indulge themselves in overpriced cheese and vegetable trays. There were flowers strewn all over the room, and a flattering photo of my sister sat atop an easel at the front of the display. The guests were overflowing with compliments for Sister. She was a girl “gone too soon,” so “beautiful and kind,” and a “gentle soul.” It was all sickeningly lovely.

Mother made it about halfway through the eulogy she had written before she collapsed into a fit of ugly sobs and hiccups. Two relatives I didn’t recognize helped her down from the podium and led her to a chair. I was asked to take her place and speak.

“My sister,” I began slowly, “used to be my best friend. We did everything together. We were inseparable. Mother often confused our names because where one of us was, the other was not far behind.”

This resulted in soft, good-natured laughter from the group. I saw Mother even perk up a bit.

“However,” I went on, “as we grew older, we became very different. Or rather, she became different while I stayed the same. The same girl who watched the same shows and read the

same books we used to enjoy together. But instead of enjoying them with me, she mocked me. Told me to grow up. Called me a weirdo. A *freak*.”

My harsh inflection on the last word caused an uncomfortable hush to fall over the crowd.

Taking a deep breath, I coolly regarded the guests and turned to address the ornate wooden coffin laid out on the platform.

“Rest in peace, sister dear.”

The rest of the ceremony continued quietly. Our parade of cars arrived at the cemetery just as the dark sky began to clear. Ugly, gray clouds vanished as piercing rays of sunlight lit up the lawn, and the only offending shadow fell forlornly across Sister’s casket.

We all stood surrounding the large hole in the ground as the coffin was carried from the hearse and, with a gentle thud, laid in the hole. A pleasant breeze ruffled my hair as I took my turn tossing a handful of soil into the grave, Mother doing the same. Her face was stained by the many tears shed that day, though none fell now.

A heavy silence filled the air.

I smiled.

A short prayer was given, and the mourners slowly trickled out. Soon, Mother and I stood alone beside the grave.

“Why,” she sobbed. “Why did it have to be her?”

I stood in silence, my steely gaze on my sister’s casket, drinking in the sight.

“And you,” she said accusingly. “You probably don’t even care! What a horrible, horrible girl you are! Horrible, horrible...” Her words trailed off into a groan as sobs continued to shake her broken frame.

“It’ll be alright, Mother,” I said calmly, without looking at her.

“Like hell it will! I’ve lost everything! I thought... maybe... it had been three years,” she mumbled almost to herself. “There was a chance... but now...”

I looked at her then, feeling strangely at peace for the first time in such a long time.

“You’ll see her again, Mother,” I insisted.

With one last shuddering breath and a longing look at her daughter’s grave, Mother walked away.

I gave Sister’s resting place a final glance as I turned to

follow Mother, laying one painful part of my past to rest at last.

I would always remember Sister, of course. One does not simply forget their first best friend, even if their true colors don't turn out to be quite as pretty as they let everyone believe.

Sitting in the backseat of Mother's old car, I contemplated how Sister might have felt in those final moments.

Had she known she was going to die, I thought, or was she oblivious to the very end?

Part of me wondered if she had been in much pain, but another part didn't care.

But I remember she hadn't screamed.

SAND AND SALTWATER RINGS

Mya Holbrook

.....

the grave drags its body across an ocean to you
a fluttering bird,
a sick, grounded thing, clawing and pulling.
it leaves shells on your pillow case,
and gray-black pearls in your top dresser drawer
on bad days, a bright blue crab in each house shoe

COTTONTAILS

Marie LeClair

.....

the earth rotates
at the speed
of rabbits fleeing
from wolves:

a frenetic must
to inhale, nurse, feel

running footpaths toward
a god that will not save
them from teeth and tongue

instead he seasons
their fur with tears

but they split their sugar
coated skin apart to find
the difference between
dust in graves and soil
in gardens between

bruises and blood between
cottontail and wolf

INERTIA

Mya Holbrook

.....
a diesel hum,
like a truck idling in an awful desert.

the air is thick, a
coffee reduced to syrup with too much time
spent alone, surface unbroken

time spent unspeaking is a silence, too.
lean on it, like a wall in the dark,
a long walk to the lightswitch.
slip a fishing hook into the lip of it and
reel it in, still and unrefusing
 not struggling uselessly as bluegill do

Nonfiction Contest Winner

MOSAIC ME

Jessie McClain

.....

The words struggle to drip from my fingers and I can't comprehend the glass mirrors with cheap wooden frames covered in black trash bags. They hang over the bathroom sink, cracked veneer causing deep grooves. They hang on the wall of the hallway and they stand lonely, covered, in my mother's bedroom. They look disappointed. And my nine year old brain can't quite understand.

My mother is lying down in bed again, the curtains drawn, and a heavy blanket pulled up over her head. She wears a sweatshirt, even though it's summer time. Outside it is stifling hot, but my mother would never know. Her favorite maroon chair sits in the corner of the room next to the grim mirror, the trash bag lightly flapping every time the air kicks on. My dad tells me to leave her alone for now, but I kind of just want to curl beside her underneath the big heavy covers. They seem like the right place to be. At times like this I think back to the night before my fourth birthday. As I was being tucked into bed under the mesh-netted canopy my mother sang in her clear precise voice.

"Que sera, sera. Whatever will be will be. The future's not ours to see..."

I felt safe.

As of now, my mom has been like this since the police had shown up at our front door for my uncle. The knock was relaxed, calm. Not like you would see in movies.

"Please, don't cuff me in front of my nieces," my uncle had pleaded "I won't fight."

And I could see it. Even a child can tell when the fight has gone out of a person. A light just stops burning. The officer gave my sister and me a piece of candy and sat my uncle in the front seat of his patrol car. I popped the sweet treat in my mouth. My five year old sister looked down at her own candy in confusion, then stuffed it in her pocket. Candy for my uncle. Not quite a fair trade, but then again, life isn't fair.

My mother loved my uncle and they always had a way of taking care of each other while despising who the other had become at the same time. My mother blames it on a short trip to Kentucky with her negligent dad when she was seven years old. She never said much except that she didn't see much of her dad

on that back country mountain. Instead he left her with three teenage boys, bad water, and outdoor plumping for several days. She was never the same. I wouldn't know if she once had a light in her eyes. It must have been snuffed out then. I imagine my mom with her small suitcase sitting on a cracked concrete porch waiting...waiting. Biting her small nails, the same size nails that my daughter has now, and wishing herself numb. Wishing herself nonexistent because her savior never came.

My uncle had the same daddy issues. He hated him even though he shared the same name. He never wanted to be his dad, but became like him just the same. It's as if my mom didn't mind washing the sheets that he would piss in when he came banging on our door in the middle of the night, drunk, looking for a place to sleep. He was too drunk to stand on his own. Too drunk to use the bathroom. Too drunk to allow himself to think, which in retrospect, I believe is what he was going for.

I am at the age of fairy-tales and princes. I grasp my Grimm's fairy-tale book that my great-grandmother gave me in my small hands and listen to my mom and dad yelling at each other in their bedroom. Sometimes I make a quick call to my grandma in an attempt to quench the fire in the fighting. Sometimes I let it be. Maybe it needs to burn. There is desperation in my father's voice. He doesn't even sound angry. He sounds the way I do when I'm tired. I hear a crash. Something breaking. Like my mother's heart that I know nothing about. The wall is too high. Things break a lot. Chipped tea cups and screaming souls that no one ever listens too. I don't listen either. I turn up the T.V.

~*~

The years trickle like rain down the backdoor window. Sometimes you watch it but sometimes you've seen it too much.

Fifteen finds me in a state of peach lip gloss, cucumber melon body spray and confusion. My mom had toughened and was tired. She was a shadow of herself, lost in her own mind and thoughts. Verbally she was a best friend, but emotionally, she couldn't handle tears. That's what my mom tells me anyway when she finds me crying, in a states of teenage chaos.

"Stop crying," she says.

I had never felt so alone. So I cry more. Because when your brain tells you something, you believe it. Because at fifteen this is now and now is an eternity. There is a lot that I can't do. But what I can do right is pretend. We are all the great pretenders.

Emotions are not a good thing. So, now I smile. I smile even when a boy tells me he loves me and then makes me disposable. His name is Billy. I thought him to be endearing until he asked for his things back and told me that I was temporary. I said nothing.

There was nothing left to say.

Afterwards I meet two more guys. Two human souls who will dominate the next two years of my life. I regret neither. They helped make me who I am. One is a past boyfriend. I will start with him.

For two years we can never decide if it's worth even being together. So we are, then we're not, and then we are again. The toxicity and pungent poison of the relationship calls for plenty of mistakes and a steep slippery slope. You never even know you're descending, adjusting to the discomfort the whole way down.

He makes me laugh until the day that he shows his love with a glass shard to my throat as his friend's reason with him to let me go. I feel the sharp tip press into my soft subtle skin but all I can think of are the cherry trees that I pick clean at my parents' house across town.

"Should we eat more?" my sister always asks, her hair glistening in the sun.

"Eat them all," I smile back. We do until our stomachs ache.

He loves me though. He says so. He loves me when he pushes me to the ground and leaves behind his fingerprints on my throat. They're black, purple, mesmerizing to look at and are a mark of my own weaknesses. I recollect my legs kicking, struggling for the one thing a life demands. Survival. I end the relationship, wear a scarf that summer, and wonder if love is only a scribble with lack of meaning. If it did have meaning before, it had dissolved under the cruelty of his touch. I'm only seventeen.

I still don't cry because I don't feel. Not anymore. Not in a bad way though. It's like drowning and breaking apart into an ocean. I'm slowly sinking...sinking...watching the light grow dimmer as I disintegrate into particles and then rebuild. I'm not me anymore. I'm stronger, wiser, and braver than before. I am able to rise again with new breath, new purpose, and new intentions. I am not a savior. I couldn't save him. So I permanently walked away from the flames to save myself. I knew if my soul was smothered by his pull and consistent lies then I would become ash and I am too good to be reduced to ash.

~*~

Now, I will move on to the second guy. The one human being who remains my own personal ghost. I see him shuffle into choir class sophomore year of high school, just fifteen years old and I can't stop staring. He makes me wonder, awakens my senses and I have no idea why. I don't know him, but he makes me believe in possibilities.

"Hi, Steve!" I smile, assuming his name was Steve since his

shirt said so.

“My name isn’t Steve.”

“Oh...well I...”

“This was my uncle’s shirt. My name is Daniel. You can call me Dan,” he explains. I never did. For almost three years he remained Steve.

Steve waits for me outside in the parking lot on cold and frostbitten November concert nights. He lifts me on his shoulders because I’m too short to see past the cheering crowds of vague faces and liquored breath.

“Would you ever want to be with me?” I ask.

I know the way others talk about me and the reputation that I didn’t choose, but was given to me nonetheless. Lying tongues tear away at my flesh like barbed wire daily. The flesh has grown back thick, tough to the touch but I’m okay with that. It makes me impenetrable.

He looks at me, his eyes the color of forget-me-nots on a clear day. “Yeah, Jess. I think I would.”

This marks the beginning and end wrapped into a kaleidoscope of color and wonderment. A human is their own worst enemy, fear sets in strong and fierce, and winter kills all things. Another bitter November came. My skin so cold that it felt bruised. Steve waited for me outside like he always did, standing in the cold, his gray coat pulled over his wool cardigan. The buttons are large and black. It’s his favorite and I know what it feels like to be wrapped up in it.

The snow sprinkled in his blonde curls and falls in his long dark eyelashes. He smells of cigarettes and fresh laundry detergent and I inhale it, forcing it to move through me and into my marrow. He lifts me into his arms, as he always does, even though he knows. Even though I know too, I let him. I’m too scared to lose us forever and every relationship stemmed from love eventually breeds hate. That is all I know. Really, I’m just too much of a coward to stay.

“This is fine,” I tell him “I am fine,” I lie.

“I’m always here, Jess. However you need me,” he says as he watches me with one last kiss.

So I walk away and leave him in the winter cold, staring at the back of me. I turn once to see his coat being lightly carried by the wind. Thinking of changing my mind, I go back to what I know isn’t love, but, oh, it’s so much more comfortable to stay in hell.

~*~

The next fall, after the end of my toxic relationship but the beginning of everything else, I slide my jeans on over my hips as I look at my calendar. September 17th is circled with scribbled black ink saying “Steve’s Show.”

I show up fifteen minutes early to the hole in the wall underage club that I have never been to. The place stinks of spilled drink and teenage desperation. There’s a rough looking red couch along the wall, already claimed, and a few tables in the back littered with empty plastic cups. I opt to stand. I almost walk out when I hear the familiar voice over the microphone. The same voice that has given me so much will. Steve looks my way, his playful mouth rising in a genuine smile. The gravitational pull I have towards him gives me the courage that I need to push my way through the crowd until I am standing in front of him. He sings “My Girl” and every stranger that doesn’t even know the weight of importance he holds, cheers. I reach for him and he pulls me close before releasing me. I go home that night with my very being enveloped by the thought of Do I even deserve a second chance? Is it too late?

I make the mistake of waiting. Waiting is a death sentence because time keeps going and death is not biased to age. I should have known.

~*~

Swirling snow, slick ice, and bad decisions bring me to a pivotal moment in my life. This is the moment that I begin to delve into cause and effect, a string of events where one thing leads to another and to another. This is when I start to realize how people can change other people’s lives, strangers’ lives, by pure coincidence. By brutal accident.

The snow is never ceasing and biting cold. I shiver and the shivering never seems to stop. What I wouldn’t do for heat, but I am used to no heat. That is the side effect of growing up half of your life on a backcountry road with nothing but one wood stove to fight your sister over. It’s a time where I wear wool hats and gloves inside my home. You would think that I would get used to the bitterness that winter brings. But I’m still cold to my bones.

When the sun finally shines and breaks through my eyelids I listlessly roll the other way. And then my phone beeps with a notification. And then directly after with a call. It sounds urgent. It feels urgent. But it’s too cold to move and I’m not going out in the snow today. But I answer. I almost wish I hadn’t. But I am grateful that I did. This, I can only break down into what I know as fact.

This is what I know.

There was snow, a drunk driver, and a car going ninety

when the sign said thirty. There was no seatbelt, but there were squealing tires, a tree, and a smashed window that his head went through. Steve was dead on arrival but, then, somehow there was a heartbeat when there shouldn't have been. Next, there were people, streams of tears, and a television on mute with blank eyes staring. There were tubes that veined into appendages and a machine breathing for him, his chest rising with each pump down and falling with each release.

The foundation was breaking down with four days of balloons, burning eyes and faces plastered to a glass window because there are just are no good-byes. We were supposed to be watching a movie. He was supposed to be alive with his ripped jeans and blonde curls. He was supposed to be smiling right now.

But then... there is nothing.

There is no heartbeat and no artificial breathing. Only a humming in the air and a numbing silence echoes and bounces off of the white hospital walls. There is nothing but gray days, pink shoes sinking into mud beside frozen dirt, so much rain, songs I can't stand anymore, and a dark casket. I slid my bracelet, which matched his, in with him.

~*~

One week after I watch the frozen dirt pile up on a discarded and fragmented version of my 18 year old friend, I run into a familiar face. His name is Timmy, I know of him but never knew him. He didn't know me either, he just knew my name spoken from Steve's mouth. We go out that night and watch a comedy on a small T.V in an almost bare, near dark, apartment. Nothing is in the kitchen but beer and popcorn.

The movie is funny, but I don't remember laughing. I haven't laughed in a while. I only wrap myself in Steve's sweater, with the large buttons, and sit on my bedroom floor. I do, however, stare at an odd picture of a foggy, dark green, sea spinning in a state of chaos, naked bodies crawling out and scrambling on top of each other. It's almost animalistic and I'm intrigued.

That's when he walks in. Steve's brother, John, caught in his own net of despair. His body and mind is tangled up, just like the bodies in the picture, and hanging him like a self-made noose. His state of mind matches my own, and I need to look at him to know this.

John has thick dark hair, and golden eyes. I've never seen eyes like his. They are like amber, honey, and all the good things of this world. We stay up until 2 a.m. talking about nothing at all and I somehow know it's what both of our souls need. Yellowcard fills the apartment as we both sing, badly dance, and laugh together. Pizza boxes are spread across the floor like the

remnants of our very lives. This is what we have become. We live loudly until our eyes feel heavy. We forget completely, until the ball and chain around our ankles remind us who we are and all the good and pure things that we have lost.

He walks me out to my car under a cold but clear sky. The stars seem close, like they are almost attainable. Almost. Maybe they are. I don't want to leave his gemstone-colored eyes and the smell of leather but I drive the empty streets home. Jewel, Pieces of You, is pulsing through my car speakers. But I'm only humming Yellowcard.

~*~

John and I are married three months later outside of a courthouse.

"We should do that," he says, in the dark, one night as we're watching "The Five People You meet in Heaven."

We're eating donuts for dinner and the smell of spring rain is blowing in through the open window.

"Do what?" I ask.

"Get married," he answers completely casual.

I smile and reach for another donut. "We should do that," I agree.

Standing under a bright June sun, my foot is bleeding under a thin Band-Aid because I was bit by a dog just an hour ago. John wears a gray t-shirt and jeans, my face and feet remain bare. As we say our vows, I blush and glance down at my toes covered in the early summer dirt.

On March almost two years later we have a little boy. His name, Steve. He is born on the 21st and his delivery is grueling and dangerous. It's a wonder we are here at all, but we never gave up on each other. Twenty-one months after that, on a cold December dawn, little Jewel is welcomed under a blue ceiling painted with angels trimmed in gold. She is also born on the 21st. Now there is, forever, the number twenty-one burning in my mind.

I like to think back on our nights of walking up snowy driveways, scanning bookstores for hours, and late-night milk shakes on the side of the road. The kid's favorite is strawberry, Johns, salted caramel, and I opt for mint chocolate chip. Some days go by in life as a solid blur with other days standing out vivid and strong. I listen to those days. I let the concert nights filled with fire, blue smoke, and screams of strangers speak to me. We are both shivering, but you wrap the only blanket around me to keep me warm. We're meant to remember and pull something

from these days that remain with us.

Our lives are all colliding together. We will always be crashing into each other over and over again. Indefinite moments helped to become the definition of me. It's sometimes hard to tell when the shit ends and the hope starts. But I have found it does start.

This is what I know.

I will never tell my children to "just quit crying." Life came from death. So much life. And I am that of the hard colored stones put together to form a life that is made of pure magic. I am a mosaic art form pieced together by others and the lessons I take back with me. I am, essentially, a mosaic me.

BUBONIC

Mya Holbrook

.....

that it would swallow you up
that you could lay in a field somewhere
marbled rust, and green, and slowing into dusk
that it would fall asleep around you, in easy embrace

death descends instead
torturously slow— a hawk upon silent fields of clover,
it's skittering, crooked mice,
red-freckled posies in his hooked beak

HEAVENLY CREATURE

Samantha Harrison

.....

there you are
black-footed and
calloused
beaten like an angry
memory
tired like a reoccurring
dream

i've loved you since the
sunrise
i will love you at sunset
though you will leave me
there
though you may leave
me there

heavenly creature
there you are
come to me and my parched
body
i am not afraid to float in
your love again

look at you
my heavenly creature
your hollow face calls to me
your seashell eyes cry to me

i will miss drowning in your
heaven
that heaven you let sit in your
chest
how deep have i waded in that
heaven
how drowned i am floating in
that heaven

TIME ZONES

Alex Turner

.....

Orson and Thomas stand at a bus stop in the desert of southern Nevada and wait for the bus to come. Thomas looks on hopelessly as he approaches the phone--there are sores in his face of many colors. Orson sees the sores on Thomas's face and he can feel the pain of each one of them; there is such great sorrow in each and every sore.

Thomas is wearing a green jacket-- its strings all torn out. The bottom part of the jacket is stained. Thomas looks much older than he should. A thirty-year-old face that could pass for fifty. It pains him to see Thomas like this.

Orson remembers when he found him just a little while ago. He recalls the look on the face of his friend when he had shown up. Thomas had looked shocked then, with a face that could stop a heart. Now Orson knows that is just his face. Thomas is no longer his friend from long ago.

Orson looks closer at Thomas's face and he knows what he has to do. He wants to end his pain and suffering; he wants to bring him happiness. He knows he has to get Thomas far away from all his troubles. Orson plans to take him back to the city. The city was where Thomas grew up. Orson wants Thomas to be happy again free of all those toxic sins.

Orson touches his face to assure himself that there are no sores on it. Yet he can nearly feel them underneath his own skin. He wants to feel them beneath his own skin. He rests his hand on his side and his fingernail taps the metal button on the side of his blue overalls. He has had the blue overalls for only a couple of years now. They have a nice pocket for his cigarettes.

The wind makes a ripping sound on his clothes as Thomas waits for the phone call to end. Nothing remains from the night before and no one dares to ask. The phone is ringing as Thomas waits. The dialed person responds:

"Hello."

"It's been so long" Thomas says.

The voice on the other end listens to these ramblings and simply says:

"I sent you out to get groceries."

Thomas freezes and slowly puts the phone back on the hook. Thomas turns around to Orson and looks pale. His complexion has been compromised by the face of a ghoul. He sees his

Thomas's eyes and slowly reaches in his pocket. The air smells manufactured as he pulls a cigarette and a lighter from his jacket pocket. Orson looks at Thomas, nodding towards the unlit cigarette.

"Do you want one?"

Thomas shakes his head while he raises the cigarette up to his mouth. He cackles but he doesn't know why. The smell of the air begins to get stronger, but neither of them notice.

"Is everything alright?" he asks.

"I called her, and she said something strange," mumbled Thomas with a sagging mouth.

He took a moment to himself before responding-- getting his first big puff of his cigarette. It tastes funny to him and again he chuckles.

"What did she say?"

"She said she sent me out to get groceries, but I have not seen her in a very long time."

"That sounds like her alright."

"What time is it, anyway? I need to know how much longer until the bus gets here."

He looks at his watch and speckles of dust that lay on top of it. It takes him a minute to adjust his eyes, and when he does he notices that it's only been three minutes since they got here.

"It'll be a little while longer, pal. We've only been here three minutes."

"Fuck!" Thomas says as he scrapes his shoe against the gravel.

"Calm down, it'll be okay. The bus'll be here soon enough."

Thomas looks towards the sky that is now a dull orange."

"Was it always like that?"

"What?"

"The sky?"

"The sun's setting. You've never seen a sunset before?"

"Why would she say that? I haven't seen in her so long."

He takes another puff of his cigarette hoping that Thomas will be okay. He worries. How can his old friend ever go back to his old life if he freaks out about the sky itself?

The puff lasts incredibly long and when he completes the act his ashes fall on his overalls. He wipes it off with his hands, and as he does he can feel the bones underneath his overalls. He feels

the bones of his legs. They feel so fragile, they feel weak. He grips his calf. He wants to test how it feels. How his leg feels. When he does, the pain shoots up his leg. The nerve endings in his body flare up, and his whole body feels like it's on fire. He feels lightheaded as he raises his back up.

"Probably just a head rush," he thinks.

For a moment his whole body goes numb and he feels so relieved. Then the pain hits his back again. It's in his back. It's all over.

He takes another puff of his cigarette and this time as he does he sees Thomas sticking their hands in the jacket. The hands, now in the pockets of the jackets, are moving rapidly. He closes his eyes for the rest of the puff because he knows he does not want to see this. He knows that one day he'll have to look at that face. For now, he wants to be oblivious to it. He looks inside his eyelids and he can almost see the smoke inside of himself. It twirls around inside his eyes. The puff ends, and he opens his eyes again. Thomas's hands continue to convulse within the jacket.

Now he looks at Thomas--he wants to see the pain now. He wants to become accustomed to it. One hand leaves one of the pockets as it moves up towards Thomas's face. Thomas takes his hand and begins to claw at his ear.

"How could she say that? How?"

"I don't know but don't get worried."

"I wish I wouldn't have heard it. Ya know. I wish she wouldn't have said it."

Thomas's eyes darted from the ground to the watch he had.

"What time is it now?"

Only a minute had passed when he looked at his watch again, so he simply told his Thomas:

"We're getting closer."

He looks away from Thomas. The sky was much darker than before. The sun had almost finished setting. It was almost dark.

"It can't be almost dark. It's only been a minute."

Even though it was nearing nighttime, Orson still saw his Thomas and himself in the light of the evening. He looked back at Thomas and he saw the falling sunlight still on his face. He tried to grab his Thomas's hand away from their ear. He pulled and pulled on his Thomas's hand but it wouldn't budge. After several tries, he was finally able to pull his Thomas's hands away.

Orson's hand slips and scratches Thomas's face by accident.

Thomas screams and Orson takes his hand away. Orson can almost feel it now. He can feel the hand that touch the sores. Orson thinks for a moment that this hand is probably poisoned now.

Thomas falls to the ground writhing in pain. He is screaming.

Orson takes this poisoned hand and touches it to his face. He does not want to and yet he feels as though he must. He touches his face and wants this poisonous hand to do what it came here to do. He feels for a sore on his own face. He feels his entire face, three times over. No sore is on his face.

Thomas begins to claw more and more at his own face. He drops his cigarette and tries to lean over and grab his Thomas's hands, but the pain is back. His body is on fire now again and this time he knows he is burning. He stops from leaning over and looks up again.

"My god! My god!"

He looks up at the sky and now it's completely dark. He looks down at his watch and he screams as well. He repents all his sins through those screams. He falls down beside Thomas. Only two minutes have passed.

"I'm so sorry."

There are only screams in response.

Thomas had stopped clawing at his face only to go back to convulsing the hands in his jacket. Orson can hear the sounds all around him. He can hear the wind and he can hear the friction against the gravel. Somewhere he can even hear something approaching.

"It must be the bus."

He looks towards the sky, now pink again.

He can hear the doors creak open and he wishes that he could get on that bus. He wants to take Thomas on that bus and find him help.

"I can still get on the bus."

Orson begins to stand up, but the pain sends him right back down.

The bus closes its doors and moves on. Orson looks to his right and sees the cigarette that he dropped. He picks it back up. Leaning up slightly—ignoring the pain just to get another puff. The cigarette had gone out. He reaches for his lighter and he tries to light it. It finally does light and he takes another puff.

Orson knows it's his fourth one. He knows a lot of things. He knows that the sky is changing and that his watch isn't broken.

It's only been five minutes since Thomas had asked that first time, yet night had come and gone. The sun was rising now. He laughed in the middle of his fourth puff and he choked on the smoke. The choking rattled his body and the pain overwhelms him. As he goes to sleep, he feels his face. He can almost feel something there. He can almost feel a sore there. He does not realize it is gravel that he is feeling, so he goes to sleep peacefully.

PRINCIPLES OF THE PSYCHOTIC AWARENESS

Marie LeClair

.....

I believe in the mundane's ability
to write itself into the nostrils
I breathe through, that it becomes
part of me through air held in lungs.

I believe in the ghosts that tap
on my drywall, trying to grasp
my attention when my eyes fade
into the leaking paint on my ceiling.

I believe in the star I wish on tonight.
the clouds in the night
sky move a little slower, it makes
starlight flicker in slow motion.

I believe in the boogeyman underneath
my bedsheets. He crawls inside my
pillowcase at night to lay with me
and breathe the sighs that leave my lips.

I believed in love at first sight when I saw
the tiny heart of a blossom wrapped in
honeybees and pollen. It whispered in my ear,
your legs will feel lightweight in the soil.

DIVERGE

Bethany Moll

.....

I follow closely behind, tapping the tips
of my toes against the edge of your shadow.

I try to catch it.

Your clothes; a larger version
of my own. Pink instead of blue.

The dirt mound; too high for me,

I dust my shoes brown

trying for a foothold, and I slide all the way down.

You climb to the crumbling top without trouble.

The image of you in front of me; a funhouse mirror.

What I yearn to distort to.

The yellow beam from your flashlight

and the crunch of the fallen leaves beneath your
feet tell me where to leap next.

We avoid the fat roots that try to trip

us up, and the shrouded pitfalls that our parents have
marked brightly with orange.

But the woods age with us and

the leaves continue to drop and pile.

Soon your beam will flicker

to a halt.

What panic will fill my lungs

when I can no longer see you walking
ahead.

THAT AWFUL ROWING

Samantha Harrison

.....
To Anne, in her mother's furs.

[As the African says:

This is my tale which I have told,

if it be sweet, if it be not sweet,

take somewhere else and let some return to me.

This story ends with me still rowing. – Anne Sexton, “Rowing”]

They packed me in the canoe full of summer tiger lilies—

insulting. It was a death of the sea and

the opening of the river's mouth.

And Anne with her skinny hands

beats me in the head as I row towards my death. She is yelling,

go on! Row towards something better! You premature corpse!

I tell her I'm Sexton too.

Look at my thin breasts. Look at my stained fingers.

And if she should ask me if it's a burial on the water,

I will tell her the stream can only move the body,

but there are roaring deltas and maybe even Mesopotamia

at the end of the twisting river. Look at my unfertile crescent.

I might as well be scorched on the water,

what is a woman if she can't

play God? I float on down the stream, like a fossilized steam-
boat.

Chalk-white, embalmed but rowing like I am alive

teaming with life and lilies around me. Rowing rowing rowing.

God, find me at the end of the river.

God, tell Anne it was fine because I had no daughters to lose.

If God wills it, let me keep on rowing towards him.

SMALL TRAGEDIES

Samantha Fain

.....

The take-a-penny, leave-a-penny dish was empty. Boris pulled his wallet out of his back pocket, a fringed thing, and placed three of his own in the dish. There. It looked like he'd had some customers. He combed his hair through with his fingers, then braided it with his eyes closed. If he braided his hair early enough, no one would interrupt him. Four in the morning was fairly quiet.

He considered himself to be a clean man. He walked to the bathroom and took a piss, then washed his hands with the Dawn dish soap he'd set on the sink. He felt guilty as the blue liquid oozed into his hands. He was complicit, wasn't he? A manager of a gas station run by the company that had killed all of those animals in the water. He remembered the soap commercials, with the greasy seals and ducks, and the penguins wobbling back to the black ocean. *Dawn saves lives.*

He'd watch the morning news in the back of the store when there weren't any customers inside. But today, Boris didn't even bother to turn it on. All he had to do was read the sign outside.

He'd been thinking about the oil spill since it happened, wondering whether or not he was partially responsible for the national crisis. He sold the gas. He didn't save lives. He was doing everything wrong. The second day after the Deepwater incident, he tried to quit his job in protest of the company's off-shore drilling. He spoke to his supervisor over the phone and told him his plan. He would travel to the gulf and bring a picket sign, holding it up until his arms felt jello-ey. *WHAT ABOUT THE SEALS?* Was that clever enough? He would live like that, for days, weeks even, whatever it took to end the madness and hold the megalith of a company accountable.

He stared at himself in the mirror, speckled with spit and dirt and something redbrown, that could have been blood or vomit. He tried to straighten his shoulders and stand tall. He liked to think that his tiny hunch wasn't permanent, it was just a product of sixty-two years of poor posture. He sighed, telling himself it was completely fixable.

He thought he was prettier than he was. Braided together, his hair was a painting of untrimmed light and dark gray smatterings. It withered down his back like a dead flower. It hit below his lower back, which was covered in moles beneath his white tank top. In the mirror, they looked like brown and yellow barnacles stuck to him. No matter what Boris did, they wouldn't scratch off. In

those odd moments in which Boris saw a glimpse of his real self, he flinched. His wrinkled skin wrinkled more as his monobrow creased. Sometimes he thought he saw hair protruding out of his ears, but he didn't have the adequate mirrors in his house to check on these growings. Instead, he'd shake his head at himself in disgust, going back to his daydreams. In his mind, he looked like a Steve. He'd always wanted to be Steve.

Steve was an activist in his late thirties, broad-shouldered and tan from spending all of his time on the streets of the big cities and the grasses of prairies, double-fisting picket signs. *PEACE NOT WAR. FREE LOVE. SAVE THE EARTH.* Steve fought all fights, was on every side so much that he was often called a groupie, a poser, a man with a day job who didn't know what he was even fighting for. But Steve knew exactly what he was fighting for. He was fighting for everything. He didn't have a day job, or any sort of career. In Boris' dreams, Steve was homeless, but never without a home. He tent-surfed his way through the East Coast. Steve arrived at the Gulf the day after the oil spill occurred, and painted himself black to protest with his friends. Sure, they were all accused of blackface, and the police escorted them to the station and made them shower, but their message was clear. *YOU'RE KILLING US.*

The ring of the doorbell ended Boris' fantasy. He ran water over his hands, wiped them on his pants, and paced back to his spot behind the register. The customer wore a camouflage cap and cargo pants. He grabbed a fistful of jerky off the rack and brought it to Boris.

"That'll be \$6.99," Boris said.

The man rolled a toothpick around in his mouth and pointed to the parking lot with his thumb. "Machine didn't print my receipt," he said. "Number one."

Boris was not astonished. He sighed. He'd fixed station number one on Tuesday. Either way. He noticed that it was usually only women who cared about getting a receipt. Boris figured the difference between the sexes was that women were either more anal or financially responsible than men. He didn't care enough to figure out the answer.

The man was waiting on his receipt and his change, but Boris' fingers merely hovered over the register screen. Another car had pulled up in the parking lot. A young woman stood up out of the car and began to stretch. Boris hoped she would come inside. She looked so cool crossing her arms in her leather jacket, the wind catching her curly, ramen-noodle hair.

Boris could see himself in leather. He'd had a leather jacket once in his twenties, but he outgrew it quickly once his pot-belly

began to take over his torso. But this time would be different. This time, Boris would be with *her*. They would buy two motorcycles and ride side by side in the fall months. Maybe they would drive to a diner, or a waterfall. He imagined them parking their bikes and getting in the water together. They would strip to their underwear and he would jump in, but she would be too afraid, since she couldn't swim well. He would take her hand and guide her into the river, then teach her how to doggy paddle, placing his body against hers so their arms melded together. Her skin would have an odor, that repulsive yet enticing smell of a woman who hadn't washed her vagina in two days. They'd been adventuring, anyway, they hadn't had time to shower.

Boris often fantasized about the customers he interacted with. He would imagine introducing the women to his mother, dream of being beaten by their husbands for flirting with their wives. *You old man*, they'd spit. *Get the hell away from my wife*. Sometimes he would bite his lip so hard just imagining the late nights he had spent being the *other man*.

Boris' wife had passed away at forty from cancer. She had always loved animals. Each year for their anniversary, Boris would take Sandra to the zoo. Her favorite animals were the penguins. She liked the way they slid into the water, told him it reminded her of the Slip n' Slide she'd had as a child. Either way. Now, all Boris could think about were the penguins, all black and soapy, being washed by gloved hands that scrubbed their skin just a bit too hard.

"Hey, man," the customer said to Boris. "Give me my receipt."

It was then that the woman, who looked to be in her forties, walked into the station, dropping her cigarette on the threshold of the entrance. Boris nodded at the man, but really, he was staring past him, at her. She was eyeing the beef jerky now.

He handed the man his receipt. "Now, that's too expensive," the man said. "Would think you'd be changing that."

A gallon of gas was \$2.84. Boris could have explained his predicament to the man, but the woman was so sexy when she shifted her weight to her left foot, still looking at the jerky. Boris could have told him that the oil spill obviously had an impact on the price of gas, but the price wasn't even very high, compared to its cost during Bush's presidency. He could have quoted numbers to the man, told him how in June of 2008, gas was over \$4 a gallon. He could have said that, *Sir, there are more important things than the price of gas. Haven't you seen the animals dunked in oil, slathered in Dawn dish soap?* Either way. Instead, Boris told the man, "I'm sorry, sir, but I'm not responsible for the prices."

"Aren't you?" the man said, pointing a dirty fingernail at

Boris' BP nametag. "Looks like you're the one responsible, Boris." He spit out Boris' name with a grunt.

"Sir, that's not true. Let me explain—" but Boris was met with a jingle of the doorbell, left with the man's last words. He was responsible for killing those penguins.

The woman had been roaming around the station for several minutes. She'd been to the bathroom and had meandered back and forth between the refrigerated items and the coffee machine five times. She looked like a Delilah. Delilah looked like she needed his help.

Boris hobbled over to her, scratching behind his ear. He scratched himself when he was nervous. "Ma'am," he muttered, "can I help you?"

But Delilah didn't hear him. Boris had spoken too quietly. He noticed himself clearing his throat before he spoke again. "Ma'am, can I help you?"

Delilah turned and stared directly into Boris' eyes, so much so that Boris felt her gaze penetrate his core. When she spoke, it seemed as if smoke poured out of her mouth. Boris smelled the nicotine on her breath. He imagined how the scent would linger in their house. The couch, their bedsheets, her skin—it would all smell like nicotine. Their furniture would be ruined. He couldn't believe he'd married a woman with an addiction. Sure, he knew that they both had their vices—he'd had a thing for porn in the nineties. Then there was the alcohol. He'd used to drink himself dizzy each day back when he was 30 years old. He still carried his chip in his chest pocket. But porn didn't kill, at least not him anyway. Alcohol hadn't killed him, yet. But here was Delilah, inhaling something that could kill her. Did she not care about their future together?

Instead of answering his question, Delilah just pointed at the sign out front of the station that displayed the gas price. "Sure is high, isn't it?" she commented.

She was just like every other customer, complaining about the gas. She had nothing of substance to think, or say. She couldn't articulate anything except her wish for cheaper gasoline. Boris had continued to stare at the woman in utter silence, his fingers pushing into his palms. Their house crumbled before his eyes. He could see it—the furniture turned into ash, floating up toward the clouds. The sunlight beaming through the windows seemed to distort the house itself. Everything felt sideways, twisted. He opened his mouth to speak, to reach for her. He was about to tell her about the state of the ocean waters, all Tso sauce now. But before he could respond, Delilah spoke.

"I guess that's because of the oil spill, though, isn't it?" Boris

nodded, breathing a little easier. She understood. He mustered up a breathless “Yes.” *Yes, how did you know? Yes, you heard about that, too? Yes, are we the only two people in the world who are intelligent enough to determine cause-and-effect? Yes, are we the last two humans alive, left alone in this awful, terrible world?*

“God, isn’t that just awful?” she said. “My husband works on oil rigs. He’s an underwater engineer. He tells me about all the things happening down there, on the Gulf, you know. Isn’t it just sad?”

Boris imagined what it would be like to come home to Delilah. He would walk into the house, a brick one, nothing fancy, but with a quiet pride. Delilah would be waiting for him, in the bedroom. Her voice would float to the front door and he would follow it like a hunting dog, yes, he could see himself as a hunting dog, his snout all pink for her. When he walked into their bedroom, Delilah would be lying under the sheets, with nothing but an oversized work-shirt, one of his, draped over her shoulders.

Boris had nodded his head at Delilah, who had continued to answer her own questions while he lost himself in thought. “And those poor little ducks!” she’d finished. “It’s just so sad.”

Ducks? Boris wanted to ask. Do you mean the oily ducks? The greasy seals? Do you like seals? He would begin to unbutton her shirt for her, and she would laugh lightly and swipe at his hands, reminding him that she was perfectly capable of undressing herself, so then he would step back and say *Okay, then, I’ll watch.* He’d undress himself too, and before they had sex she would lotion his back with some Aveeno, to help with his eczema. He would offer to do her back, too, but she wouldn’t make him. She’d crawl onto his lap instead and place her hands on his shoulders, leaning into him for a kiss. When she moved to let him lie down on the bed, he would see her belly jiggle, and for a minute, he would be repulsed. But then he would remember how she stared at his wrinkled knees and deep-throated him anyway, how she avoided his eyes during sex and stared at the hairs on his chin instead. He would remember how beautiful the rest of her was.

“You know the commercial, with the soap?” Delilah said. “Whenever it comes on the TV, with the animals all black, I just cry.”

He imagined how they would have sex for the thirty-seventh time. This time, they would savor each other, make love slowly so his joints wouldn’t crack. She would lie on top of him and pour her body into his, cover him like a lid to a slow-cooker. When they had finished, he would lie inside her for a while and she would stare into his eyes until they turned each other on enough to go again. The television would play white noise, stuck on PBS or the animal channel, some show where the tigers reminded

them of their capacities for violence. She would start to claw his cheeks with her fingernails, and they would kiss deeply, hungrily, starved for each other. But then, suddenly, the screen would blink to blue, catching Boris' attention. He would pull out of the kiss and peek his head around Delilah's body, watching. Delilah would sigh but she would understand because she knows him. She understands that he isn't bored with her, he's just zoned out because that's how he is, and she knows this. She would guide him inside her again, this time without his help. She would gyrate on his penis and run her fingers through his braid and moan his name softly and coax him back, back to her, but his eyes would be trained on the commercial, watching greasy seals slide off the shore.

REFLECTION

Danielle Nuckols

.....



Visual Art Winner

FEARLESS SAILOR

Greg Potter

.....



LADY LEMUR

Greg Potter

.....



WITH A CHERRY ON TOP

Alexis Varvel



FIGURE DRAWING MASTERCOPY

Alexis Varvel

.....



LOST AGAIN

Samantha Harrison

.....



STRIPED

Bethany Moll

.....



GAZE

Bethany Moll



ALONE

Bethany Moll



TOUCH

Bethany Moll



PRAYER

Bethany Moll

.....



EGG MASTERCOPY

Alexis Varvel

.....



DECAY

Alexis Whiteman

.....



COLLAGE PAINTING

Alexis Varvel

.....



OF KEYS AND KITES

Karly McPherson

.....



EXEMPLIFICATION

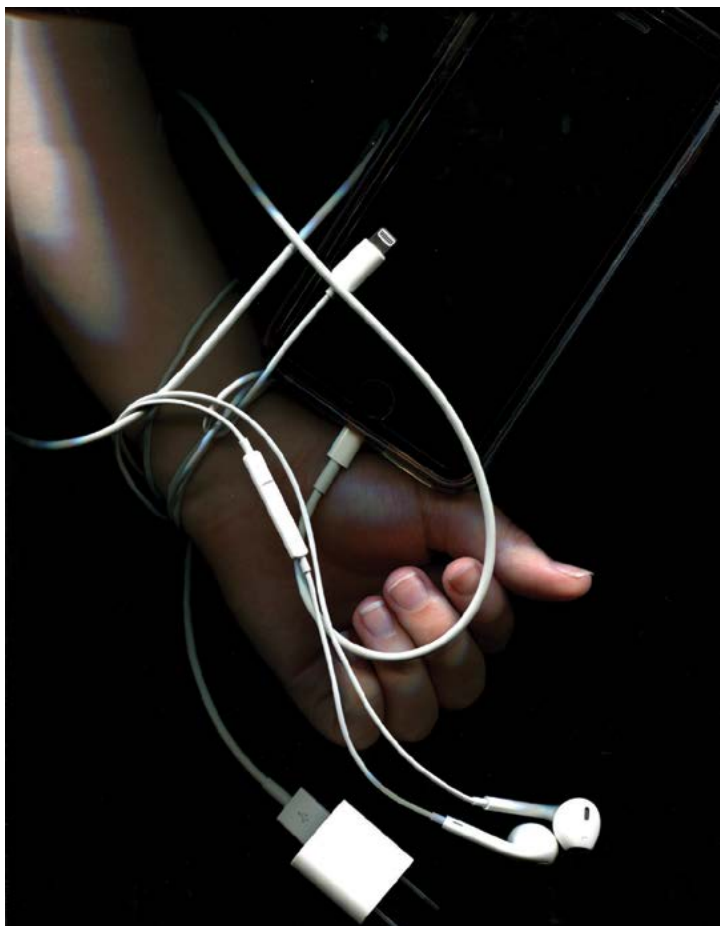
Marie LeClair

.....



TANGLED

Alexis Whiteman



LILY BEADS

Bethany Moll



PEWS

Alexis Whiteman

.....



114

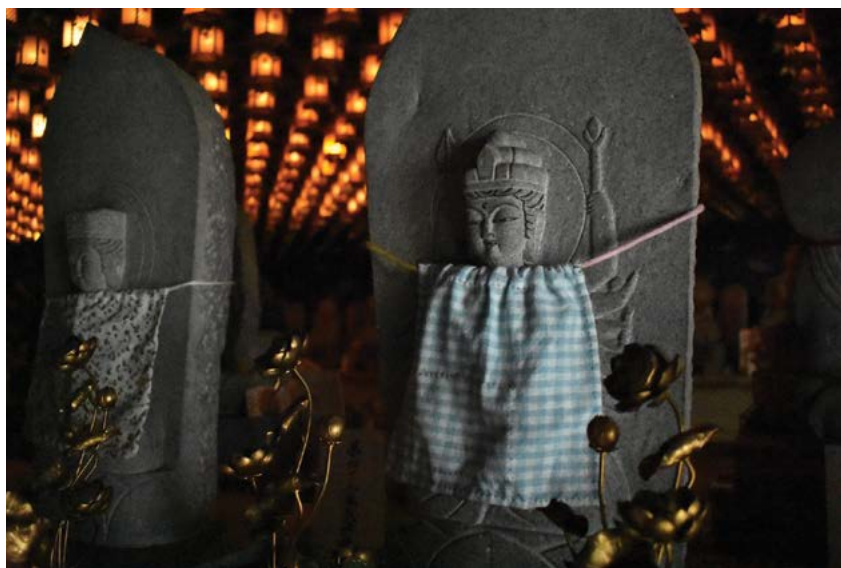
Alex Turner



TEMPLE SHRINE

Jade Harris

.....



JAPAN TEMPLE

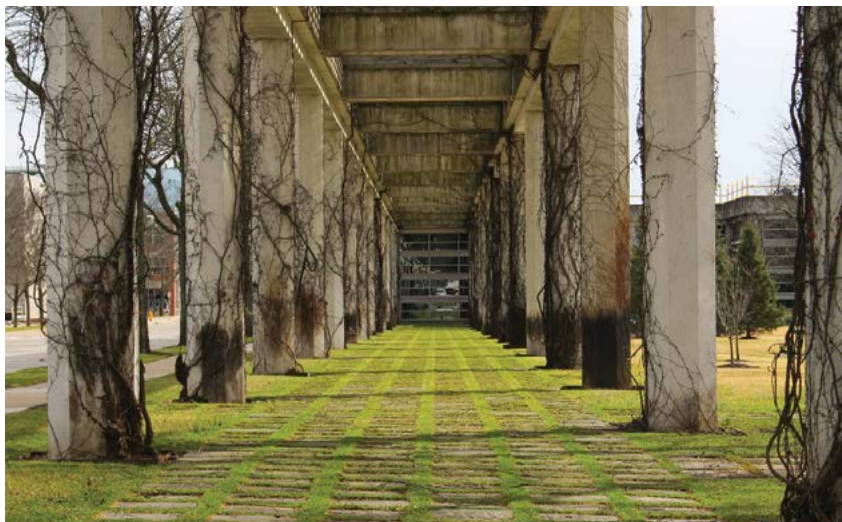
Jade Harris

.....



COLUMNS

Alex Turner



PORTRAIT MASTERCOPY

Alexis Varvel

.....



Drama Contest Winner

STARLIGHT

a scene by Marie LeClair

.....

CHARACTERS

ANASTASIA, 26, astrologist, tall, dark-haired young woman who appears to be standoffish

ROBERT, 27, veterinarian, blonde man who has a nervous but bubbly personality

TIME

Late evening, around 11pm

SETTING

In an observatory, late in the evening. Air is stuffy and old as if the planetarium has not been used in years. Dust covers the rails and walls, and there is a flickering light in the background of the scene.

AT RISE: (Robert and Anastasia are looking through the old telescope quietly for several moments. There is clearly tension between the two but it goes on without being pointed out by either of them.)

ROBERT

I think I found it.

(Squints for a moment into the telescope)

No really, I am pretty sure I found the constellation on my own this time.

ANASTASIA

That's great, you're finally getting the hang of it again.

ROBERT

I mean, considering the lack of practice after 10 years, this is quick.

(Beat)

Listen, I know this is kind of awkward considering what we

talked about the other day... but I felt like this would be the most comfortable place to talk about this.

ANASTASIA

It's okay.

ROBERT

Okay... well I know that you didn't want to talk about this, and I know you're against this in general. But this is important to me, you know? Life changing stuff? A thing? That is happening?

(Silence)

Stasia?

ANASTASIA

It's fine. Honestly, it's okay. I said that, just now.

ROBERT

We need to talk about this, though. This is as personal for you as it is for me. Will you please look at me?

ANASTASIA

How many times do I have to tell you that it's okay? Please. Just let it be. Why don't we go back to the telescope? It's better to just let go of this. I'll give you her number before we leave.

ROBERT

I need your wholehearted permission, Stasia. This is serious to me.

ANASTASIA

You may need a blessing from her husband first if that's what you're looking for.

ROBERT

Stasia, I –

ANASTASIA

Stop. This isn't going anywhere. I shouldn't have said anything. I'm sorry. Leave it be.

ROBERT

Why won't you talk to me about this? That's all I want from you. You're my best friend. How am I supposed to get through this without you?

ANASTASIA

How can you possibly get through this with me?

ROBERT

Because I trust you. Because I come to you for everything, even

this. I know she's your sister, but you've never done this before.

(A beat.)

ANASTASIA

(Moves over to the telescope, changes the position.)

You had it on the wrong one. That wasn't our constellation.

ROBERT

Shit... I'm sorry. I tried, at least.

ANASTASIA

It's fine. I have been replaying the night we found it in my head. I keep forgetting how different it looks in the sky now. It doesn't look as bright as it used to. Even with the telescope at my lab.

ROBERT

(Waits for her to turn away and looks into it.)

It looks the same as it always did, though.

ANASTASIA

To you, maybe. Perception.

ROBERT

Is this you getting to your point without saying it again? Please don't do this. Just talk to me.

ANASTASIA

(A beat)

It's okay that you love my sister. It's fine. I have said this, and I won't interfere. I don't control her life or yours. That isn't the way this works.

ROBERT

But how do you feel? Your feelings matter. You need to talk about this.

ANASTASIA

Heartbroken.

ROBERT

(Is taken aback, takes a moment to process what has been said.)

What? Heartbroken over what?

ANASTASIA

Over you.

ROBERT

Stasia this isn't the time to fuck around, okay? I am trying to be

nice about this. This isn't funny. Dancing around it isn't going to help.

ANASTASIA

I'm not fucking around, Robert. I'm in love with you. I have been since the night we found our stars. You're in love with my twin sister. That's what I have been processing.

(A beat.)

I thought we were going to be together. And I thought that you pulling me from my work in such an urgency was going to be that. The other night... I thought things were finally going to be easy. I thought. That's the problem though. Thinking about this has always been my problem.

ROBERT

Stasia, I...

ANASTASIA

It's okay. There isn't any way you could have known. I get that. I felt it, but I didn't show it. I never knew how with you. So, I stayed closed in different ways. As your friend. As your shoulder to cry on. But you never showed interest in anyone else... so I thought I had a chance.

ROBERT

You never said anything. You never even tried to make it known. Why?

ANASTASIA

I needed to focus on my future, not a person. For a while, I thought it was obvious, but you never caught on. I never thought it was normal for girls to just hang around one guy all the time and go to prom with them and never stop talking about them or actually taking the time to get to know their family and so and so forth, I mean how? I felt like it was. Apparently, it wasn't. But maybe you were blind because you were too obsessed with her. What exactly makes her so proverbial and perfect to all of you? There must be something. I can ask you now since you're sitting here in front of me.

(A beat.)

I'm sorry. I'm angry. None of this make sense to me anymore.

ROBERT

I don't know what to say... I'm sorry, Stasia. I wish I had known sooner.

ANASTASIA

It's not like it would have mattered. I could have made it

perfectly clear for years, but it wouldn't change the fact that you were looking at something while blind.

(She steps away and looks into the telescope again.)

ANASTASIA cont.

I thought that coming back here, to the place I realized I loved you, I thought it would bring me clarity. Some sort of resolution, some perception. But everything is dimmer, older, not as bright. I'm sorry.

(Anastasia pulls out a piece of paper and a pen from her bag, quickly writes something down and hands it to Robert.)

ANASTASIA cont.

Here. This is her number. Call her. I'm sure you'll have a chance with her anyway. Everyone does. It's alright.

(Blackout.)

(End of play.)

THE 3,000 FOOT DROP

Jessie McClain

.....

Angel falls into the Devil's canyon. Disappearing into mist.
He couldn't resist the kiss of the Earth. Angel falls into open
mouths. And no one hears the lyrical connotations. Cadence
rose. Bloomed. Wilted. Angel falls into current. Sea tides. Neck
binds from wide nets. Don't fret. Because the Angel falls out
of love. For love. The thought of love in the dark. Pushed him.
Lost him. Cost him. Angel falls and left us in syncopation.
Desperation. If Angel falls, how can I stay upright?

Poetry Contest Winner

RUNNING LOW ON GAS

Brittany Love

.....

Mania:

The apparition of glowing red lights rock me into a hypnotic silence and render my disposition to the soft static of my stereo. Its low-down growl crawls up from the depth of wounds and submerses itself in salt. How does this stinging stimulate redemption and how long am I permitted to hold its synthetic warmth? Transfixed I can discern the spread of pleasant venom through my veins; it bleeds just to tease and retracts like a rubber band around my wrist. The symptoms are flamboyant, like the lingering taste of false-superiority; or the dramatic way in which plum rises to the surface when white-knuckles strike brick. I glance past faded scars at ten and two to find my tank half-full a road that threatens to reveal no end. I revel at this challenge the concept of distance has posed on my machine, we are one, vibrating with urgency. Disassociated, I submit to that turbulent state of highway hypnosis; my mad conscience sings-

*-“Sometimes driving on low
gets you all the way home.”*

Depression:

These rows of glaring red lights feel stagnant and prick at my skin like that air that hurts to breathe. How fucking long has it been snowing and how much longer can I exist in a wasteland of soiled white, its soft blanket depleted under the heft of my tires - I drift in my car when I drift off to my defensive space the place too perfect for me to stand, at the moment - at least- so I try to keep it as black as piercing silence so not to dwell on the wet rag that weighs on my chest nor the fist grasping my heart, squeezing so hard it cannot pump blood. My fingers have turned cold as ice and cling to the wheel. “Desperately cling” the dark fires and I extinguish, *enough* . I turn down the stereo so its frequency may not touch me and bask in the numbing silence- -to diminish that noise completely would be first to assume that you can acquire help, and second to wonder-

*- How did I come to be Litost?
Is all this guilty of my design?*

WHEN THEY CALL IT EXPULSION

Jessie McClain

.....
I didn't know that it could be so easy. You ripped me apart
in bright shades of hot flame. Two a.m. seemed a time for such
things.

Thick liquid, red, spilled down my legs.

The floor lay in waiting.

I had dreamt that I threw you away.

My tears surged while I was still sleeping.

A mother's guilt and regret weighing me down.

And you were the anchor.

I was tied to the sludge that lay
under the water. I drowned
in that water every single day. Grabbing
at you. Revived. Just to drown again.

You would be 12 now and you still grow when I sleep.

When I think of you, I see myself again
through your eyes.

Unworthy. Unsafe.

A toxic home that killed only because it thought,
you were a weapon.

I screamed inbetween alive and
dead. When the lights went black we were
both confined in a decaying mansion.

My heart was in my mouth.

You were smiling.

You were wanting.

The monster in my
head. My dream in flesh.

Just.

Quiet.

You can shut your eyes now. Rest.
I stay in the decaying mansion, and wait
for you to turn 13. My eyes close, and my mind
wanders, through the whispering halls of your tomb.

TUESDAY, 3:30 A.M.

Bethany Moll

.....
your halo of pale light shines through my linen curtains.
you push me like the tide, keeping me rolling,

awake, drowning me deep, in crescent-shaped
longing. I turn toward you for a hint of

insight and you peel back my eyelids
to make me look. for what,

you won't tell me. no need to be
so mysterious, Moon.

I beg you. whisper a cold breeze into my ear,
kiss me with your crater face and

give me reason for the turbulence of my
sleep, the crashing waves beneath my

dreamboat. something you wouldn't
understand. you have no inkling of the itchy

pillow. the sheets pulled over your eyes. exasperated
sighs. you are a coward, Moon. you sleep during the day.

you don't fall victim to the sun's heat. you can't be stained
red. the night was made for escaping the day.

but not for me. I am stuck in the prison bar
shadows you splice across my face.

I try to push against the beams, push against the
current but still you hold me here.

I watch as you mock me, Moon, drifting behind a
heavy cloud, peering around to torment me still.

SALAMANDER HOUSE

Alex Delaney

.....

He ignores the broken air conditioning unit and squints at the bloated sun overhead. The house is a neat stack of twigs, catalogue-picture perfect kindling.

“At least it’s a dry heat.” He says reassuringly. There is no one there to offer a reply.

Caked with orange dust and loose iron, the rooster weathervane refuses to turn. He oils it daily, but it ignores the stale air and stares ahead with flat eyes.

The scattered fistful of yellow that passes for a yard splinters under the push mower. Their shards are expelled and hang briefly in the air for a moment before burying themselves in the dirt. He mows every day until the lawn is a bone meal desert.

The cacti are nervous. They might retract their roots and roll down the road like fat green logs, he worries. They would not survive the journey. He wraps a ball and chain around their bases. To keep them safe.

The cooling of his sunburn is unbearably audible in the dead of night, a fiery hiss seeping as the dead cell sheathe clings to bare mattress. Dried roaches and locusts form a crispy, thorny thicket underfoot the things that greet the moon. The air conditioning unit coughs out a death rattle lullaby. Even his dreams are soaked in sweat.

The window is keeping him awake. The valley down the hill is playing with a storm. Clouds swoop low with thunder-rumble belly laughs and a lightning-shine smile flits between heaven and earth. The weathervane welcomes a rogue bolt from the blue, guiding its glow into the house until every warped plank radiates like the afterimage swimming on a cooling CRT. The mattress sighs as he rolls to face the blank wall, eyes shut so tight that white sparks needle his vision.

He spends the next morning inspecting the siding, stroking along the grain, gingerly flipping them over and returning them to their

slots to hide the termite bites. He sheds his burnt suit like a snakeskin and buries it out back with the others. He wonders if anyone will notice the signs – the ash on his hands, his crow's feet, the smell of charcoal, rust but no sign of rain.

GRINGO BRAVO

Samantha Fain

.....

He wanted something sweet, that was all. Just something sugary on his tongue. He'd just drank the world's longest gulp of water, or that's what he would tell his grandkids when he told them this story. It was so hot. The air weighed on his khakis and button-up. They didn't let the air in, never had. He hadn't listened to Maggie when she told him to wear something lighter. Had she suggested cotton? He couldn't remember.

What Dick did remember were the cajetas in Mexico, the sweet dulce de leche the women sold on the streets. He would buy the treat at least once a day. He normally didn't eat sweets, but cajetas were something different. Something Dick couldn't quite place his finger on. He was addicted to one thing: chewing tobacco. Cajetas were a close second. He dreamed of them while he ate his brunch with Maggie: the eggs would melt into syrupy caramel on his plate.

They were the only reason Dick missed Mexico. As a whole he preferred South America, where he and Maggie were now, leading a group of Spanish students from back home. They weren't missionaries, he would tell the locals. *I'm not here to help you.* He was here to teach. He communicated with his students solely through Spanish. He wasn't one to take it easy on them—he had brought his paddle with him in his suitcase. If they went out of line, he would whack them with it. The students would sign the paddle after. It would have his sons' signatures on it one day: Mike, Rich, Ross, chicken-scratched across the handle.

The pastel houses were built into mountains. The city itself seemed to be leaning somewhat to the right, and it looked as if it might topple if Dick breathed too hard. He was breathing heavy. He had gone on a hike with Maggie and the other students, and they had climbed many, many hills. Dick couldn't remember the beauty he'd seen as he'd climbed them—his legs hurt too much—but he knew how to make up for the pain.

"Let's get dessert," he said to Maggie.

She knew Dick well enough to know exactly what he was thinking.

"Where?" she asked.

"I don't know."

They trekked downtown, downwind of the dust and dirt of the paths they had hiked. Dick felt eager. It had been at least two years since he had tasted the sweetness of cajetas. He stopped at

the first sign. *PASTELERÍA*. He walked inside.

“¿Tiene cajetas?” *Do you have cajetas?* he asked the man who sat behind the counter reading a newspaper. Normally, the man would ignore his customers. He didn’t like working the shop. But Dick had gained his attention.

The mustached man looked up, his eyebrows rising. “¿Un burdel?” *A brothel?* he responded, his lips twisting at the edges. No one had ever waltzed into his shop asking for cajetas. He pointed at the door.

Dick argued with the man. No, he said. *Cajetas*.

“Quiero cajetas,” he said. *I want cajetas*. He was tired and growing more irritated by the minute. Dick would have done anything for a cajeta—hell, he would have given Maggie to the man. Just for one night, he decided. He made what he thought was the universal sign for cajetas with his hands, but it only looked like he was churning butter. But the man still didn’t seem to understand, beginning to laugh at Dick. He rose from his stool and began to dance, shaking his body back and forth with his arms up at shoulder-level, acting as if he were with a woman.

“Una cajeta?” he asked, pointing at his junk.

Dick couldn’t comprehend why the man laughed at him. It wasn’t due to a lack of intelligence; rather, South America was new to Dick, and he hadn’t gotten used to the place, the language, even though the people still spoke Spanish. There were different dialects, different slang words. Like how in some states back home, some people called it soda, and others called it pop. It was sort of the same. In Mexico, cajeta meant dulce de leche. It meant candy. In South America, it meant pussy.

“Quiero cajeta,” Dick said again, this time angrier.

PRESENT

Mackenzie Steagall

.....

What is the present?

The present, my mother said, is this moment, the gift of air going in and coming out. I want to carry the present with me, so I hold it in my lungs, in the sacs and pockets of my insides, until it becomes the past and I let it go.

When does the present become the past?

Exhale. Now it is the past. It is the middle child, trapped between Past and Future, bumping into Future's back, spinning unsteady, and as long as it doesn't make a commotion, Present goes unnoticed. Inhale. There is no time like the present.

Exhale. No time is like the present. Inhale. There is no present, just past.

DEVOUR THE AIR.

Marie LeClair

.....

Sparrows die when their bodies hit window-panes but never learn to avoid it; her spine will twitch, and I will cry when I cannot work up the courage to crack her neck. She wants to breathe, I want to funnel air into her lungs, but her gasps stop. I stare. What could my hands do to repair a death created by the crack of a wingspan and a window?

*

Toxic gas eats our oxygen, and we love to feed it continue to feed it until we choke on our own consumption. Isn't it beautiful how the red sunset contrasts the cutting down of redwoods? We kill them to count their years, each ring a year wasted on inhales, exhales. No. We must eat the air, swallow emptiness we leave behind and breathe in its ashes.

disingenuous blood bonds, promised we would forget mother nature, forget crimson blossoms, forget origin's allure. Yes, we did forget. The air is too empty to engulf now.

Did you know that fishhooks leave holes in mouths? We felt empty skin as I pulled on a hook that refused to go. He screamed with his body, wallows on my palm with sharp scales. He could only choke on the sky, on me. I pour his river onto him, but the hook paralyzed his lungs, the hole in his mouth spreads into his eyes and leaves him hollow.

*

Is there an end to it? Where bodies burn for fuel and plastic mouths feed on dust. Please believe us: deliciousness is made by carbon monoxide, sweetened when we danced in

GROWING PAINS

Mya Holbrook

.....

Ever since he'd evolved beyond the pond,
this pale frog has made his home in a potato sack,
beneath a shovel, near a shed.

Each morning sunlight
penetrates the rough weave of the burlap.
He is careful, now, to turn away,
to feebly shield his face with his hands,
however much it shames him.

Tonight he wriggles free
like a worm from the earth,
to scale the garden wall and peer
at the night sky, endless, and dark.

As he crests the top
he greets instead the rising sun.
It is beautiful; not at all a rotting or ugly thing,
a piece of fruit set unskinned for too long, as he thought.

He draws a three-pronged hand to his breast,
wonders if there is such a light inside him,
holds on to a golden hope that there could be.
With this, he loses his grip, feet
scrambling for purchase on uneven stone.

He tumbles backwards,
plummets—
lands on his back, and stills,
red eyes thrown wide.

The sun cuts a slow arc in the sky
until it is just above him, so that
he need not rise again to find it.

PERCY, PERCY

Samantha Harrison

.....

“Oh Percy! Percy dear it’s a boy! Can you believe it?” Mrs. Creams was still trembling from the labor pains. The baby was taken away, and in a flash he was swaddled and bundled like a gift. A red, howling, shriveled gift. Percy Creams had watched the baby be pulled from its mother, and he was shocked by the reality of birth. It was never so horrible in the films he had seen.

But the films never really showed the reality of it—birth or anything. There was a lot of mucus, and blood. He was standing at the edge of the small room now, and his wife was under many large lights. She was sprawled on the flat hospital bed like a limp Thanksgiving turkey. And they had carved her like one too! All because the baby wouldn’t turn around right. It was trying to come out legs first, but that just wouldn’t do. Percy wondered if back before modern medicine, when women had babies in their wedding beds, if they knew that too. What did they do when the babies came out kicking rather than breaching? Did they yank them by their legs? If they did they would surely break them. They would surely break the baby.

But the mother wouldn’t be carved like a turkey. That was the silver lining.

The baby was howling from around the corner, and Percy could hear the nurse trying to soothe it. She was cooing some unintelligible lullaby perhaps, or maybe she was just bouncing the squealing child in her thick arms. He wasn’t sure. He felt like he was anchored to the corner of the room now, and all he could do was watch his wife. She looked grey, despite the yellow lights and the blue tiles on the wall. Her hair was knotted up by some well-intending nurse, but now it was clumped in damp strands on her face. The curtains were still partially pulled up around her mid-section, and Percy could still feel the phantom surgeon’s presence—the long needle and the quick knife he wielded only minutes ago laid on a metal table top. And the baby cried and cried from far away.

“Percy, Percy,” his wife was calling to him, “--tell me if the baby is okay.”

He moved and phased through the wall he thought was there. The nurse and her thick arms were holding the baby. He shuffled up to her and she smiled. She smiled at him, and then to the baby that was gurgling in her arms, “Oh he’s a healthy one! You

should be proud, we didn't know if he was going to make it or not," She pushed some of the soft hospital blanket out of the baby's red face, "He's going to be a good strong boy!"

"Percy, Percy," he heard his wife again, echoing in the tiled room, "is the baby okay?" The nurse must have heard her, because she pushed right past Percy and towards his wife. The baby started crying again, and he could hear his wife gasp sharply. Was she surprised? Was she moved? He phased back into the room where she was sprawled out and saw her holding it. She was no longer grey, but red and streaked with new tears. She looked frail under the baby and its blue blanket. She looked to Percy, and then to the baby, "Oh he's got your nose. How handsome," she was enamored with the baby again. Percy was anchored to the corner again.

The nurse said she was going to go get the doctor, but as she wiped her hands on a soft towel she turned back to Percy, "What will you name him? I don't mean to be nose-y or anything." He did not know why she was asking him, and he did not answer. Instead, his wife came to attention and began wondering the same question.

"I'd like to maybe name him after my father, but Doug is such a bland name," the nurse and his wife laughed tenderly, "—oh maybe I should name him after *you* Percy! Wouldn't it be darling to have a little Junior around the house?" Both the women seemed smitten with the idea and exchanged approving glances. The baby was silent now, and made no qualm at the idea.

The doctor came in shortly after the nurse with thick arms left. He had a narrow face and a thin, greying mustache that he must comb every other hour. How else would it look so tame? Percy wondered if he would grow a mustache soon, it seemed like a fatherly thing to do. Or maybe a beard, some fathers grow thick, tired looking beards. He was not sure. The doctor took the baby and looked him over once more. He flipped him and inspected him like a penny he found on the sidewalk. Was it shiny? What year was it made? All of that was to be put on the birth certificate.

"Hm hm, have you got a name for this handsome one?" the doctor smiled with his eyes, "Or should I come back a bit later so you can discuss it?" The baby seemed pleased to be wrapped back up in the blue hospital blanket and breathed softly with its eyes closed.

Percy's wife looked to him, but then to the Doctor, "Oh I think I've got it now!" she was excited despite her weakened state. She sat up slowly, "Oh, have you got the papers now? I can do it now."

The Doctor found the papers and placed them on a grey clipboard, "Here you are ma'am, and would you like a blue or

black pen?” Percy didn’t know why it mattered.

His wife chose the blue pen and eagerly took the cap off. She beamed at Percy, “Oh I’ve got it I’ve got it! How does *Percy Douglass* sound?” Percy did not say anything, and could not, because she had already begun to write the name out. He wasn’t sure how he felt about it. He wasn’t sure how he felt about sharing. The doctor was smiling with his mouth, and his mustache curled around his thin lips. It was a good name. It sounded good in the blue-tiled room.

At home they had already set up the small white crib. It had its own room, with blue and white swirling clouds on each of the walls. The two windows that faced the street would not be trouble for an infant. It has no consciousness of who or what was out there, or even that the clouds on the walls were not real. Percy thought this as his wife watched the baby sleep. The whole first night she would hover in and out of the room, and even if the monitor wasn’t going off, she would still go in and watch the baby sleep. Perhaps this was what a good mother looked like: this was a true maternal instinct, Percy thought.

Each time she would leave the bed, he would wake up. The clock was red and humming each time— 3:00, 3:15, 4:00, 4:30, 5:17, 6:00, *it’s time to get up*. The buzzing alarm did not wake him up that morning. The sleeping baby did.

His wife did not have to go to work, because her company gave her a generous maternity leave. She could stay in the rocking chair they had placed in the baby’s room and do nothing but watch the baby sleep. Or she could sleep and try to let her body begin to heal. After all, the fat stitches would sit in her for nearly a month. Percy knew this, and he wondered if she even noticed them. Had she even noticed that she had been torn like a clumsy toy and sewn back together by the surgeon’s hands? Was she aware of what the child looked like when it was taken out of her? She was not there, Percy decided as he drove to work, she was deep in the epidural. Deep in the pain killer that numbed her bottom half, and that was, perhaps, where she still was.

The other men at work slapped him on the back and offered him cigars. “Percy, Percy! Way to go, I heard it was a boy!” All the men had the same voice. They were all laughing and pouring their coffee. Percy sat at his desk and began to tumble through papers. Each of them had another number to call—another name to write down. Another name to remember. The man that sat closest to him could not contain himself and demanded on standing beside Percy’s chair. He hovered like a summer fruit fly. Percy could

hear him buzzing.

“So, you’ve got a boy now huh? Oh I’ve got two myself, and they’re swell. The missus takes great care of them while I’m away. We’re busy aren’t we?” he laughed and nudged Percy’s left shoulder, “Ahh that’s great news. What did you name him, by the way? I’m not being too nosey here, just a question.”

“Oh, I heard he’s got a Junior now!” a man from a few desks over piped in, “My missus told me that at least. You know how women are! They gab gab gab!” A few men laughed and hollered in agreement. That man’s wife must be friends with his wife, but Percy wasn’t sure.

“Way to go, Creams! Way to go!” he was handed another cigar. He didn’t get to tell them that it wasn’t really a Junior, because they didn’t share a middle name. But the phone rang, and he listened into the humming receiver for the next voice. Hopefully it would be someone from far away that wasn’t offering cigars. Maybe someone who didn’t even know who he was.

At the end of his shift, Percy stacked all of his papers back and clipped them neatly. He shut off the small desk lamp and placed each pencil back in his drawer. The man whose desk was closest came over to him again. This time he did not offer cigars or say “congratulations.” Instead he offered to take him out for a drink. “A few other guys are going out to the pub, and you could use a quick one couldn’t you?” Percy did not agree, and he walked away after he put his jacket on. The man seemed disappointed, but Percy didn’t really know if he was or not.

They all parked in a large parking lot that the company had paved for them. It was dark and cold outside, but it was only 6:30. That was because it was winter. There is no time for daylight when it is cold, Percy thought. He knew it often kept people inside because it was off-putting. People don’t typically trust the night. He found his keys in his right pocket, along with his wallet. Would he have to put a picture of the baby in his wallet now? He already had a photo of his wife, but now people would expect a photo of his son too. That was space that could have been filled with another credit card, Percy thought as he walked across the parking lot.

There was a woman in a heavy fur coat waiting a few yards away from him on the sidewalk. Perhaps she had been watching him, but he wasn’t sure. She smoked her cigarette the way a man would—aggressively and carelessly. She smiled and her lips were cracked, “Hey fella, got a minute?” Percy stopped and she walked towards him, “Oh you’re awfully kind! Most fellas don’t pay my voice no attention!” She was cat-like, and her legs wobbled when

she walked. It must have been her tall, pointed shoes, Percy thought.

She toyed with her lighter, “Oh, fella, say, have you got a light? Or do you even smoke?” Percy could not answer, because she had already figured it out, “Ah no way. You don’t even smoke. Oh well, my lighter’s out, how about that!” her lighter was not really out, and Percy knew this. She fumbled with her cigarette box now, “And shit! This is my last smoke! I better make it good.” She took a long, selfish drag. She looked at him with smoky eyes, “Did you want a drag? It’s my last one, but I’m a nice lady,” she smiled, and Percy saw her teeth. They looked like the thin yellow pages he often used to find names and numbers. Before he could decline, she decided to change her mind, “Nah you don’t smoke. You don’t need it,” she took another selfish drag.

Percy moved to leave, but she touched his arm suddenly, “Say fella, you seem a little glum. Can I give you a good time?” she smiled with her yellow pages. Percy felt his body shift, and all his inertia seemed to flow to his head. She saw him shift and retracted her hand, “Ah it’s okay, at least you’re not the rude type. You know, sometimes they’ll hit me if I even touch them. I can’t help it I’m a nice lady, you know?”

He felt bad for her suddenly and reached into his coat pocket. She noticed and inhaled sharply, “No sweetheart I don’t take no donations,” she stepped back, “I ain’t a charity or nothin’!” But he was not reaching for money, he was reaching for the cigars the men had given him. He had kept five of them, the rest were still on his desk. She seemed confused and looked at them carefully, “Are those for me?” he could not answer, because she took them quickly, “Oh geez fella! I appreciate it! Shit, I haven’t had one of these since my boy was born. He’s off somewhere else now, they took him away.” She lit one of the cigars feverishly with her empty lighter, “Shit shit shit, you don’t need kids when you got the street though. That’s what I say mister. Mister fella!” She hit the cigar lightly and let the ash fall softly on the cold concrete, “You got a kid? You just have one? You seem like you’re not the family sort, no offense Mister fella, I can just sense things.”

Percy stood quietly with the woman while she smoked. She watched him. She was analyzing him and his stiff pant legs. They didn’t talk, and they didn’t have to. He felt at ease in the cold parking lot, with the woman and her teeth like the yellow pages. She was halfway done with the cigar when she spoke again, “You know what, I feel like you’re not sure you wanna go home fella. Mister fella! I think we could take a walk and I can smoke these cigars. Wouldn’t that clear your head a little? You got a screaming baby at home, don’t you, Mister fella! That’s the worst. I swear, they cry when you’re there and when you’re not. There’s

no winning with kids,” she waited but he did not reply, “Oh I gotcha, you got a wife too. A nice little house with a wife and kid. That’s good ain’t it? I wanted to be a wife once. Watching the baby and singin’ lullabies. All that shit, that sounded real nice when I was younger. These days I just think about making it to the next day. You do too, don’t you Mister fella?”

He decided to walk around the block with her, but he never asked her name. She just kept talking about the street and smoking his cigars. He didn’t mind it, really, because it wasn’t about him. It wasn’t about the baby, his wife, or anything at all really. She smoked the first cigar and was working on the second when some local officers began watching them from their parked car. Percy noticed it first, but the woman caught on soon after. She bid him farewell by an appliance store alley. The light post he stood next to hummed as she kept taking deep hits on the cigar. “Now listen, Mister fella, you go on home. Don’t worry about me, them cops don’t talk to me. They never do, but you go on home and don’t worry about it,” she faded into the damp alley. He heard the rattling of paper and empty cans as she made her way deeper and deeper into the dark.

He hadn’t noticed he was leaning on the humming light post. It was cold, dark, and some buildings had chimneys that kept billowing thick smoke into the evening air. The way the smoke rose made him think about the stranger and his cigars. He felt odd. A shiver crept all the way up his back and to the top of his head. He wasn’t that far off from the parking lot, but he felt distant. From himself. From the screaming baby at home, his turkey wife, and the policemen that watched him from their warm car.

He took the long way home that night. He took an old road with many sagging trees and odd road bumps. He rolled down his window and let the cold air jitter the air freshener that hung on his rearview mirror. The plastic flowers were supposed to smell like Hawaii. Hawaii! Of all places, and there was nothing relaxing about driving, or Hawaii for that matter. He let himself seep out the window and into the sagging branches of the trees. His car drifted home after the odd bumping road merged back into town, and even then he did not get out of the car. He sat for ten minutes, then an hour, and then two hours. There was nothing but the car and his body in the driveway. He felt at ease being with himself for so long.

He crept into the house after he finally pulled himself from his car. The wooden floor groaned under him—he knew it would wake the whole house up. He would stand still for a few seconds before going on, but the wood floor was agonizing to hear. He

had made it to the bottom of the stairs when his wife got up. She stood at the top, looking down at him. Her night gown now hung loosely around her tired figure. At one time it was filled with her and the baby.

“Percy, Percy,” she said, “Where have you been? Didn’t your shift end hours ago?” she did not let him speak. She stepped down the stairs carefully so that she could meet him at the bottom. She had to move slowly. She was still sore from the stitches. The damp evening light was hollow on her complexion and the wooden floor beneath her. She looked like a pale blue lily of the valley, and her bare feet did not make the floor groan. She looked up at Percy as a perplexed child would, “Where have you been?”

The baby began crying far off beyond the stairs. Percy’s wife did not move. She kept looking at him. Percy let his tired shoulders droop. He felt how heavy his jacket really was, and how heavy he might have been. He rubbed his face and swore that maybe he felt short stubble coming in, or maybe he was just feeling the age on his face. The baby kept crying and neither of the two were going to go to it. They were among themselves and no one else.

Percy could breathe. Percy could speak, and so he did.

“You should go check on Percy.”

ODE TO MY GRANDFATHER'S KIDNEY STONE

Samantha Fain

.....

You like to pain, clipped edge of a calcium cliff,
chipped hard times that stiffen the muscles,
makes the bones groan and moan, you overgrown
clover twining your way through vines—
or veins—never letting go. You've got some hope
for a manmade mineral, thinking you're not replaceable,
as if you're visceral, some gut feeling that won't pop
out in the next two or three or four days. I like your spunk,
punk, your little hard-headed barbed body that guns
your way down those sweet pink pipes. What made you
stop running? Was it the way he aged, shrinking
into himself, no bigger than the change in his pockets,
or the way he said bastard, butter-soft but rotten
at the tooth, or maybe just the way he ate and drank
his blue mints and off-brand Coca Cola until you formed
in his belly, all sentient, like Jonah in a whale. But
the difference between you and him is that one of you prayed,
which is an art form, because it takes practice to say
what needs to be said in one kneeling.

LAMB'S EAR

Mackenzie Steagall

.....

On hands and knees, the girl brushes
her cheek across the dusty gray leaves,
and declares the plant soft-y to the mother.
The mother, on her knees, feels the bite of
gravel and the snarling sun on her roughened skin,
and presses the bound, fragile roots of the Lamb's Ear
into the dark safety of the soil. She baptizes the little
plant with well-water and whispered blessings of growth
and resilience. Despite the mother's layers of sunscreen,
the girl's thin limbs, like white roots,
brown in the sun, the world inflicting itself on the girl
without her even noticing. The girl cannot be
deprived of the sun's warmth for fear of its burning.
The mother cannot hide the good that the world offers
for fear of the bad that the world offers.
All the mother can do is baptize the girl in bathwater
and whisper blessings of growth and resilience into
her Little Lamb's ears.

TWO DAYS GONE

Samantha Harrison

.....

I've talked enough about the going and the gone and
the people who walk heavy-handed with wedding bands.
So I'm giving up my morals—I'm smoking now.
I'm being intimate now. With anyone who's got a flushed face.
I'm drinking poison. I'm casting myself to the stake like
a Salem witch. Maybe I'm smoking Salems.
Now that I think of it I'm doing more than that.
I'm un-lady like. I'm sprawled open ready to make love.
It's sex—it's got me beat. Beat beat beat in the head
with the notion of affairs and translucent partners.
I'm clean! I'm howling, oh!
I'm too clean to be this miserable! I'm putting on a new face
and looking to the almanac. Full moon, it's two days gone.
Full moon, playing with my lunar Piscean body and soul.
Do not forget your tenderness I say to myself
while I pour like rain from the sky. And I'm
two days gone. A phase of the moon; once new
and now full of something that makes me
only brave in the dark. I am the hag that sits on chests.
I am sleep paralysis now. Moving like the moon and her phases.
I can't decide what time I should get going and gone.

TREATMENT

Brittany Love

.....

One a day keeps the doubles away

I.

The doctor's reluctance to directly assert my diagnosis was antagonizing. Already clammy and eating at the skin around my torn up nails, I presume I appeared desperate for a detailed psychological report; not this same altruistic nature I bestow in order to hide behind reserved veneer. My tongue sat obediently and anxiously tapped its paws – its ears they perk when he introduces "Mania"- even un-identified the term fit like a long lost sweater. I did not hesitate to trace my fingers around the tattered thumb holes; each worn section seemed trivial once I slipped the familiar cloak over my head.

II.

The Mental Health Questionnaire stares back at me from a dry erase chart, permanently discolored from frequent use to reassure I was nothing special, rather, a statistic. Each question poses an infinite tear into time and space, hurling my body through morphing landscapes of pre-existing incidents. The brief return of macabre sensations leaves my fingertips with each YES I admit.

II.

I cannot remember a time when I did not wake to dark skies; not yet kissed by twilight. My mother would kiss between my eyes, sagging with deprivation and call me her early-morning-riser. My memories, temporally compartmented, appear checkered with highs and lows, from kisses and blows my progenitors gave me. I assumed the exposure to their contrary colors gave me whiplash, but the white coats calculate that I was wrong.

"At times I feel as mad as a paradox." I think I'm special, important, is what I hear when I speak and I shrink until he interjects, "Not quite, the disorder you face possesses conditions that posses your person. These *highs* and *lows* you call them are not just products of external elements but are due to permanent damage of neurotransmitters."

"What about the guilt?" I mean to say the black mass that engulfs me when I act as a slut on a puppeteer's string. He nods, "Normal for someone coming down from an episode of Mania." "and the lows?" "Depression, her other" With a note on his pad

he sentences me to a life that requires treatment as if I asked for life itself; yet I leave enlightened.

IV.

The required time in which the medication takes to stabilize your mood has passed. I have eaten one little buff pill for every breakfast and can attest that they hold the capability to affect certain neurotransmitters in your brain. A few of these guys, the triplets, have been denying my receptors for over two decades now, causing a one-way drop-off in the banks of my mind, collecting emotional control and impulse. The waters would rise with lost motivation and my missing libido until finally they crashed in a wave that demanded to be felt; and I would feel it for days or months. Mania, she would reign in my disposition and slap the god complex right into me. I'd fall to my knees, transfixed, every time. And when I was too tired to suck on her fingers she left in a fog of smoke that deluded my perception. The colors would fade and in the corner behind me, always behind me, sat her other. Whose name I am not familiar with, never cared enough to ask, yet I can still recall the frigidness of her presence, the way my eyes iced over. I would fall, unsaturated, and the cycle would begin again.

After being properly re-wired I visited Internal Medicine and cried for man's progression in science; my long-standing lack of knowledge pertaining to the trauma that manifested my doubles. Who when not stabilized would sing their siren songs.

V.

Marked only with indefinite periods of euphoria we must burn as bright as we can-

-Or decline to acknowledge the nature of anything outside the safe perimeters of our mind

This despondency does not become us; we must welcome the urge to act compulsively-

-Dejected. Your recessions are safer

-Feel darker

-Than the fire that insists on burning itself out.

SONNET FOR INDIANA POTHOLES

Samantha Fain

.....

You drive I-65 and hear the smacks of the tarmac
make an almost music. Wear and tear that hollers
when you hit it, says *I've been here and I've gone there*
and a little bit of *you think you're tough, motherfucker?*
So you feel the rumble of the rubble, slip on the chip seal,
nearly wheel through your windshield into a cornfield.
A Pollock-paved trapdoor. A hubcap-slap shockwave.
A hand trying to pull you through to its grave.
I've birthed you, motherfucker. I'll eat you up.
And maybe that's love. The pothole the mothergod,
who rocks us just to show us we're alive.
Our vehicles just vesicles for her breakdowns,
the holes phagocytes to swallow our rides whole.
Oh mother, engulf us, engulf us. Til death be our guide.

LOSS

Marie LeClair

.....

The beauty of the world... has two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish, cutting the heart asunder.

– Virginia Woolf

staring at the blank edge of a mirror will
lead to nothing but an algetic stagnancy

you remember grandmother's
sewing needle pricking your thumb

it was not the cut, it was knowing the loss
of blood, feeling the skin empty

grass will grow around your sleepy eyes
pull the pine needle from your fracture

ferns can live inside of split jaws
a tree will grow within your loss

CLAY FORM

Bethany Moll

.....

Myself I'm like a clay pot,
massaged into life on the wheel.
I grow taller—prouder with every turn

or more fragile—I'm cut away
seamlessly by delicate and skillful hands.
A ding, a dent or two is found

on me—imperfect. But there are tools
for that: to sculpt, to smooth, to fix.
Hands appear from all sides to score

and slip me—slice, scrape, and
strip me from my blemishes until I am shrunk in
layers. Just as I was taught: I cannot be

beautiful if not smooth. I cannot be
placed upon a mantel lest I be without
flaw. But I was the crack that could not

be filled. Packed in, wrapped desperately
in plastic—a new body in waiting. But clay and skin are
ever-changing, aging, drying, cracking. On the shelf.

Abandoned, I turn pale, dusty—bone-dry.
No longer fit for the kiln. Waiting
for the inevitable moment when

I am shattered and sunk in the barrel.

Fiction Contest Winner
AIGRE-DOUX

Olivia Inman

.....

Arryn stared ahead at the sleeping figure lying on the couch. A tired, stitched-up woman with no memories dozed with no fear in her posture, the only indication of stress being her tight grip on her cell phone, even in slumber. Arryn just watched the slow breathing, glad to know that at the very least, life did course through Lian's veins. Occasionally, she feared that the frequent naps would lead to a soon approaching death that she would be unable to postpone.

Not that it really mattered, since Arryn knew the truth that pained her so much.

While the woman in front of her wore Lian's face and had Lian's voice, nothing she did was like how Lian would act before the incident that tore their lives apart. She had no memory of the past, depending on Arryn to tell her everything. No recollection of her family or friends or intense studies or even Arryn.

There were some days when she would say something that Arryn's Lian would say. A random movie quote here and there. A joke they'd shared years ago.

It wasn't the same though.

The funeral was bleak. Arryn stood frozen at the sight of Claudia silently crying as people offered their condolences, hugging her softly as if it would soften the feeling of her world falling apart. Claudia lost her only daughter, the one thing she claimed had been good about her life.

Arryn wasn't any help either.

She just stood there, her gaze travelling between the casket and Claudia. This wasn't fair, not to anyone. Not to her. Not to Claudia. Not to Will who seemed to be ready to throw himself onto his cousin's casket. Not to Mari who was openly wailing over the death that struck them all dumb.

Arryn's blood was cold like the frozen pond just outside the window of the funeral home. She couldn't think, couldn't even feel her own breathing. She might as well have been in the casket with Lian.

Lian drank coffee every morning before the incident, and she

still did. Differently though, of course, just like how everything was different now. Before, she just drank black coffee like it would keep her alive, but now, she poured obscene amounts of creamer or sugar into her mug before adding a little bit of coffee, always looking at Arryn with a smile.

The smile was another problem. It was too wide, but still never reached her eyes. It was meant to say, “Look, just like before!” without Lian’s knowledge that she shouldn’t be drinking her coffee like that.

It wasn’t just the smile.

Ages ago (though not really), it had always been Arryn who would have to initiate anything that could be considered even remotely affectionate. Now, Lian would just casually slip her hand into Arryn’s as they watched mindless movies for fun. It was now Lian who would just do stupid little romantic things for the hell of it.

And she just did it because she could. Or maybe it was really because she couldn’t remember that she never would.

It was another stark difference from before that Arryn was forced to add to the list of contrasts that were driving her crazy. She swore, vowed to keep trying. There had to be a way to remind Lian of the past. Movies, jokes, food, blatant reminiscence.

It was her job to raise the past and bring Lian back. Back to normal. Back to life. She didn’t even know anymore what she wanted to do. Sometimes, she just wanted to get rid of Lian, banish her life a ghost from this life into the next.

But if she did that, all of her work would have been for nothing.

The giant house was empty again, Arryn being the only inhabitant once more, and she hated it. After her parents’ deaths, she had worked so hard to stay away. This time around, she just tried her hardest to scrub the feeling of death that permeated the walls of the house.

The floors shined. The windows were unnoticeable. Every speck of dust that had once existed was eradicated from the world. It was too much. She couldn’t get rid of the doom that hung over her home, finally realizing that it was just hanging over her.

She felt sick every single morning that she woke alone, the cold freezing her to the bone despite the fact that she had the heat high enough to cause her to sweat.

Lian had loved puzzles but now seemed to struggle with them,

staring at a thousand jigsaw pieces with a pained expression on her face. Maybe was growing tired of confinement. After all, it couldn't be very exciting to sit in solitude at home, having only Arryn for company.

But she couldn't really go anywhere else. Not when she was supposed to be six feet underground on the other side of the country in a nondescript cemetery that held a family plot.

The Modern Prometheus.

It served as Arryn's saving grace. She paid off the funeral home—nearly all of her life savings suddenly depleted—and kept the body for her own. An empty coffin took the place of Lian's.

Initially, Arryn felt bad for it, but then, she buried herself in her newfound goal. She knew absolutely nothing of science, but if Mary Shelley could write of an idiot's stitched-up creature coming to life, then surely Arryn could find an actual method that could reanimate the dead.

Electricity and chemical reactions were the only components of basic galvanism, both of which Arryn could get ahold of somehow. She only needed to figure out the how.

Sometimes, it seemed like Lian was haunting her, just a shell of who she had been, nothing more than an empty box.

But the box was closed, so Arryn really had no clue if it was empty or not. Maybe its contents were just locked inside, and just needed to find the key that fit.

She bought the foods Lian had loved. She played the music that Lian listened to repetitiously. She rearranged her sleeping schedule to fit the small number of hours that Lian had once slept.

She couldn't lose Lian.

Not more than she already had.

Her skin had greyed. Every suture the mortician had laid into her skin stood out like ink on paper, telling the tale of Lian's murder. Arryn could only feel guilt. Lian wouldn't have been out so late had they not fought hours previous, screaming at each other across the living room over something Arryn couldn't even remember.

It had been Arryn who had broken first, angrily telling Lian to just leave. Lian, stubborn, heart hardened from her childhood, glared at her with hurt and malice in her eyes as she swiped her

coat from the closet and stormed out the door.

A fight over something stupid killed Lian.

Arryn killed Lian.

Therefore, she had to be the one to bring Lian back. She worked and studied and froze her home to try to slow the decomposition process, trying to save Lian from death.

She would stare at Lian's cold body, hoping that the grey would vanish once life entered her lungs once more.

Arryn would stare at the ceiling at night, not trusting herself to sleep without dreaming about the past, only to be disappointed by the shadow that too had taken Lian's place.

Lian slept more now, at ease when she slumbered, unlike before when she'd wake at the slightest sound. She slept through the thunderstorms as if they were silent, and it would make Arryn wonder if maybe Lian was dead again.

Again.

Not many people could say that.

Oftentimes, Arryn wished she couldn't.

"I don't remember" was the first thing Lian ever said after Arryn injected ridiculous amounts of chemical compounds into her body and used an electric chair Arryn had bought at an auction to stimulate those chemicals.

It had been forty-seven days since she died that Arryn found success. It was five days since the revival that Lian spoke.

And it turned out, she really couldn't remember anything.

Two hundred and thirty-seven days from the resurrection did Arryn find out a horrid truth. After months of witnessing Lian mention events from the past with clarity and suddenly drinking her coffee black, Arryn learned the coldest fact that could ever dare to strike her.

She returned from shopping, bags full of foods Lian loved, hearing Lian recite what sounded like a list. She quietly crept to the kitchen where Lian stood, staring at the too-bright cellphone that she refused to relinquish ever. Arryn, having never insisted upon seeing its contents, heard for the first time a glimpse of what Lian was always scrolling through.

"Lian likes coffee. Lian loves to watch action movies. Lian makes fun of romances. Lian loves to read at night. Lian's favorite

food is Chicken Pad Thai.”

She was reading it off the screen, reminding herself of the facts Lian used to know by heart, committing them to memory as if it was all for a test she was close to failing. The thing that didn't make sense to Arryn was how Lian knew those exact facts when Arryn had never actually told her any of them.

Maybe it was the assortment of coffee mugs in the cabinet. Maybe it was because Die Hard was on at least once a week. Maybe it was because they had an abundance of ingredients for Chicken Pad Thai and the offhand comment of “You could make it a lot better than I ever could” that Arryn once let slip out.

She didn't know. Only Lian knew how she knew, and Arryn was starting to believe that she would hate the answer. Just like she was beginning to hate this whole arrangement that she had set up. She was living with a ghost, and it was all her fault.

“You like grey more,” Arryn said as Lian reached for the red coffee mug, apparently unaware of what her favorite color was. Lian looked at her for a long moment, then took the metallic grey mug and filled three quarters of it with French Vanilla creamer.

“Thanks,” Lian mumbled, taking a sip of the overly sweet drink that should make her gag.

“You're welcome.”

Arryn hadn't expected the soft smile that did not belong on Lian's face. A smirk maybe, but never a smile that could melt a person's heart.

“What would I do without you?”

It was meant to be sweet, but Arryn could only think of how Lian wouldn't have died. Without Arryn, Lian wouldn't have changed. She wouldn't need to be fixed. Now though, Lian was right. Without Arryn, Lian really had nothing left. The world thought she was dead, and she had nothing to do to prove it otherwise.

“Who knows?”

Lian slept like a baby. She'd curled into herself and gripped whatever was closest as tightly as she possibly could. Typically, it was her cellphone. The one she kept everything she knew about herself on. Occasionally, she'd reach out and grab ahold of Arryn's hand, but that was rare. Her phone was always closer.

For once, it was Arryn's hand, meaning that she had the chance to look at the phone.

There was no password. No lock. Nothing that could ever be

like how Lian was once paranoid about someone getting ahold of her personal information without her allowance. The background was a somewhat recent picture of Arryn watching the television intently. She had no clue when Lian had taken that picture. It wasn't like Lian to take pictures before, so she had never expected any now.

The notes app was the only thing installed. No games. No social media. Just the notes, and it was all just one long document. Obviously, this was the list.

Except it wasn't just a list of facts from the past.

It included things that Lian thought now.

Lian drinks coffee every morning. I don't like coffee.

Lian likes rock music. Rock music gives me headaches.

Lian loves her mother. I don't know my mother.

Lian wears turtlenecks. I hate the feeling of wearing them.

Lian doesn't sleep. I don't want to wake up sometimes.

Lian solves jigsaw puzzles for fun. Puzzles confuse me.

Lian likes Thai food. It burns my mouth and tastes wrong.

It went on like that. Everything Arryn had been doing was apparently wrong. Everything Lian ever liked was what she now hated. This wasn't fair. All the work Arryn had put into trying to save her was for nothing. She didn't bring Lian back. She put an emotionless stranger into the body of her dead girlfriend, pretending that one day, everything would be normal.

Lian was gone. That much was obvious. It had been obvious from the beginning, but she just wanted to fix what she had caused. It had been Arryn who yelled. Arryn was the reason Lian had left that night. She was the reason Lian was in the gas station when the thieves burst in. She was the reason Lian was there, the reason Lian was stabbed to death, the reason Lian had been lying in a casket.

She just wanted to fix it all.

She scrolled to the end of the list.

Lian loves Arryn. I love her too.

Arryn only sees Lian, never me.

I am Lian, but I am not Lian.

That just stung.

Arryn wrenched her hand out of Lian's grasp, not caring if she woke the sleeping woman or not. That wasn't Lian. It wasn't her. That was just someone who had the nerve to sit around and wear the face of a woman she was nothing like.

Claudia's living room was cramped, full of blocky furniture that had to be at least twenty years old. The walls were a greying salmon that needed to be repainted. Lian had promised to do that, but of course, she wouldn't be anytime soon.

She'd probably never do it now.

"Sometimes, I feel like people forget about her," Claudia said softly, taking a sip of her tea. "The world keeps going, but Lian's gone. They keep walking around me, shoving past with their faces down. You and Will visit me still, and I'm glad for that. But Lian could light up the world with a smile."

A fact that anyone who had ever seen Lian actually smile knew.

Arryn didn't have the nerve to tell Claudia that Lian was alive. Couldn't tell her that if she took the four-hour drive, she'd find her stitched-together daughter reclining on the sofa, staring at her cell-phone like the world depended on. Couldn't tell Claudia that Lian was breathing, because it meant nothing to say it and then follow it up with the fact that Lian had no memory.

Sometimes, she wondered if having Claudia visit would jog Lian's memory, but after weighing the possibilities, she always chose to stay quiet, never wanting to upset either Lian or Claudia. She couldn't imagine what it would be like to hug your daughter, only to realize she didn't know you anymore. And she definitely couldn't think of what it would be like to have a stranger sobbing over you, especially when you had absolutely no recollection of them.

"It feels like she's still here," Claudia mumbled. "The air is the same. The city's the same. Nothing's changed, but everything is so different."

"Because she's with us wherever we go," Arryn said, truly unable to relate to what Claudia felt.

Because there was an empty Lian at home that needed to be filled.

Arryn threw away the coffee. Lian had been the only one to drink it anyways. It didn't matter if she wanted to keep up the charade anymore or not. She couldn't. She deleted every single one of the raucous songs Lian had loved. She tossed all the Thai ingredients they kept in the cabinets into the front yard, not wanting any of it in the house anymore. She took all the action DVDs and smashed them, eventually deciding to just leave the shattered pieces on the ground.

"Are you okay?"

Arryn turned around and looked Lian dead in the eye.

“Get out.”

“What?”

“You aren’t Lian, and you never will be! Get out of my house!”

“Where am I supposed to go?”

“I don’t care! Just leave!”

“If that’s what you want, then fine.”

Lian, still wearing her pajamas, grabbed Arryn’s red coat from the closet and walked right out the front door. She hadn’t been wearing shoes. Or socks. She didn’t have any money. Or a form of identification. She didn’t even exist to the world, but she so readily walked out into it, not even worried about the consequences that leaving might have.

Maybe she hadn’t changed that much.

“Maybe you should just leave!”

“If that’s what you want, then I will.”

She snatched her grey coat from the closet, shoved her feet into her converse, and tore out the door in a run. Arryn could have run after her. She could have done something. Anything.

Instead, she stared at the ajar door, shocked that Lian just left.

Arryn woke to the smell of smoke. She bolted to the kitchen, hoping that she wouldn’t have to put out a fire, just in time to see Lian dump a bowl of water onto a blazing lump of what Arryn supposed was some sort of food.

“You’re awake,” Lian said simply, poking at the charred, wet thing.

“You’re back.”

“I don’t have anywhere else to go. Lian is dead.”

“No, you’re—”

“Lian is dead, not me.”

“You are Lian.”

“Maybe. I bought more coffee.”

“Why? You hate it.”

Lian drinks it, and you want me to be like Lian was.”

Maybe Lian wasn’t a shadow. Or a ghost. She was someone else, but she wasn’t a box. Arryn couldn’t unlock her. Couldn’t fill her up with the past.

The past was dead, ashes that Arryn kept piling atop Lian, suffocating her with what needs to be without thinking about what should be. The past was dead and gone and never coming back. That was the nature of death. It wasn't supposed to relinquish those it took from life, and by forcing its hand, Arryn had cheated a system thought unbreakable.

It was Lian, whether she liked it or not. The woman wore Lian's skin, talked with the same voice, had the same mannerisms.

“Not if you don't want to.”

The small smile that graced Lian's face was enough to light up the world.

MY SCHOLARSHIPS DON'T EVEN COVER MY ENTRY FEES

Iris Ries

.....

I look at the aisles of fruits and vegetables in their refrigerated homes

the fluorescent lights basking down on them.

I walk past these.

I continue through the aisles of cereals and canned goods.

Blue collared people mill about.

They bump into me,

They do not say

Sorry.

As I walk to the cash register and place myself at the back of the line

I notice the scarce amount of objects in my cart.

The eggs, about to expire, are 50% off.

The milk was off-brand; it was the cheapest I could find.

The line moves forward, step after slow step.

Our feet hit the linoleum

I stare at the man in front of me with his cart full of goods

I wait until his back leaves my view

I turn.

My eyes meet hers.

Her eyes are dead and unwelcoming.

A smile is stretched across her face.

Did you find everything you need?

Yes,

I say with equivalent obligatory civility.

The eggs and milk move across the broken conveyer belt

Speed equaling that of a snail with a brain tumor

With tired hands the lady rings up the eggs and milk

Your total is \$6.95

The neon green lights blink at me, telling me to hand over the bills.

I open my wallet and find it barren

I don't have the money to buy my milk and eggs.

I look at the lady apologetically

I leave the store without my food.

I go back to my overpriced, cockroach-infested dorm room.

I think about the man in front of me in the grocery store line.

His cart brimming with eggs and milk.

AULD LANG SYNE

Samantha Loyd

.....

It was New Year's Eve. The emergency room downstairs had been busting with children that injured themselves while engaging in some sort of festivity. Not us. Brother dearest, brother mine, baby brother who received all of the attention, all of the cuddling, and all of the new toys, was sick again. We drove up the country roads of Nineveh, Indiana, and sped down the interstate because of him. Again. I stared at the blank white walls and marveled at the contrast between light and dark. The glaring, harsh, sterile white of the hospital walls contrasting the cool, calming, yet hard, deep purple of the waiting room floor. I never could abide waiting. I quit card games when they bored me, and I grew weary of long movies. Books were the only source of long-term commitment I could handle, and my grandmother didn't allow me to bring one that day. I kicked my battered tennis shoe against the uncomfortable chair next to me. My four-year-old brain rebelled at another night spent away from home, but Mommy had been crying, and Daddy looked angry again, so I kept my mouth shut. We'd waited there for what felt like centuries, and I wanted nothing more than to go back to my little red metal bed in the corner of the little lilac room we all shared. I heard a door open with a creak and was struck by a sound that was almost a sob and almost a scream before the door slammed shut.

A doctor appeared and stared over his Harry Potter glasses at me. This doctor was one of my favorites, with his sparkling, laughing eyes and funny glasses that glinted under the glaring lights. But this time, his eyes looked dull, and no humor shone out through the round windows perched before his eyes. He held out his hand, and I took it with no hesitation. He led me beyond the closed door, where we were greeted with a strangely familiar sight. The same blinding white walls encased the small room; a window placed facing out towards a courtyard intended to give the patients the illusion that they were not trapped in their deathbeds. The same hospital bed commanded the center of the room, with the same loud beeping machines surrounding it, with the same bars on the sides to transform the hospital bed into a cradle. However, an uncommon still silence pervaded the atmosphere. Always, always when I entered, my baby brother was giggling or crying or burping or laughing or making some other listless baby noise. Yet when I entered this time, not a sound arose from the little hospital bed that cradled him. I stepped closer to see what was wrong, but somebody pulled me back. I tried and tried to argue that I could wake him up. He loved when I

played peek-a-boo between the bars of the hospital crib early in the morning, and loved the funny faces I would pull to distract him from yet another set of needles violating his tiny body. Yet even as I approached the bed, he remained still, his eyes shut in what appeared to be a restful sleep. Then, I noticed his non-existent breathing, and heard the monotone suspended beep of the machine monitoring his heartbeat. A well-meaning adult tried to tell me that he was sleeping, but even at age four, I knew what death meant. What happened next blurred together. I went for my mother, but someone turned me away so that she wouldn't see the burden that was her sobbing child. Someone else ushered me back toward the waiting room, and gently pressed a book into my hand. I had no interest in reading now. I again stared at the white walls and marveled at how life could be so short. The clock on the wall struck midnight. Happy New Year.

TO EACH HER OWN

Samantha Harrison

.....

Each Tuesday, right as the church bells rang the noon hymns, the women made their way to Mrs. School's home. The weekly tea time was a religious ritual to them, and the four ladies would shake their coats and hang them by her front door in an orderly fashion. Each pair of pointed, polished shoes that they had bought from the newly constructed shopping center would be slipped off and left under the sagging coat rack. Mrs. Schools had such a nice plush carpet, they all would think, as their stockings sunk into it. The tea room was past the living room. It was just out of sight from the front door—but if you craned your neck just enough, you may see the thin shadows that the light pink lights casted onto the women. You could hear the light clinking of fine china handed down from one generation of posh women to another.

It was the summer of 1969, and most of the tea sessions were spent discussing the prospective fashions of the new decade that loomed ahead. The women still wore their light morning jackets. This was, of course, so that they could show off how well their jackets went with their demeanors. It was successful each session, and one woman would always tell the store she had shopped in to buy it. One particular session, Mrs. McDougal noted how much her husband had paid for her jacket. She stroked the thin, pink jacket shoulder, "It really is a lovely pastel, a bit late for Summer I admit. Oh, but you must know how much my husband was willing to pay!" She breathed sharply, "\$40.00!" She watched the other women for their reactions. She was hoping for some sudden exclamation, but the women nodded stiffly. They weren't very outward folks.

McDougal

We had known there was something off in the home for the longest time. I knew that Mrs. Greggs had noticed it, and Mrs. Finch must have too. It felt like each framed family photo hung crooked now, or the tea was always darker than it had been brewed. We had asked Mrs. Schools if she was doing it on purpose—perhaps she had started reading a new monthly magazine that was giving her instructions? She had replied with a hollow "no" and went on stirring her sugar in. It was her third cube. She had never been all that sweet, I thought.

And maybe it wasn't just the tea that was darker, it had come to my careful attention that Mrs. Schools seemed more fatigued lately. She had been forgetting to put on her face

cream, and her nose was constantly un-powdered. I couldn't recall the last time she had curled her lashes, oh, maybe I could. Nearly a month ago? The boys were still in school then. Maybe this summer vacation is taking a toll on her nerves, but I doubt it. My son is out of school too, and I can manage my affairs quite well. I'm at least a year older than her too, I should be the tired one.

Her husband is home much more often now. Mr. Schools was promoted and now he doesn't need to work as much. Lucky man! My husband slaves away all day in his thin office! If he was home more, perhaps my boy would behave better. But Mr. Schools, now that he's here so often, there is a shift in the home. Not that he's a bad man, by any means. I think he prefers a rather particular company, however.

Greggs

I would never consider myself a nosey woman, because the Lord oversees all judgements—not me. However, it's awfully hard not to take notice of small, intricate details. I'm just an organized woman, so I'm prone to notice each hair that stands out of place. That doesn't make me a bad person! I'm just concerned about the affairs in the home that's all, and I thought Mrs. Schools knew that. She walks around like a phantom! She doesn't bother to curl her lashes anymore, and she hasn't worn lipstick in weeks. I got her some lovely shades of pink that went well with her complexion—and here she is letting them go to waste! Really, I thought she would tell me what was really going on within her walls by now.

But she's not told me a thing! I'm sure she's noticed how Mrs. McDougal and I watch her now, but Doris McDougal is spiteful. She's so prone to showing off and being outspoken: that gaudy pink jacket she shows off is awful. It's a shame she made her husband pay \$40.00 for it, but my husband would do the same for me, I suppose. Husbands are good in their own ways, I suppose.

Husbands are odd creatures, I believe. I know Mr. Schools is around more now, I can't help but notice him sulk by occasionally when we have our Tuesday tea sessions. He seems tired, but I'm only one spectator of his behavior. He never comes in or says "hello," but instead he peers around the corner like a small boy would. I found it charming the first few times, but now I wonder what he's been doing—why won't the poor man just come in and say hello? We're all civil women, aside from Mrs. McDougal at times. We never shout, and we never complain too loud. Mrs. Schools seems to know how he is haunting her home now, and I wonder if they're fighting. I would like to know.

But I'm not a nosey woman. I've asked Mrs. McDougal if she's said anything, and she hasn't. I was disappointed that she hadn't asked about it yet—because I knew neither me nor Mrs. Finch would ask a thing. I know that it's best not to judge a home's inner mechanics, but Mrs. Schools really does seem very off lately. Rumors start because of misunderstandings. Maybe Mrs. Schools should just tell us what's going on herself.

Finch

I've been hearing Mrs. McDougal and Mrs. Greggs whisper about her at the Tuesday tea sessions. Mrs. Schools, oh, the poor woman. She pours our tea and sits numbly while conversations of money and clothes fly around her. I've noticed her glazed eyes too. And her bare face, it ages her. She looks at her walls, and maybe at her crooked photos too. She never gets up to straighten them.

I wish she would. I wish she would do something aside from look like a corpse. Mrs. McDougal told Mrs. Greggs that it was because Mr. Schools was home now. I would hope it's not her husband's fault. The crooked photos on the wall may be from slamming doors, now that I think about it. Or maybe they were knocked off and she hung them back up hastily.

Her husband looks at us from the doorway like a tired child sometimes. The other women like to pretend he's not there. They try to ignore the way he watches his wife, and then looks at each of us at the table. I can't ignore the tension that I feel between us and the doorway. I can't ignore the sweet steam that comes from each of her porcelain tea cup. I'm afraid one day I should look towards the doorway and see him there, leaning on the tilted frame.

The home is stagnant and frail, but we sit at the table like it's a bomb shelter. I fear that the atomic bomb that we've taken shelter from may be in the shelter with us.

McDougal

I've been trying to piece things together, because I don't want to ask. I think the matter is sensitive, but Mrs. Greggs doesn't care! She had the nerve to ask me whether I was going to ask Mrs. Schools why she looked so drained—I was appalled! If she wants to know that badly she should just ask herself! But that damn woman, she tries to seem holier than the rest of us. Why, her major complaint was that Mrs. Schools wasn't wearing the lipstick that she gave her a few weeks ago.

I'm sure if she goes and prays about it, she'll feel better. Mrs. Greggs watches from the corner of her eye while Mrs. Schools

pours her tea. At least I look at the woman directly! I've tried to drop subtle hints that I am concerned, and that's more than the other women have done. Mrs. Greggs pretends to be above the gossip, but she's not. And Mrs. Finch, she could be a mute for all I know. She's never said a word about it.

But I know she heard Mrs. Greggs and I the other day discussing the possible matter. She leaned towards us from her seat across the small table—Mrs. Finch isn't above our gossip either. She was interested in the notion that Mrs. Schools' marriage could be failing.

And I said, in a lowered voice to Mrs. Greggs, I believed that Mr. Schools had been having an affair. That could drive a canyon between two people easily, and it could certainly keep a man out of a tea room. Mrs. Greggs was more than willing to further discuss it, but Mrs. Schools was coming back into the room with the tea pot and cups. We sat back in our chairs and stopped whispering, because we are respectable women. I tried to laugh with Mrs. Schools later on during that session, but she was hollow in her seat. Mrs. Greggs sat stiffly under her tight shirt collar, like the hypocrite she is. I didn't bother to look across the table at Mrs. Finch. I knew she would be looking down at her cup quietly.

Sometimes I could catch her glancing to the doorway, however. That's the only other place she looks to.

Greggs

I walked into the tea session today behind Mrs. Finch. She's got new shoes, but she won't say a thing about them. They look nice, but they remind me of funeral shoes. Mrs. McDougal is loud and speaks her mind, but Mrs. Finch never does.

I would love to force her to speak at the tea sessions. I know she must have some insight on the Schools' situation. Yet she never says more than a sentence. Her timid "yes please" or "thank you" has become dull. Mrs. McDougal believes that she knows more than either of us, but I would argue the opposite: I believe Mrs. McDougal knows more than anyone at the table. I can't stand the way Doris glances at me from the corner of her eye, but I won't say a thing about it. The Lord can handle people like Doris McDougal.

McDougal

Mrs. Greggs tried to ask Mrs. Finch about her shoes at the last session, but Mrs. Finch didn't say a word. Not even when she was spoken to.

She seems hollower than Mrs. Schools. I had not noticed

because she isn't prone to looking up from her cup and saucer. But today Mr. Schools lingered in the door frame much longer than usual. I watched for Mrs. Schools to do something, but she did not. She watched her walls and crooked family photos. Mrs. Greggs looked at me from the corner of her eye, but I didn't return the favor. I happened to be watching Mrs. Finch.

I saw her watch the doorway, and when he appeared she didn't stop watching. They were watching each other.

That's when I was able to see how empty her eyes were.

Schools

I would have told them if they had not already figured out. There was nothing more to say. I had taken the frames on and off the wall so many times, I could never get them straight again. There was no point.

They couldn't be the same again. It couldn't be the same again.

She knew that.

Finch

I should have kept to myself, but I was waiting for him to be in the doorway. I knew he would show up eventually, and I had no idea what I was doing. I was watching for him. They were watching me.

That was the detonation. We were all in the shelter.

Greggs

Doris and I talked about it before we went home that afternoon. I hate how frank Mrs. McDougal can be. But I'm still not judging, that's not my place.

McDougal

I had noticed her new shoes too, and Mrs. Greggs was right. They did look like funeral shoes. She had slipped them on very slowly when she left the session that afternoon.

She left the house like a dead woman walking.

The church bells were ringing sweet hymns on Tuesday afternoon. The women hung their jackets and slid their pointed shoes off before going to the tea room. Mrs. Schools had brought

each cup and saucer into the room on her best platter, and then she poured the warm tea. The steam rose from each cup and hung like fog over the small table. The clinking of porcelain filled the small tea room.

And the steam from the cups filled the empty chair across the table.

High School Contest Winner

WE READ OUR LIVES AS SWALLOWS

Magdalena Smith

.....

We don't live the structures that eat the air
Out of our ragged lungs every day.
We live moments; flies trapped in a national spider's web
Fumbling towards the edge of silk where our nightmares end

A future of new worlds built: for our pride, our beings, our
glory, our bodies decolonized
We are raw emotions captured in canvas by the white cisgender
heterosexual patriarchy
 aching to be more than portraits
More than the newest trend of suffocating and stereotypes
We are objects, decorations, ephemera
We are ghosts, desperately craving humanity
haunting this world until we can be free.

We the people don't live structures. We live moments. We live
ghosts. We live humiliation
oppression shock
 obsession fear
forced confessions trauma
 but mention only that we are fine

We the people, we at the margins of this nation, bearing the
trauma of generations, learn to read
Our lives as swallows
 Our traumas as warning signs
Our swallows can soar above the open blue ocean,
 Our swallows can fly to the ocean blue sky
While we the people —
 we the diasporans —

we the nonhuman —

learn how to suffer and die.

While surviving we learn to watch oppressions grow, threading roots into

the murky grey pools

where our traumas live

We learn to swallow the seeds living radically within
oppressions force down our throats

We learn to love the molding carcasses that grow, decaying,
inside our bodies

We learn to teach them how to play as the seeds become vines
and reach upwards into our lungs

We learn to let vines colonize us from the inside out while
structures do it from the outside in.

We don't live structures

because structures live inside us

and to decolonize we must

dismantle the institutions which nurture these vines

while we crumble the musky grey roots within our lungs

until a new world emerges

When our lives as swallows can soar across every open sky

Without performing assimilation into murky river water beneath

Without omnipresent fear that our futures and our pasts will be
ripped away

As an American flag strung up unapologetically to full mast

Mixing my community's saltwater tears and generational blood
into a cocktail

Served at a dinner party for the top beneficiaries of a
heteropatriarchal system

on the night of October 6, 1998

and every day

When our blood and tears and crumbling bones turn to
liberating Queer, trans, nonbinary glory

Then we will be free.

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design, photography, playing ukulele and writing poetry. She also enjoys learning about art history and finding inspiration from other artists. After graduation, she hopes to work in an art museum and begin a career in photography. In her spare time, you can often find her watching YouTube, doodling and worrying about the future.

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ALEXIS VARVEL: Alexis Varvel is a Franklin College student with a Bachelor's degree in graphic design and a minor in French. She is from Greencastle, Indiana, where she now works as a web designer. She enjoys drawing, oil painting, and spending time with her pets.

ALEXIS WHITEMAN: Alexis Whiteman is a senior at Franklin College majoring in public relations with a minor in creative writing. She hopes that after she graduates that she will be working in the agriculture area of public relations because agriculture holds a very dear place in her heart.

MAGDALENA SMITH: Magdalena Smith is a 16-year-old writer, Queer theorist, poet, and activist. Magdalena is a United Nations Youth Assembly Delegate, United Nations Youth Ambassador, and Founder/Executive Director of SAPPHX, a national NGO working to ban LGBTQ+ conversion therapy. They are a staff writer for The Cornell Daily Sun and Cornell University's Her Campus chapter. Magdalena has written for Entropy Magazine, Poetry Nation, The Rag, Cornell's Linguistics Department, and the Cornell Africana Studies and Research Center.

