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MISSION VIEJO, CA

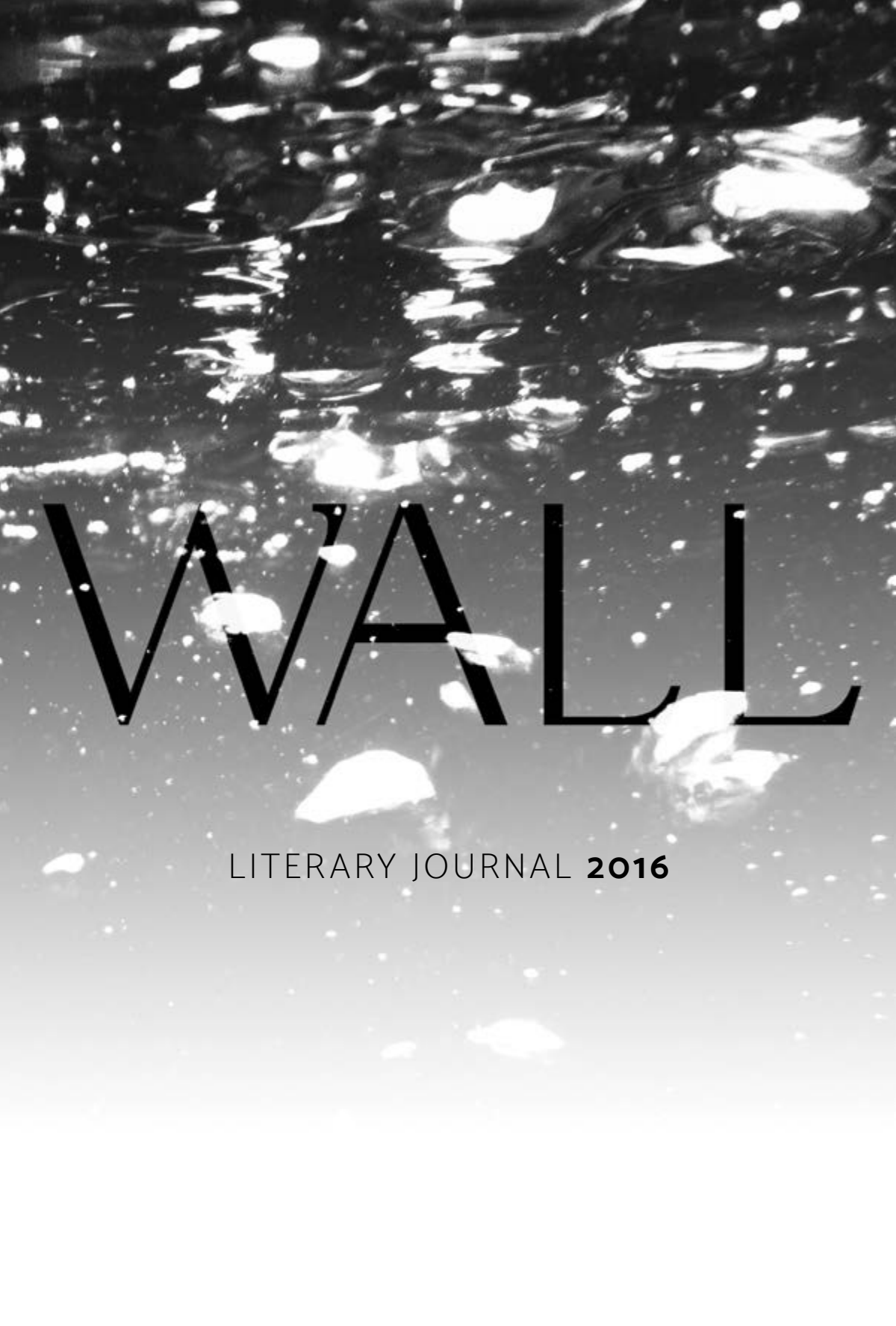
WALL

LITERARY JOURNAL 2016

WALL LITERARY JOURNAL 2016

VOLUME 16





WALL

LITERARY JOURNAL **2016**

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All communication should be directed to the
following address:

Liberal Arts Division
Saddleback College
28000 Marguerite Parkway
Mission Viejo, CA 92692

(949) 582-4788
www.saddleback.edu/la

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WALL is a student-produced literary journal of Saddleback College. All entries were
submitted by students of Saddleback College. Submissions to WALL are reviewed,
selected, and edited by the students on the journal staff. We accept entries that
embrace all viewpoints and walks of life. However, the opinions and ideas contained
here in no way represent those of Saddleback College or the South Orange County
Community College District Board of Trustees; they are solely those of the authors and
creators of these particular works.

**To submit your work for the 2017 edition of WALL, please see the
guidelines for submission at www.saddleback.edu/la/Wall.**

The deadline is January 25, 2017.

WALL

is a community space for creative displays.

It is a fresh canvas, a blank surface
begging for decoration, a vast white page
awaiting our words and images.....

MISSION STATEMENT

WALL Literary Journal is dedicated to providing an open space for creative experimentation. We encourage the unfettered expression of ideas, images, and emotions in literary and artistic works that explore and illuminate the human experience. Aimed at a multicultural, cross-generational audience, the works represented in the pages of WALL encompass a diversity of voices and visions. This is art in the raw and in the round. We want our readers to laugh and cry, smile and sigh as they immerse themselves in the pleasures and power of art and literature.



WALL

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COPY EDITORS	Sara Humzeh Rachel O'Shaughnessy Blake Puchalski Lauren Weiherer
PUBLICITY CHAIR	Madeline Gonzales
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Behind a string of bubbles, a face floats underwater, iridescent blue eyes wide and fixed on an unseen point in the distance. The image is arresting, provocative, perhaps even a bit unsettling. The cover image of this year's WALL stares you in the face, beckoning you to plunge inside its pages to sink or swim with the profusion of words and images. That's what the best literary works do: stare you in the face and force you to confront disturbing and dark truths that exist alongside the lighter sides of life. WALL 2016 delivers on that compelling premise as the stories, poems, and artwork between its covers invite readers to experience the discomfort of "going under" and gasping for breath before the triumph of returning to the surface for fresh air.

Now in its 16th year, WALL has received recognition for its superb content and design. For four years in a row (from 2012 to 2015), the journal has won First Place awards in a national competition for campus literary magazines sponsored by the American Scholastic Press Association. Individual student authors and artists featured in the journal also have been honored by the Community College Humanities Association. WALL's emergence as a nationally recognized publication is a testament to the immense talents of the student staffers who create the journal as well as the writers and artists who contribute their work. Its success can also be attributed to the steadfast backing of administrators, faculty members, and staff who provide encouragement and inspiration alongside financial support.

The staff and I would like to thank South Orange County Community College District Chancellor Emeritus Gary L. Poertner and the district's Board of Trustees: Timothy Jemal, James R. Wright, David B. Lang, T.J. Prendergast III, Marcia Milchiker, Barbara J. Jay, Terri Whitt, and Johnathan Forde. We also deeply appreciate the stalwart support of Saddleback College President Tod A. Burnett and Kevin O'Connor, Dean of the Liberal Arts Division.

Special thanks goes to professors Suki Fisher, Bill Stevenson, Jennifer Hedgecock, Bruce Gilman, Marina Aminy, and Shellie Ochi of the English Department; Khaver Akhter, Giziel Leftwich, Karen Yang, and Dan Pilioglos of the Liberal Arts Division; Professor Christopher Claflin, Chair of the Graphics Department, and graphic design instructor Rudy Gardea; Professor Larry Radden of the Speech Department; Bob Rickerson, Nina Welch, and Joyce Speakman of the Division of Fine Arts and Media Technology; Professors Timothy Posada and MaryAnne Shults, and Ali Dorri of the Journalism Department; and Professor Pamme Turner of the Emeritus Institute. Other supporters include Matthew Durham, former editor-in-chief of WALL, and Bruce Parker of PJ Printers.

The staff and I invite you to take the plunge into the pages of this year's WALL.

Gina Victoria Shaffer

Faculty Advisor

WALL 2016

EDITOR'S NOTE

The process of producing this year's edition of WALL began with an assessment of editions from past years. This being the first time I have served as an editor, I was enthused about creating a beautiful reflection of our school, yet unsure what expectations would be sound. The staff gathered to discuss ideas and hopes for the journal; I boldly pronounced the desire that the journal flow like a novel, each piece seemingly linked by a common theme. However, we immediately became disillusioned when we discovered that we couldn't achieve the thematic unity we wanted because of the wide variety of work submitted.

I renounced the idea of consistency and instead looked forward to a collage of human experiences with little in common. As each piece lay below my fluttering eyes, I was pleased by the artistic value my peers had offered. I felt lucky to have a duty that I didn't feel as much entitled to do as I did eager. The more I read our submissions, the more I wanted to read them, an effect all writers seek to have on their audience. While the quality of the work was fulfilling enough, I was proud to find that each piece did in fact have an overarching pattern, one that reflected a struggle most adults would be able to relate to.

WALL 2016 did not just begin with my disillusionment over the lack of thematic unity; nearly every work is, ironically, now unified by the disillusionment that plagues adulthood. Whether it is the acceptance of a dysfunctional relationship, venturing out of a comfort zone, seeing the world in a different way, or merely reflecting on the day, every piece leaks vulnerability in the way of discovering the unexpected.

College often marks the beginning of a large transition. Careers may change, we may move away, or we may simply come into our own as a more evolved version of our self. WALL 2016 effectively explores the inner turmoil that often accompanies change, especially when reality has set in. In the same way a bubble bursts, our limited perceptions burst at the shattering of all we thought we'd known. While this experience can be suffocating at times, there is no better cure for the heartbreak of reality than the absorption of art. Thank you to the writers and artists who have contributed to this year's edition. Your struggle is your reader's strength.

Karyn Renee Bailey

Editor-in-Chief

WALL 2016

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Yongji Shen

Walking through Underground Tunnel



Photography

Baron Wilhelm

Flying Free

Plagued by confusion,
A life filled with delusion,
Bonding with friends, then a-wandering, wandering,
Searching for seclusion,
On top of a hill,
Doldrums sitting still,
The screaming orange on the butterflies' wings,
All the little things,
Fringing briars intersecting with the vast unending sea,
Flying free,
Death by mass murder on your girl's shopping spree,
Oh what's my plea?
A miniscule flea, on the back of a dog
Buried in the fur, like a tree in thick fog,
Forgotten.
Going along for the ride,
Only a coward will hide,
With courage comes pride.
Triviality is to slide!



Karyn Renee Bailey

You Can Be Anything

But they didn't breathe
The chill of deceit
Down your fine spine
When they uttered those sweet lines.

Those that made the heart believe
In time that does not tick,
In reality that exists
A mere replica of the destiny
You imagined would be,

Dreamt of so fervently
With the blind determination
Of a moth drawn to light—
Light so bright we forgot to mention

The sting. Only sing
Hymns in la la land
Where we grow up as grand
As we all expected.

As though what we intended
Is precisely what we catapult into,
Caterpillar breaking through
Carefully crafted cocoon,
At the ripe age of adulthood.

If only the transition were so understood.
But like romantic love,
So much more persists
Than the momentary bliss
We never had trouble recognizing.

And so those little faces
Grow up to furrowed brows,
Calculating the hows
Of living ill-equipped
For the sinking ship
That is mortality.



Horizon Fire

The first time I met my father he pulled a shotgun on me. The next day I set him on fire.

I have yet to meet a person who went in search of their biological parent and found the mother or father they had imagined all their life. Looking back, I'll admit that I had fantasized about what the outcome would be, but never imagined that the journey would end down the barrel of a shotgun or with one of us reduced to ashes.

As a child I brought the subject up to my mother, Lynn, many times, and each time I was more determined to meet my maker, Michael. He left her before I was born, claiming that fatherhood was not something he was prepared for. He must have had a high opinion of my mother to believe that—as a nineteen-year-old high school dropout whose discernible life skills qualified her for a cashier's position at Jack-in-a-Box—she had the capacity to raise and rear a child on her own. Fatherhood was an option to Michael, not a commitment.

When my mother spoke of the times she shared with Michael, the ones that brought them together, all the ones that led to my conception, the only detail I ever paid attention to was the tone in her voice: one of tenderness. When she spoke about the aftermath, however, it became a tone I could only describe as the absolute embodiment of disdain. As I grew older I came to understand why she so completely resented him. She fell in love with a man she didn't really know that well at a time in her life when she hardly knew herself, not knowing yet that love is temporary unless it's blood. Michael had no regard for the life he had created with my mother, and as such, she didn't want him to be a presence in her child's life. She believed that if he was around, he would eventually abandon me again and choose his own needs over mine.

But I was too stubborn. I listened and I allowed her to voice her opinion about Michael, but no matter what she said I was determined to know who he was for myself. More than that, I thought that through meeting him I would understand more about myself and for once feel like I belonged.

Some time after my first birthday, my mother met a man named Raymond, the brother of one of her friends. From what I know of how they got together, it was fast love that was based on practical reasoning. He had a one year old, Ryan, who in just a few short months became my stepbrother. Getting married made sense: she would raise the children while he worked. Two years later they had my sister Katharine, and three years after her, my sister Rebekah. My mother created

a family, but to me it always felt like a village. Though there are some physical similarities between Ryan and the girls, for the most part none of us look related. We all have strikingly different personalities except for our cynicism towards all things remotely emotional. We learned at a young age that there is nothing about fast love that is ever practical.

Around kindergarten, and before anyone had told me the truth, I knew Raymond wasn't my father just by looking at him. For the longest time I never thought of him as one either. Raymond tried to be a father, but he was just the man who paid for his family and made appearances when he was required to. He worked right down the street but was always mentally away on business. Raymond was a manager, the head of quality assurance at an aerospace company, and his work persona bled through in every area of life. When it came to child-rearing, he was an authoritative figure who settled disputes with no regard for the emotional frailty of his children. I always believed that if he had the ability to fire us and find replacements, he would do so without hesitation or an ounce of regret.

Ray and I never got along. We had nothing in common, nothing to bond over, and nothing at all to talk about most of the time. When he did make an effort to be involved with his children, he became the Boy Scout leader of the troop Ryan and I were in. It worked for Ryan, bringing them closer. But by that time I was old enough to do my own thing, which, incidentally, was scouting for boys, something Ray couldn't understand. He never said anything directly about it, but he somehow made his position clear whenever the subject came up. I came out to him when I was nineteen. He was the last one to find out, and when he did all I can remember him saying was "I'm too old for this shit."

It was then that I decided there had to be something better, but I went in search of it in the wrong place.

I searched for my real father online, knowing only his full name and that he lived in Indiana. Aside from me, Mom didn't have much left from her time with Michael, and she had made an effort to refrain from revealing too much information about him so that I would not be able to track him down.

I found a photograph of him at the beach, tucked away in an old journal she kept, the contents of which reflected her complete discontent with him. There was no doubt in my mind that the picture was, in fact, of my father. In it I saw my reflection, and in that I came to realize that although she hadn't seen him in twenty years, he was with her every day. In the journal I found the name of Michael's grandmother. Using her name, I was able to locate their family, and by association was able to find my father, who had spent most of his life off the grid. He lived with his grandmother in the small town of Salem, Indiana. I left her a voicemail

detailing who I was, and a few days later Michael called me back while I was out at the market.

I sat in the parking lot and talked to him for two hours. It was difficult, a little too Lifetime original movie for my taste, but I remember getting off the phone and being hysterically joyful and hopeful. I didn't just look like him; I sounded like him. In fact, my laugh was just like his, and it was the most comforting feeling in the world.

The next day I told my mom about the conversation. She was furious and demanded that I put her in contact with him. She wanted to threaten him, to guard her cub just as any lioness would, and I wouldn't let her. I didn't want her to destroy my opportunity to have a real father. She expressed fear that Michael would never accept who I was, that he would reject me the moment he found out. When they were together he had voiced his opinion on the subject of homosexuality, and it was not a favorable one. He didn't just live in Indiana; he was originally from there. When he left my mom, that is where he returned to, an area where my lifestyle was not considered appropriate behavior. I rejected her advice, believing that Michael would get to know me and the truth wouldn't matter. Yet, in not wanting to admit that I could have been wrong, I withheld that truth from my conversations with him.

Over the course of four years, we talked once a week, sometimes more often if work was slow for him. I loved the times when he called on the holidays and the best times were when he called on my birthday, the fact of which he did not have to be reminded of. He said he always wanted to send me birthday presents but that my mom would never allow him the privilege to do so. Every so often he expressed interest in me taking a trip out to meet him and his family. He also talked about wanting to take a trip back to Orange County, but he was afraid that my mother would hunt him down and rip out his ribcage. So I agreed to visit him in Indiana because as much as I loved my mother, his fear was definitely warranted.

I went in the fall of 2007 during the fires that spanned from Los Angeles to San Diego. I remember flying out early in the morning and watching the fires lay waste to the place I thought was my only home. It was an appropriate landscape for the final stretch of my journey, the end of always being an outsider, of never belonging where I was told I belonged. While other people on the plane were shocked and concerned at the devastation, all I could do was smile and watch the sunrise over the black clouds.

During the five-hour flight I attempted to account for every possible scenario for how the reunion could play out and strategize a plan of action for each. I remember feeling so fortunate that my best friend's mom worked for an airline and that I was flying for free on standby: I could leave if things went south back east.

At the airport I was greeted by a woman claiming to be my grandmother,

Patricia, and my cousin, Ashley. Patricia said I didn't have to call her "Grandma" if it felt uncomfortable, but that in time she hoped it wouldn't. During the drive to Salem, which took more than an hour, Ashley and I became fast friends. It didn't take long for her to figure out the truth about me. Most people would agree that I don't exhibit any stereotypical gay tendencies. My early twenties were a different time though. I had never felt the need to hide who I was and didn't have any experience doing so. She didn't say anything right away, and neither did I, but I could tell she knew I was gay.

I met Michael at his grandmother's house. He said, "Come give your dad a hug."

There was something strange, something that felt very forced when he called himself my dad. I couldn't shake the awkwardness of it all, and it was apparent that neither could he. In an effort to calm our nerves we smoked an entire pack of cigarettes together. I had always smoked when I was nervous to meet new people, and that is what he was: new.

He showed me around the house while the rest of his family made dinner. It was a small place, not unlike any other home I've seen except for the giant cabinet full of shotguns in his bedroom; that was not something I had ever seen growing up in Southern California. But the rest of it was filled with a lifetime of family memories, photos and trinkets, each with a long story behind them. My parents' house had the same effects, only the stories behind them were much shorter, at least they were to me.

That night Michael took me to a haunted corn maze. I had never been to an actual cornfield and he thought that I would be pretty scared. At that moment I realized he had completely forgotten who my mother was and that she had raised me. Mom and I look nothing alike, but I had inherited her nerves of steel.

While we were enjoying our time, my cousin mentioned her suspicion to her mom and word got back to Michael. The visit derailed pretty quickly. We went back to his grandmother's house and he went off into his own world for quite some time. I assumed what had happened and was told it was so by his grandma. She advised me to just go to sleep and we would deal with it in the morning.

Michael woke me up in the middle of the night, jabbing at me with one of his shotguns. He was crying and furious at the same time; he couldn't process the truth. He asked, and I won't ever forget this, "What did your mom do wrong?"

In that moment, and it felt like an eternity, I came to understand that my maker was never meant to be a father. As he held the gun to my face, I urged him to blow my head off: "Pull the trigger if it makes you feel better. I'm not afraid of you. But you should be afraid of what my mother will do to you when she finds out what you've done, and I promise you it will be worse than death."

Double Take

He lowered the gun and stormed out of the room. I packed my bag and left the house. As I waited on the corner for a cab, I thought about what he said about my mother doing something wrong. She didn't do anything wrong. She had only ever tried to protect me from that moment, from the certain pain he would cause me.

I stayed at a hotel that night. In the morning I was able to get on the first flight back. I couldn't work up the courage to call anybody. The shock hadn't worn off and words were hardly possible. As the plane descended into San Diego, I saw the aftermath of the fires. The smoke was still clearing, and through it I could see all the houses it had claimed and the ones it had threatened. It had become a desolate wasteland, nothing but ash.

I drove to my parents' house, wondering the whole time how I would explain it all. When I walked through the front door, I fell to my knees and broke down crying in my mom's arms. There was no "I told you so." My family listened to what had happened and my mom broke a few things. There wasn't much to say about it all: it was what it was, and it was over.

I went outside for a cigarette that night and after a few of them, Raymond joined me. He said, "You know, Ryan always did boy things. He played with trucks and he liked sports. And the girls always did girl things. It was simple with them. I knew what to do. With you, I never knew. You liked patterns, figuring out how things work, and baking, and a lot of things I couldn't wrap my head around. You were different. You were just you. But just because I didn't understand never meant I didn't love you any less because of it."

The one scenario I had not accounted for was that my relationship with my dad would come to an end. But it didn't. It was then that I knew it had only just begun. I took out my one picture of Michael and set it on fire. I watched as he turned to ashes while smoking a cigarette with my real father.



Sadness wraps around me like a familiar sweater,
vomiting dread-filled fear and despair, I must hurry—
Before she forces me to stop and I no longer
want to breathe.

She drones on; inhales and slowly exhales—welcomed silence,
the smoky tendrils oozing through her Medusa hair.
Those petty eyes begin their ceaseless search, coming to rest
on my gauze-cloaked soul.

She flicks her cigarette; the ashes blow back in my face,
the whistling wind is conspiring against me, again.
I cough, she snickers. I wonder what god-awful thing
I've done today.

Her words puncture the nurturing bubble of a child's dream,
the knife-shaped letters methodically pierce my heart.
The initial pain, with its strangling grip, eases with assured
familiarity.

Pleading past her biting words that pause beside me,
please let me get through another day, dear Lord.
Disconcerted eyes say what my tender lips must never dare:
I suddenly realize
I despise you.



As the Sparks Fly Upwards

her face was as red as the glowing cigarette perched on her lip
 a deep cherry matching the full glass of wine
 drinking the smoke in deep
 inhaling the intoxicating denial

exhaling lopsided O's
 one for each man who left her
 a flicked butt, ashed somewhere on the sidewalk
 coughing and crying when the wind blew them away

as she lit up another and took the first drag
 she knew the poison was eating her away on the inside
 but there was something sweet about that weight in her lungs
 and that slow burning hole in her heart

the smoke formed familiar shapes sometimes
 phantoms that haunted her front porch
 behind her back and in the ashtray
 disappearing through the windows

maybe she had a taste for pain
 or maybe it was just the nicotine in her bloodstream
 drifting through days in a glazed tobacco haze
 sparks slowly swirling upwards



It Was All a Dream



Graphite, acrylic, and spray paint on canvas

Empty Space

With a grunt, he yanked hard on the aluminum door blocking his path. In its current condition it resembled the door to an old vault, belonging more to the Old West than here. He stumbled back a step as it offered less resistance than expected, the door opening with a faint hiss. As the sunlight hit his face, he instinctively put his hand up to cover his eyes. He felt a bit stupid when his gloved hand met his helmet with a clunk. He would have felt lucky no one was around to see the clumsy gesture, if luck had anything to do with it. He never had to worry about looking stupid anymore. That was a small relief.

He took a step forward, his foot leaving behind the certainty of smooth metal and crunching down on brittle stone. His boot shifted as if walking on frozen snow, but past experience gave him enough confidence to settle his weight and continue walking onward. Rolling hills of gray surrounded him in every direction, like waves frozen in time. He had made this journey many times before, and he knew which waves to scale and which to cut around. It was a long walk, and without company or much in the way of sightseeing, it could be very boring. On these walks, his mind often drifted back to her. He had been entirely hers, and she had been his. Until one day she wasn't. Despite all the time he'd had to think, if asked what had happened, he would not know how to answer. He was not even sure there was a reason. He only wished she'd used the "I just need space" line—he would have found it very ironic right now. With a self-indulgent chuckle and a poke of his wristpad, he started up his favorite playlist and kept trudging forward.

He had always been obsessed with the idea that he'd never heard his perfect song. The perfect song: an exact combination of notes and lyrics, an impossible match specifically fit for his ears alone. There were many songs that he loved over the years, but he knew it was unlikely that any one of them was the perfect one. Wouldn't he know? Wouldn't he immediately give up his search for new music and listen to it on repeat for eternity? Maybe he wouldn't—a terrifying thought. Maybe he'd heard it before, just for a brief second as he flipped through radio stations, and it passed by unnoticed, lost forever. Or maybe his perfect song could not exist in the first place. It was entirely possible that the artist who would have been responsible for it died as an infant or in a freak car accident on

the way to visit family over the holidays, or just decided to be a physics teacher instead of a musician because someone told him he would never make it big. It would be easy for one to give up hope. The odds just didn't favor it. Maybe he would have given up, if not for her. She would always introduce him to new music. They shared similar tastes, but she always had a way of finding sounds he'd never heard before. She had given him hope for the perfect song. At the time, it felt entirely reasonable to think that maybe one day, she would find him the song he was looking for. Then she left.

The last hill of the journey was the steepest. He began a deliberate march upward, his boots carving precarious footholds in the sharp gravel that sank and shifted but never collapsed completely. By the time he neared the top of the ridge he was breathing with some urgency. He weighed much less than at home, even with the bulky suit, but he'd gotten out of shape in the months he'd been waiting.

"I'll get a gym pass when I get back," he said, panting. He wondered if it was crazy to be speaking aloud. *Pretty sure it would be crazy if I cared.* It was strange how hard it had become to remember what normal was, when there was no one around to remind him.

As he finally crested the ridge, the destination of his afternoon walk waited patiently below. The sunlight reflected sharply off the car-sized object below, turning the metal cylinder into a flaring fireball that burned his eyes to behold. He couldn't help but be mildly amused at the foreshadowing.

The walk down the hill—which was more like a slide—was much faster than the ascent. He shortened his step as he drew close to the device, coming to a stop an arm's length away. He knelt down and began the inspection. It had become a daily routine, but today was different. Today he would not need to muster the energy to climb back over that hill. Another small relief.

"Mission Control, we seem to have a problem," he muttered as he softly slid his hand across the metal casing. The use of the word "we" felt foreign on his tongue, an obsolete sound belonging to a past life. "Please clarify," he replied, pretending to be on the receiving end of a two-way conversation. "Mission Control, the device looks like it's about to explode. ...Right on schedule."

That was the purpose of a bomb, after all. Especially a nuclear bomb, man's greatest invention in the art of death. This one was specifically designed to crack open the asteroid he was standing on, a hunk of rock so large it would have been welcomed as a smaller second moon if it wasn't so intent on hitting Earth. This was a nuclear bomb, but not a nuclear weapon—the first bomb in history designed to save lives instead of end them.

Well, with a few exceptions. There was always an exception, and he was it.

It had taken the collective brainpower of a dozen nations to come up with the asteroid interception path, the structure of the bomb, the correct timing of the detonation, the logistics of building everything they needed in such a short amount of time. A logistical work of art—man united. But for six men, the plan was simple. Slip free from the bonds of Earth into the vast unknown cosmos, intercept and land on an asteroid going 50,000 miles per hour, then die so humanity could live. A simple plan—one that so far had been executed to perfection. Time to wrap things up...

His part in the mission was a long time coming. They hadn't calculated the optimum distance for detonating the bomb when the shuttle launched. They couldn't: they needed material samples from the asteroid itself. After the landing, it was determined they had eleven months before they reached optimum distance. They did not have enough supplies for that long of a wait, not with six people to sustain. And it only took one person to detonate the bomb. So they drew straws. He won.

They each had a pill in case of complete mission failure. A kind gesture, by the military's standards. They all spent one last night together, waxing nostalgic and listing the things they would be most proud of having saved. The Eiffel Tower, the Bible, the amazing pizza place on Sixth Street, that hot chick from that one movie. Everyone had their reasons for volunteering, though few were entirely honest when asked. His answer: a song. He wouldn't elaborate.

By dawn, only one pill remained.

The memory took his strength away. He collapsed onto his hands and knees, his whole body shaking. This was it. This was real. They had all died for the mission, and now he was going to as well. There really is no rescue shuttle coming over that horizon. He had known what he signed up for, but he couldn't know what giving up his life meant until now, at the end. He was giving up tomorrow. He was sacrificing whatever experience he would have had an hour from now. He would never think up another stupid joke.

He sat up as blue crossed over the horizon, the tip of home creeping into view for the last time. The view made him feel small. Everything he had ever known, everyone he had ever met, contained inside a small marble floating in the black, a pebble on the beach. She was there somewhere, too. It took him until now to admit to himself he was doing this for her. The admission was enough to steady his hand as he flipped open the trigger's safety shield. He grasped the trigger tentatively. Pull the handle, twist, bang. There was an instruction manual, but that was the gist of it.

He hated her. Hated her for making him need her. Hated her for leaving him. Hated her for being able to leave. Hated her for never finding him that perfect song. Hated her for making him do this. He'd always said she was the only girl on Earth

for him; he hoped she remembered that when she learned he had volunteered for this mission. He hoped she felt guilty.

He yanked hard, and the handle pulled out with a satisfying click. One flick of the wrist, and it would all be over. The bullet with humanity's name on it would miss its mark, a very anti-climactic outcome considering how far it had traveled and how much fear it had caused. He would be over, too. That felt more important, in a way, in this very moment. It was time for his last thoughts, and the pressure was almost too much to handle.

He loved her. Loved her for making him need her. Loved her for existing. Loved her for making the world worth saving. Loved her because, in the end, she was his perfect song.

His wristpad screamed up at him. Optimum Distance. Now. Earth would live another day. And her song would keep playing. I still hope she feels guilty, he thought, twisting the trigger mechanism with all his strength.



Kelly Wobst

Conundrums Quake

How did this all start?
These scars take every
beat of my heart and turn them
into chains locked up in the castle of forgotten arts,
The danger of separate terrors being built up for the pleasure.
I'm no stranger to written letters of my sin
playing off the paper.
My eyes begin to dilate
to my fear; this evil is reading me like a book.
My tears won't stop falling;
I've got a lot to lose.
Falling roses.
My pricked fingers from the spinning wheel of lies.
I no longer can deny my involvement with dark skies.

Pain's poison will not let me go,
It's got me under bars; yelling and shouting.
Freedom is my addiction;
so let me see
what there is to be.
When can I leave these bars clean?

Demons try to choke me and swarm
into my complexion.
The moves that I make
in such a small place
define my escape.
When does running and hiding
bleed together to become the same?



Kareemah Yameen

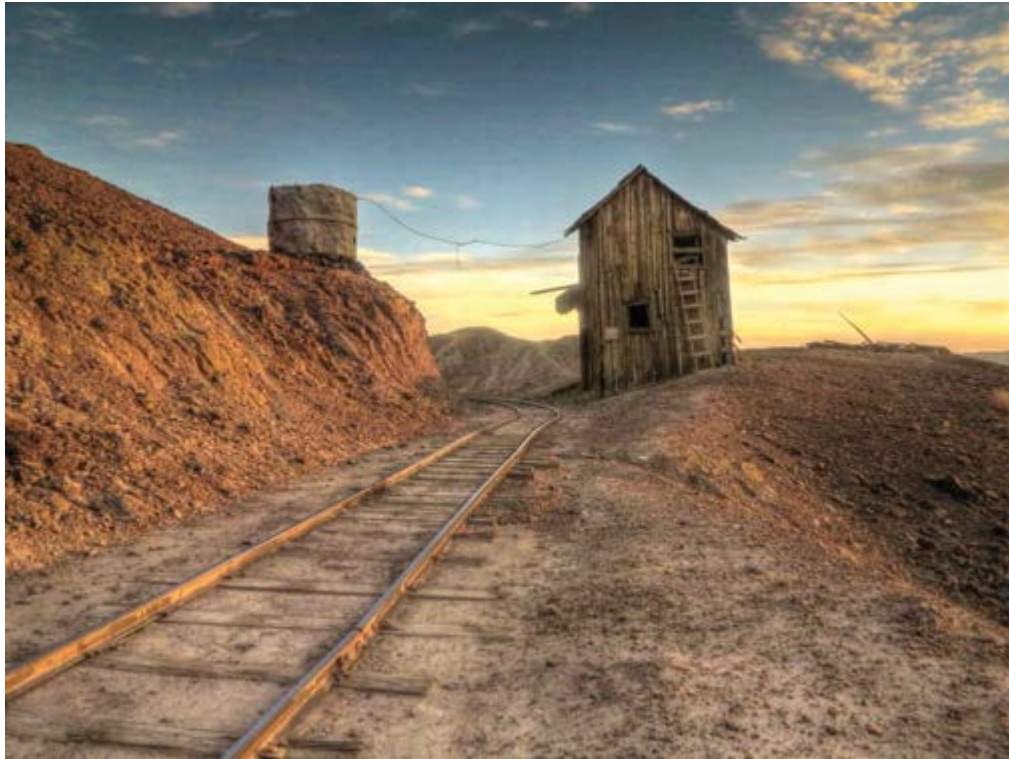
Stone Rose



Stoneware, high fired

Hugh Foster

Tracks to Calico



Photography

Victoria Killeen

Balanced Rocks



Watercolor

Tread Lightly

He'd been making his way down Cherry Street when a spongy mound filled with brittle toothpicks rose from the sidewalk to meet the bottom of his right shoe. The crunch of bird bones beneath Robert's sneaker put a falter in his stride, interrupting his morning run. He tripped past the anomaly, catching his balance before he, too, became sidewalk roadkill. A glance behind, a flash of recognition, and then he continued his training.

But something gave Robert pause. In three minutes and twelve seconds (if his pacing was accurate), he'd be on Market Boulevard and would pass Far Sight Books. In the window, he would see a flimsy cardboard sign that read "All life is precious. Tread lightly." On any average day, if he came across the store and read the sign—which was written in some horrible New Age-looking font meant to resemble Hindi or Sanskrit, but achieved little more than chicken scratch—he'd scoff at its attempt at holistic commercialism and walk on. But every morning for the past six months, he'd risen before dawn, filled his stomach with two boiled eggs, wheat toast, OJ, and coffee; slipped his feet into his custom-mold orthotics; and followed a set path around his quiescent town. And every morning he'd passed the bookstore and the cardboard words would latch onto his shoulders, keeping time with his footfalls and whispering in his ear like a mantra.

It was with these six words rolling around his mind like marbles in a wooden bowl, repeated so many times they'd lost their meaning, that Robert slowed, stopped, and breathed, hands resting on chiseled hips. His forty-year-old lounge's body had resisted the training at first; two marathons later, his molded muscles pulsed through each mile as if stillness were a poison. He looked up and down the quiet street, empty of moving cars at this hour. The Ohioan burb's traffic wouldn't pick up until after eight, but rush-hour jams in the Midwestern sprawl were only tall tales carried from the Golden Coast. The sun had started its sky trek, and the adolescent maples that lined the road wore long shadow capes. With a stilted casualness, he sauntered back to the carcass and, with another peripheral scan, crouched down beside it. Drips of sweat from his brow blotted the concrete; he smoothed the wetness back, off his forehead and through his short copper hair, before taking a closer look.

Despite enduring the full force of Robert's weight, the bird's body looked mostly pristine. A coral beak, ruffled crest, and brushstrokes of red against a palette of

earthy gray-brown feathers helped Robert identify the deceased as a female cardinal, common in this area. Its wings were loose but not fully extended, as if whatever had stolen its life had come moments before flight. Its eyes were sunken and imploded in their sockets, its feet curled and tucked against its body. He studied the sharpness of its claws, the thinness of its legs, the dryness of its ridged skin. He counted the wing tips and wished they were fanned in all their natural glory for his viewing. He squinted in the dawn's growing light at the smoky mask it wore around its mouth; its lipsticked beak was slightly parted as if finishing a morning dirge. He longed to feel the softness of its feathers against his fingertips, but as soon as he thought it, he felt embarrassed by the wish.

"What're you doing?" a child's voice asked.

Robert grunted in shock, clutching his chest and falling onto the sidewalk away from the surprise speaker. His left arm dug into the cement, peeling skin away.

Feet in front of him stood a stunted, freckled boy, no more than five or six years old. His straw hair dangled over his eyes, and when he laughed at Robert's reaction, he had as many gaps as teeth in his smile. Grass stains covered the knees of his denim overalls; he wore nothing but the bare skin of his chest underneath the shoulder straps.

"Jesus, kid, you scared the crap out of me," Robert said, rubbing his raw arm. The boy just laughed, air hissing out through his teeth holes.

"Where are your parents?" Robert looked around for a distracted adult, ready to relinquish the child's attention and be on his way.

The boy pointed at the upstairs level of the closest house, a manicured Craftsman with a detached garage.

"Do they know you're outside by yourself?"

The boy shrugged and said, "Daddy doesn't care."

"And your mom?"

"Mommy's in heaven so she can't say no."

"Oh," Robert said, stealing a glance at the dead cardinal. "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"For your...never mind. Listen, you should probably go back in. It isn't safe to be running around outside alone. There are bad people who might hurt you or take you away."

"Are you bad?"

"Me? No, I'm not bad."

The boy squinted like a cartoon sheriff. "You could be lying."

Robert blinked at his response. "Uh, well, yes, exactly. So you shouldn't talk to me."

"I don't really think you're bad. You look silly, like a clown."

Robert looked down at himself: neon green T-shirt, equally bright orange gym shorts, and matching green socks pulled up to his knees. Not exactly Ronald McDonald, but he supposed he was a bit flashy.

“Were you going to touch the birdie?” the boy asked.

Robert’s eyes dilated before he said, “Of course not. It’s probably riddled with diseases. Animal control will pick it up shortly, after I call.”

“Why?”

“It isn’t sanitary to have dead animals lying around.”

“Why?”

“If you touched it, you could get sick.”

“Why?”

Robert crimped his lips before answering. “That’s just how it works. You wouldn’t want to get sick, would you?”

“Mommy got sick. Did she touch a dead animal?”

“Uh...no, I’m guessing not. There are different kinds of sick.”

“I touched Mommy after she died. Am I going to get sick?”

Robert’s face flushed. “Listen, you should probably ask your dad these kinds of questions.”

“Are the birdie and Mommy in heaven together?”

Defeated, Robert said, “Yes. They’re both in heaven now.”

The boy got quiet for a second, then said, “I wish I could have told the birdie to tell Mommy I love you.”

A soft smile crept its way onto Robert’s face. “I’m sure she knows.”

The boy stopped talking and stared at the lifeless cardinal on the ground, twisting at the waist and swinging his clasped hands back and forth. Then, inexplicably, he said “bye” and ran toward the front door of his house. Robert shook his head as he pulled a cell phone from his pocket and looked up the number for animal control.

As the phone rang, he watched the young boy make his way back to the house. Instead of climbing the porch steps, however, the boy split right and approached a trio of algae-green trash bins sitting in the driveway. Robert squinted at him in the maturing sunlight. As if conscious of his voyeurism, the boy looked back; Robert shot his head down and focused on the cracks in the sidewalk.

“Thank you for calling animal control,” a lady’s prerecorded voice reported in his ear. “Our normal business hours are nine a.m. to four-thirty p.m., Monday through Friday.”

With measured slowness, he raised his gaze back to the boy. The kid must have believed Robert’s disinterest, as he reached his minikin hands to the lid of the nearest bin. Finding he was too short, he rose up on his tiptoes and was able to lift the lid a few inches. He then pulled an odd-shaped object out of his back pocket. Robert visored his eyes from the sun with his free hand, doubtful of what he saw.

In his fingers, the boy gripped a large timber slingshot. Robert flicked his eyes to the inanimate creature on the concrete beside him and cupped his mouth at the shocking implications.

“Your call is important to us,” the automated message continued. “Please leave a message and we will return your call.”

Struggling on his feet, the boy forced the slingshot beneath the lid and into the trash bin. The thin, hard edges of the lid scraped against the weapon’s wood; once through, it hit the plastic bottom inside with a resolving clunk. He dusted his hands against one another, like an old man finishing a hard day’s work. The voicemail system beeped in Robert’s ear and recorded his silence as he watched the young boy hop up the porch steps and run into the house.

Robert fixated on the shut door, trying to convince himself that if he didn’t move, he wouldn’t have to decide what to do next. A shadow moved behind the Craftsman’s second-story window, jerking him out of his paralysis. He ended the phone call and lifted his stiff, unstretched limbs off the sidewalk. A part of him insisted he should tell the boy’s father, while another part advised it was none of his business. His feet choreographed a new dance at the end of the driveway, the “conscience shuffle.” Two times he made it halfway to the house before turning back and restarting his dance.

Then he looked upon the cardinal on the ground, still untouched, still beautiful, and there it was. The answer to his riddle, the key to his kōan. There was no action to take, no righteous gesture, because he’d already taken it. He’d acknowledged the bird and offered his reverence, which the boy had witnessed. In that moment, he knew the boy’s choice to discard the slingshot was more than an offhand shrug. Something he’d said or done had resonated, rippling like centipede legs, affecting everyone and everything in a hundred-foot radius of this singular, tiny, immense departed animal spirit.

Resetting his watch, Robert jogged in place for a few seconds before resuming his one-man race toward Market Boulevard; his cardboard mantra chanted in his ear louder than ever before.



Ruminations of a Sinner

I, like Judas, have stumbled
Through wide expanses of
Moral grays; I was looking
For a savior,
Not salvation: and is that
Right, is that righteous?

She said
She wanted to take a bite
Out of me, like I was an
Apple, like this was The Fall,
So I let her break
Every last tooth on my skin;

Is it my fault that I have
Learned to take my kisses
And my silver where
I can get them?

And he said some days
Would taste like this, taste
Of dish-soap bubbles;
The clack of teeth, the hollow
Pop, the empty promise, a
Taste like bitter
Disappointment but

Then he chose a rope
And I started walking
The desert
Like I could burn away
The need for repentance,
Only it still feels like I am
Choking, too.



Assistance for the Drowning

I used to rescue helpless drowning insects, swooping in with a frantically pulled kisby ring leaf or a life-raft twig, saving them from the colossal chlorinated expanse of our backyard pool. I would circle around and around, on high alert for any frenzied disturbances in the otherwise still water. The most inconsequential of ants was not immune to my empathy.

After their tired insect bodies had found their way onto whatever variant of life-saving debris I had hurriedly constructed, I would place them in a bush or on the cement by the pool. Sometimes I would watch their wet bodies, dark and glistening against the bright sun-soaked cement as they sluggishly dragged their heavy microscopic wings. I would continue watching as they slowly dried.

This wasn't a particularly regular occurrence; it was just something I did every now and then when I was around twelve years old. I suppose I wanted to feel like I was making a difference. Was it for the sake of the poor insects with their chaotic, kicking spindle legs and water-muddled wings? Yes, I definitely felt for them. But now I wonder if there was something within myself that found a sense of fulfillment in this seemingly trivial activity that went beyond the self-satisfaction of doing a good deed. Maybe I liked knowing that I had changed a life, even if it was just an insect; I had changed the course of history, even if it was in an imperceptible way.

I hadn't conducted any type of pool surveillance in years, unfortunately for all of the insects that had strayed into the watery abyss and found themselves in a rather grim situation. But on a rare rainy day some time last year or perhaps the year before, I was working on the computer when I happened to glance up and see my mom through the open back door, interacting in a curious way with one of our outdoor potted plants. I went back to my work, but, out of the corner of my eye, I kept seeing her as she strode back and forth between the pool and our potted plants. I was mystified by her manic pacing, but she soon volunteered the reason behind it: "Lauren, come help me!"

"What?" was my reply.

"Lauren, come out and help me!" She sounded nearly frantic.

"What are you doing?" I yelled back at her through the open door.

She explained that there were about fifty worms drowning in the little pools of water that had collected in the dips of our concrete and in the pool itself. I went

outside and sure enough there were a bunch of earthworms squirming desperately in the water while other dead, bloated ones lay sunken at the bottom of the pool. I looked at my mom in simultaneous awe and exasperated incredulity. She continued with her mission to rescue all of them as I stood there and wondered why my middle-aged mother cared about the fates of these wriggling earthworms. I mean, a twelve year old going through the trouble is one thing, but this was quite another. She had never shown such compassion towards drowning bugs before; I wondered what had acted as a catalyst for her sudden sense of obligation. It's still a mystery to me, especially when I recall all those times (despite my incessant protestations) that she carelessly flung the snails that had been cheerfully chomping on our front yard vegetation into the street to be run over by an oblivious neighbor driving past. My best conjecture is that she was disturbed by the sheer amount of water-induced casualties the worms were experiencing—those dozens upon dozens of tormented, conspicuous bodies wriggling helplessly. It was quite the massacre.

I could see that my mother was truly overcome by the situation. "You do it," she said, still in a state of distress, carrying one that flopped about on a leaf. Her face was crumpled in aversion. "You used to play with worms."

"I didn't ever play with them," I said. "I held them in my hands a few times. When I was about ten."

"Can you please do it?" she persisted, sounding overwhelmed. "I don't have time. I have to go get ready and there's so much I still need to do."

I relented, partly for my mom's sake and partly due to the guilt that had slowly accumulated as I stood staring at the dead worms lying ominously at the bottom of the pool. After all, there was once a time in my life when I had spent up to an hour a day fishing out the insects that made fruitless, tiny circles around and around in our pool. This wasn't so different though, instead of swimming in circles, the worms were only able to flop to and fro. They needed help. Desperately. So I helped them, sighing and asking myself what in the hell I was doing the entire time. I suppose I did feel bad for these worms. But I didn't feel it with the same intensity that I had years ago. Had I grown up, gained a sense of perspective through experience? Or had I lost something? Something that, even if I tried, I could never get back.



Aerial View

Syma watched as the world slowly shrank below him. Gargantuan trees dwindled to tiny shrubs, which seemed to congregate around glistening puddles of water. The altitude reduced people to moving black pellets as Syma soared higher. Roars of harsh sea winds intensified, drowning out any noises that could still have been heard from the city hundreds of feet below. A giant, flat grid of white and gray segments stretching for miles surrounded the now miniscule green rectangle below. The checkered lattice of streets and avenues eventually gave way to a motionless ocean that hugged the urban peninsula. Syma was used to this view. Climbing to this height, a level no one else could reach, was indeed liberating. But it took him away from what he enjoyed most: people.

He dove back down towards the earth below, a flash of green light trailing his swift movements. Statesman Park returned to full view, its hiking trails twisting like snakes through dense clumps of green foliage. The moving black specks enlarged as Syma lowered his flight further, their moving appendages becoming visible as they crawled about the expansive terrain.

One group seemed to be passing a tiny ball back and forth in a field. Another cluster rested on their backs in the meadow. On a windy turn of a dirt trail, a family took notice of Syma, their tiny arms waving towards the sky. Excited, Syma raced towards the hikers, their bodies turning life-sized as he drifted to their level. Now flying just a few feet above the dusty clay road, he drew near and danced around a jubilant, three-foot, button-nosed girl. Her blonde pigtails bounced as she jumped up and down, her wide eyes following Syma's every movement and her hands reaching up at him. Her smiling father swooped down and picked her up, holding her above his head as she tried to grab Syma with her pink, stubby arms. Syma jolted up a few feet to avoid the child's grasp and took back to the sky. Syma loved to be around people, but he felt uneasy whenever they tried to grab him. Time to move on.

After migrating a few miles west, he encountered a small, secluded beach hidden behind a thicket of cypress trees. From a hundred feet below, a tiny rim of white foam ricocheted back and forth against the rough sand, eventually disappearing back into the ocean. A tiny red umbrella stood out amidst the massive strip of beige. Intrigued, Syma lowered himself quietly towards the sandy coast, inching closer to the umbrella. Two peachy figures of very different proportions lay underneath it. Syma drew closer.

The first figure was a sea lion of a man lying on a towel, with only a Speedo and a bed of chest hair covering his tan, pruny skin. His belly stacked so high that its shadow nearly engulfed the woman lying beside him. Syma carefully flew around to get a better look. She had a petite figure, excluding the areas of her body injected with silicone. A tight bikini decorated her smooth body, which glistened in the sun as a result of excessive sunblock application. They both appeared to be napping. Syma must have snuck too close to her massive partner because he suddenly jerked his head left and right.

"What the hell..." he murmured, lifting his sunglasses. He spotted Syma staring right at him. "Hey! Hey you, get out of here! Asshole!" His girlfriend shrieked, burying her head into his flabby torso as he tried to get up.

Startled, Syma tried to escape, hitting the umbrella. The impact knocked him to the sand. With a violent hiss, he rose up again, blowing sand in every direction. The man swooped his sixty-ounce soda cup and chucked it at Syma. A cool splash of brown, bubbly liquid soaked Syma's entire body. He couldn't see straight. He couldn't fly straight. The world began to dance around him as he hurtled across the beach, an orange light trailing his jerky movements. Sparks flew in his periphery. Things were moving too fast to process. Tree, grass, sky, sand, sky, sky, tree, dirt, grass, sky, water, people, tree. Tree! He collided with the trunk of a thick cypress tree, creating an explosion of plastic shards that rained down onto the asphalt road below.

Several hours later, a thirteen-year-old boy raced towards the trunk of the dented cypress tree, clutching a controller in one hand and his backpack in the other. His callous-ridden hands lifted the body frame of his severely damaged RC drone. Sniffing, he grabbed the remains of his precious Syma X5C Quadcopter and bolted home.



Deadlines and a Green Screen

The sound of the mouse clicking and the keyboard buttons clacking echoed across the murky yellow walls. The room was lit by the setting sun through a small window that made variations of brown, orange, and red explode upon the dark wooden desk. Seated on a fairly new office chair, black and springy, was a man who rested his chin on the palm of his hand. He thought deeply before he proceeded to create more noise within the eerily quiet workspace of his apartment home.

Tab. Tab. Click. Click.

Minute by minute, hour by hour, the ritual repeated itself. Fourth deadline done early. Fifth deadline done early. The man was about to complete his sixth project for the day when the alarm of his old mechanical pocket watch rang and blasted five high and low notes. He retrieved the watch, which was right below the shining white light of his computer screen, and pressed it open to see the time. It was thirty past midnight. The man looked around him to see absolutely nothing: it was pitch black. His eyes soon adjusted and he saw the familiar shape of the office room rolling with shades of very dark blue.

He moved his eyes back to his pocket watch and clasped it closed. Etched on the metal round clump was a hexagon with the words “Time is of the Very Essence.” He placed the metallic singer of time back down below the computer desktop once again. He looked up to see his work almost completed and resumed by pressing the letter key T to spell the name of his latest client.

But once T was released from the weight of his index finger, the screen froze and revealed his reflection like a mirror before abruptly changing into a blank monitor filled with bright lime green. The color shined throughout the room and caused his wooden desk to seem like a meadow with blades of grass. And for a faint second, he thought he could hear the tune of his pocketwatch ringing and bouncing between his ears.

The man clenched his teeth in frustration and his fist slammed down on the desk, making a loud thud. His work was incomplete. His time was now wasted. It was all gone. After staring at the blank green screen for several seconds, he let out

a long sigh, filled the air with the stench of his microwave dinner, and proceeded to press the power button on the bottom right of the monitor.

Nothing happened. It stayed that bright green despite the great power of the power button. He scratched his forehead in confusion before reaching under the wooden desk and yanking out the power cable. The screen was still green. His heartbeat quickened, and he randomly pressed every button he could see before him as fast as humanly possible. Maybe that would work? His office room was filling musically with the sounds of clicks and clacks, of tabs and taps. But his efforts made no progress. The screen was still green.

The man slammed both of his fists against his sturdy desk and let out a roaring groan. The green was now etching into his eyes, stealing thoughts of any other color, and interrupting what was a perfect day for this fine workman. He shook the monitor, using it as a vent for the steam that had been building rapidly in his head. Yet when all his fingers grasped the back and side of the monitor, his right thumb slid over the blank green screen.

What looked like smoke poured out of his thumb, hissing as if some magical force was pulling it forward into the abyss of the screen. Cubes of his skin color seemed to emit from the finger, and his thumb went farther and farther. His initial rage immediately turned into panic; the man quickly pushed against the screen with the rest of his fingers to resist the force, but to his dismay found that they, too, were sinking deep into the green. The screen had swallowed his hand up to his knuckles when the smoke changed to black in color and cubes floated about him before either fading or popping. He propped his feet up against the desk, squeezed his arm with his left hand, and tried to pull back, to retrieve his hand, but he wasn't strong enough.

The unknown force and the smoke abruptly stopped, leaving his hand absorbed by the green screen up to his wrist. He breathed deeply in and out; he was thankful it had stopped. He tried once more to pull his hand back, but his hand was actually stuck, sealed like glue within the digital landscape. He stood up from his office chair and looked behind the monitor. There was nothing at all, just the back of the plastic surface. Again he went through the new routine: the mashing of buttons and clicking of keys. He tried pulling and tugging, twisting and yelling. His hand was still gone. And the screen was still green.

The man was feeling nauseous, the microwave dinner threatening to come back up. His work was the least of his worries, and his mind could think of nothing but that horrendous color: lime green. He sat back in his chair, contemplating how he would escape this awful situation and what his life would be like if he didn't. He

would spend the rest of his days stuck at a computer, trapped in a solemn room. The green screen captured his hand, dominated his mind, and spread its light upon him and his office.

Like an angel singing and a raven cawing, the five-note tune of his pocket watch rang. At first the man thought it was all in his head, that the screen was tainting his mind. But he realized it was indeed his pocket watch. He grabbed it and propped it open to see the time once more. The watch was glowing green and the time was still thirty past twelve. Suddenly there was no light, and the green was gone. The room was completely pitch black and it was only then that the man realized that he had instinctively grabbed the pocket watch with his right hand; somehow his hand had freed itself and latched onto his metal timekeeper. He yelled in triumph and sobbed in relief. For him, it was a blessing to know that the screen was no longer green. His hand was now free, and he could now spend his time more wisely. No more overloads of work. No more would he spend his days stuck inside a room, trapped in personal isolation. He had a life to live away from a computer screen.



Chaye Grable

Princess of the Pond

Come play with me.
The water's warm.
The sun strings strands of gold
bouncing off the rocks.

Come play with me.
There's secrets here
that the pond's mirrored surface hold,
shining in the dark.

Come play with me.
Take my hand,
I'll tell you the treasures I've been told,
hiding in the depths.

Come play with me.
Don't look back.
Give into the water's hold,
sinking out of breath.

You'll stay with me,
My little doll,
now that you're dead and cold,
sitting in a watery throne.



Forgotten Hearts

Forgotten Hearts



Scratchboard illustration

Her father refused to check her bedroom anymore. Which concerned her. Was her father afraid? Why wouldn't he check? He said that she was old enough to not be afraid. What did age have to do with anything? There were things trying to get her. Neither her father nor her mother believed the things she saw at night. Even at school she could not find a helpful hand. No one could relate to the occurrences happening at home. Her classmates would respond, "I'm too old" or "I grew out of it," deepening her loneliness. She suspected that her stature—she was the smallest in the class—made her a target. Her bedroom was behind the last door on the righthand side of a long hallway within her three-bedroom, two-bath home. Each night at home, she struggled with the dark. She did her best to not be afraid.

Before she had reached the age for school, whenever bedtime arrived she would always instruct her father to look as big as possible. While she giggled under her bedsheets, with only her eyes poking out, her father would stomp his heavy feet, snarling, and brandish his teeth around the bedroom. Although he did not shine, he was her knight. Every night he would enter her room to drive off the things that scared her at night. Stomping into her room, with his hair ruffled large and teeth brandishing, he circled her bed. Head jerked out and shoulders puffed up, he would fall to the floor, slide his head under the bed, and let out a mighty roar. She jumped every time. Springing up from the floor, he turned to his daughter and exclaimed, "Where else?" From behind her sheets, she would point at the closet. He jumped up, rushed to the closet, and swung the door open. Shaping his hands like claws, he would swipe at the clothes hung within, then slam the door shut. Swinging back to his daughter, he snarled in a deep voice, "Any others?" She pointed this time at the window. Her smile showed even through the sheets. Stomping harder, he would place his face right at the window, breathing hard until the window fogged. Then he would press his fingers on the fogged window and make the shape of a heart. Turning to face his daughter and pointing at the window, he said, "This will let them know that I'm here protecting you." In those nights she slept with hearts watching over her. Never fearing what lay below her bed, inside the closet, or outside her window.

As time went on her father tired of this display, finding it unnecessary as she grew older. "You're old enough, honey" and "There's nothing to fear of the dark" were remarks he would commonly make. As the displays became fewer and fewer, she became convinced that it was only a matter of time. They would try to take her.

With no hearts watching over her tonight, she awoke with an alertness of pain and heaviness. Her hand shot down to prevent her willingness to relieve herself; she had to go to the bathroom. After slowly adjusting to the dark, her eyes darted back and forth from the closet to the window, searching for any eyes that might be staring back. There were none. She reached out to her nightstand to retrieve her father's flashlight; only after days of constant nagging had her dad finally relented and allowed her to take it to bed. She noticed that the things were more active when she used only nightlights. Though the flashlight was too big and felt clumsy in her hand, she felt confident with the power it had over the dark. She shined the flashlight at the closet door. The door was not closed. A lump of fear began to stir in her throat. She saw nothing but her school jackets hanging, all facing the same direction. In her half-asleep state she tried to remember if she had left the door open and if she had hung up all her jackets the same way. Was it in the closet?

Reluctant to turn the light away from the closet, she then slowly shined the light into her bedroom window. The light reflecting back made it hard to see if anything lurked behind; she turned the light down and allowed the moon's light to shine. She saw nothing in her window. With a heavy breath, she then inched her way to the edge of the bed and shined her flashlight towards the ground. She peeked and saw nothing but her carpet and scattered socks.. Her breath became rapid as the heaviness became close to unbearable. She sat up in her bed, circling the flashlight's beam around her room. She would have to close the closet door, make it out of her room into the hallway, and pass her parents' room in order to make it to the bathroom.

She leaped off her bed with enough distance so that whatever lived below could not reach her. With shaking hands, she pointed the flashlight directly on the closet, managing to close the door in time to whip around to face anything from the bed. There was nothing. Pressing her back against the wall, she flashed her light at the bed until she made it to her bedroom door. Trembling, she opened the door, squeezed herself through the opening, and spilled onto the hallway floor. As she slowly rose to her feet, trying her best to keep her legs together, the darkness engulfed her.

With a faster pace she stumbled in front of her parents' room and lost her grip on her flashlight; it tumbled to the ground with a thud. Worried that her parents would hear her, she raced to the bathroom. She arrived at the bathroom door and pushed herself through. Inside she sat down and allowed the pressure and pain to dissipate from her body. As the alertness left her and sleepiness crept back in, she pushed the thought of working her way back to her room and trying to fall back to sleep out of her mind. Her thoughts instead landed on her parents. Why had they left her to survive on her own? Her heart sank at the thought. She imagined

other children dealing with the night. She wished they were her friends instead of the ones at school. They could bond and trade information about the things at night; she smiled at this thought. After she lifted herself up and began to wash her hands, she noticed that she had little trouble reaching the knobs. She was getting taller. Her heart lifted; if she was getting bigger that meant she would soon be too big for the things at night. With her heart and nerves enlivened by this realization, she walked with a slight confidence towards the bathroom door.

As she opened the door to her bathroom, she felt composed from relieving herself and from her realization. But then she froze. Standing within the doorway was the creature, larger than her but smaller than her school friends. Black with no facial features, it reflected the shape of a person, but it wasn't. She screamed, but there was no sound. She closed her eyes to focus her breath in an attempt to cry out. As she closed her eyes, she felt her leg being grabbed and lifted off the ground. Her back landed on the bathroom floor with a slam, pushing out the remaining air in her lungs. She felt her body sliding out of the bathroom and being dragged towards her room.

Unable to cry out, she began banging her hands and arms down the long hallway. It moved slowly. Pushing through the fear of seeing the creature, she opened her eyes; it had one hand on her foot and was using its other as leverage to move her along the floor. It was strong. She began to try and kick her leg free, but with every kick its grip tightened. As she slid past her parents' room, she reached for the door knob but missed it. She banged at the foot of their door; she could hear her parents as they arose. Her fingers captured the flashlight, and she shined it at the creature. But the flashlight had the opposite effect of what she was expecting: the light shone right through it.

As the creature took the turn into her room, her flashlight again slipped through her hands. She managed to shout "Dad!" as it began dragging her towards the darkness below her bed. As it slipped underneath, she managed to place her foot at the frame of the bed, preventing any further movement. As she struggled to keep from going underneath, she noticed that her room had changed. It no longer felt like home but another person's refuge. As she fought to stay above the bed, her senses heightened. She noticed her closed closet door had green claws trying to carve their way out from underneath. Through the space below she thought she saw green eyes. Her window carried six pairs of glowing yellow eyes, little creatures whose breath had fogged the window from the outside. Within the fogged window were several little hearts that had been smeared. As the black figure lifted the bed, she lost her footing and slipped under. The last thing she saw was the shoes of her knight entering the room.



Remembering the Good Times

Wheels at Rest

I remember playing in the yard
 Of the old brick house
 Chasing each other
 Hiding behind the bushes
 Our own fortress

I remember your crayons
 An endless bin
 Containing every color I see
 Coloring outside the lines
 And all over the table

I remember your cars
 Strewn across the floor
 The two of us "vrooming"
 Room to room
 Dogs flying after us

I remember lunches
 Warm Mac and Cheese
 Melting in our mouths
 Overflowing with food
 Still trying to talk with excitement

I remember moving
 No more standing on the corner
 Anxiously awaiting our fun to be had
 Driving in the car
 Trees, our blurry drawings

I remember growing apart
 Barely speaking
 The occasional birthday call
 Or Christmas card
 In the mail

I remember the final call
 Our parents telling me what had happened
 A full bottle of pills gone
 Machines keeping you alive
 You no longer being you

I remember saying goodbye
 Tears streaming down my face
 Choking on the words
 Unwilling to admit the truth
 You left us. By choice.



Photography



Love, Sweat, and Tears

The bell rang and I began to make my way through the concrete pathways of Smiley Elementary. The other kids were laughing and hastily making their way to the snack their mothers carefully packed for them, waiting in their big polished wagons. Sometimes, just for a moment, I would imagine it was me running to the parking lot, anxious to feel the cool air and discover what Mother would have waiting for me. As I drifted into the familiar daydream, I was interrupted by the bellow of a muffler. That sound could only mean one thing: my mother's jeep was near. I walked with my head down, avoiding cracks and analyzing the orientation of my shoelaces. I was strange in ways like that. The bellow resolved to a hum and as I felt myself approaching the jeep, I raised my head and there they were. The top was down and my father was in the driver's seat, trying to hide the 40-ounce bottle of beer he had in his lap. My mother was beside him, smiling with her head turned towards me.

The tension between them was immense and though I wish I could say that I had grown accustomed to it, I had not. The dynamic of their relationship was rather complex and though they were aware of the mutual pollution, they refused to abandon their fantasy of happily ever after. This was their second shot; they had separated before when I was just over a year old and remained that way up until they decided to gamble on their affections once more when I was ten. Now they were sojourners of tent and room key, as was I.

As we pulled away from the curb, the wind joined the muffler and I kept my head down. I was exposed and God forbid one of the other kids saw me. The budget motel, or what I called home for a brief stint, was just a mile down the road and we should have been there soon. Not a minute away from school and they were at it again. I could see them yelling and I could just make out what they were saying over the whirring of wind and motor. They were frivolously throwing each other under the bus.

"Don't fuckin' lie to me, Troy! I know you've been messing around with that old bitch Jolene."

"Shut the fuck up, stupid... Your mom is selling dope. She's been doing it for weeks!"

"Selling dope? What the fuck is wrong with you? You fuckin' idiot! Don't listen

to him, honey. Your dad's a liar and he's been making drugs for years!"

"God damnit, Jenny!"

The way they said each other's names, Jenny and Troy, emphasizing the first two letters like it was a punch to the face—I couldn't stand it. But what could I do? I was just a scared and tired young kid in the backseat. I was always in the backseat. Of every argument, every fight, every word. Thankfully, I had a blanket and could hide and cover eyes and ears. I could pretend for another moment I was in one of those polished SUVs just around the corner from my house in Smiley Heights next door to all my friends.

"You better take me to that bitch's place right now, Troy!"

To this day it's not clear to me why my father chose to listen and drive us to that whore's place, as my mother would say. Maybe it was an attempt to prove his innocence. Or possibly just to witness the thrill of whatever hostile act he was sure my mother would commit. And so we went. Onto the freeway, eastbound away from the budget lodge, away from the place into which I had just unpacked my clothes. Not more than ten minutes went by when we arrived at a small row of apartments outside of town. I heard my mother hop out of the car and I frantically removed the blanket from my head. She was hollering and screaming and pounding on the door.

"Get out here, bitch! I know you're in there, you fuckin' whore! Open the fuckin' door right now."

My mother was red, and pacing back and forth. Only seconds later she went straight to the front window and shattered it, bare-knuckled. I couldn't stand it. I wouldn't sit in the backseat and endure the crass television special that had become my life. I hopped out of the car and ran as fast as I could. Angry and upset, I ran with my head down. No one would see me if I had my head down. Tears were running down my cheeks and snot was flowing from my nose. Just as I ran to the end of the street, I could hear the jeep creeping up behind me.

"Get in the car! We're sorry, son. Please get in the car right now!"

Both of them were frantically trying to coerce me back into that damn jeep.

"No! I'm tired of this! I'm tired of you! I'm tired of this car! I'm tired of everything!"

"Honey, I'm sorry."

My mother was yelling, still red with fury but conflicted as she felt my pain.

"Please get back in the car."

Though my fury fueled my unwillingness to fold, I began to realize what would happen. Somebody would call the police. They would find us and take my mother away. Hell, they would take both of them away. After a brief moment of reconsideration, I hopped back into the backseat. Just as I felt the warm vinyl seat beneath me, we were off, fleeing the scene. Angry, sad, and frustrated I wrapped

myself in my blanket, which shielded me from the voyeurs and pedestrians. No matter where I was, I feared someone would recognize me and I would be exposed. This was my greatest fear. I had become quite the James Dean when it came to leaving my personal life outside of school, but when the day was over, so was the movie.

Again, the car was filled with air and fuel expanding and waiting for them to combust. Their silhouettes were filled with anger and regret, and I knew it wouldn't be long before it happened. Before the love and hatred converged like hot and cold air resulting in the inevitable storm. At least I had my blanket where I could hide, where I could dream of snacks and cool leather seats. Just as I departed, my delusion was interrupted by a quarrel no child would forget.

Their voices grew louder and my imagination was no match; I could not hide from this one. Slowly, I removed the blanket. It was dangerous to remove my shield, to leave myself exposed, but my concern and curiosity outweighed my fear. Just as the shield passed before my eyes, I saw my mother's fist reach across to my father's face and instinctively he flung his own back at her. His blow was fierce and she was immediately silenced. My mother frantically covered her mouth while it wept thick red tears.

As soon as my father realized what he had done he thrust the bottle he had between his legs out of the window. "JENNY! Oh my god, what have I done?! JENNY!"

I had seen them fight before. I had seen them yell and flail. But I had not seen something of this caliber. I quickly sacrificed my shield to my mother to sop up the river of red tears flowing from her mouth. Now everything was quiet. I could not hear the wind or the muffler. I couldn't hear anything. My mother tried to yell, but she could not speak. Finally I heard something slip past her tongue. "Pull over."

It was a strange feeling I had just then: frightened for my mother and furious that my father would do such a thing, but remorseful because I knew he would be leaving again. He would be going away for a long while this time. Who knows when I would see him again, but why should I care? Look what he had just done. What he had done to my frail and loving mother, who had cared for me always, especially when he was gone and it was only us two. The woman who sacrificed her life to give me all she could.

Now flooded with regret and fear, my father began belting out different possibilities for us. He proposed we keep driving until we hit Arizona; I had a grandpa with land there. We could all flee and things would be different. He would change and he would never hurt her ever again. All the while my mother would not speak. Her decision was made.

We kept driving for some time though time itself was inconceivable to me at this point so I'm not sure how long it was. I knew the sun was almost down,

and that's about all I knew. There I was, sitting in the backseat, exposed, and my mother bleeding. Finally we stopped for gas and as soon as my father stepped out to use the phone, she quickly hopped over to the driver's seat and we darted away. I can still see him standing there and I can hear his voice scream "Jenny! Jenny!"

As we drove away I could not see her face, but I could tell my mother's pain was not just of a physical nature. Her heart was as broken as her jaw. It was then that I learned my first lesson of love. For me, it seemed to be the strangest of all affairs. Now these two lovers who had grown up together, who shared stories of their own childhood, of pain and love, this couple who thought they could take on the world together, were interrupted by pain too grave to endure any longer. If this day had been different, what would they have learned? When would they have accepted the unbearable truth that they could no longer force what could not fit? Some have said love is a funny thing, but I'm not sure funny is the right word.



Tyler Christ

Wasted

Curtains drawn, 11 a.m.
Another day passin' by
The bottles empty
Running dry
No fight left
To clarify;

I cannot eat
I cannot sleep
I cannot dream
I am ghost
Shrink wrapped in
Flesh and bone

Waiting, always waiting



Arnold Agustin

Wasted



Scratchboard illustration

MAD



Digital illustration

[M a d]

It doesn't matter.
 Nothing makes sense.
 This whole world that we live in is all of a mess
 We are all mad.
 we already know it
 And that's why we all are refusing to show it
 I can't stand this scene that's all up in my head.
 It is loud. Obscene.

and is causing me dread.
 It's a circus on wheels— parading about.
 The ring leader's screaming, but he won't let me out!
 What's worse is I know I can't make them all stop.
 You carry it on
 day n' night
 round the clock.

This whole universe sees it. The third eye snuck a look
 My heart has palpitations like caffeine has taken hook—

I took the red pill and woke up in a daze
 I didn't expect this sort of a maze
 twisted. turning. a gory aura haze

If I go to bed now, I'm sure to slip away
 I'll smile wide for all to see
 Stick out my tongue proud
 and spit out some teeth

If this is my world
 Then let's say cheese
 Fuck You—
 let me sleep



Holiday

you're on *vacation*
 under the premise of some 'holy' charity
 how's your ego feeling from this
 oh, so selfless
 good deed
 all these poverty stricken,
 starving countries really need
 are girls from California
 to build a
 poorly constructed library

you've left your makeup
 in your million dollar home
 beside the sea
 to meet a fourteen year old girl
 who's raising a family

but, "it's all right"
 you tell her
 trust in God
 is all she needs
 and who is she to argue
 empty promises of eternity
 So
 raise your money
 have your fun
 make your *holiday* donation based
 because it's a great cause
 it's one you've done
 don't forget your pictures
 along the way.



Terrorist of Love: Letter to a Friend

The chancellor from the embassy of heartbreak called. They found your passport in a gutter on teary eye drive and wanted to know if you were all right. I told them you were studying at honeymoon library, that you had been eager to finish a degree on love and had not been acting the same ever since you saw her eyes. He warned me terrorists had been posing as women, secretly attempting to plant bombs, destroying heart and mind. I said uneasily not to worry, that you were smitten since you met this woman and you hardly called anymore, so everything must be all right. He shunned my words and asked where you were, thinking that there might be another attack tonight.

Before long agents kicked in my door, guns drawn, looking for this terrorist of love. They showed me a blurred picture before knocking me unconscious with the butt of a gun. Minutes later I awoke dazed, head heavy with blood, surrounded by agents against terrorists of love.

Soon I was at the headquarters being questioned. As I sat in a computer-lit room, the news swept my tear-filled eyes like a wet bristled broom. You had been killed by a terrorist of love. It was a gory scene. She had reeled you in by texting "Hey, handsome man," and you thought she was precious, a hidden gem. But you were inexperienced, my friend, and now I see why you exploded.

Had the agents been able to find you before the explosion, they would have performed a memory restore, setting you back to the point before you met this terrorist. Since she was able to infiltrate your mind, sensitive feelings had been compromised, including your networking abilities and internal street lights, disabling your ability to stop and go. This led to head-on collisions and smoggy, fume-filled traffic inside your soul. For a short time you ignored, even hid behind, Facebook pictures and rosy-cheeked smiles; you must have endured agonizing pain for miles and miles.

And I told the agents everything. I even told them about how the two of you, with windows open, had enjoyed the cold crisp air of Arroyo Grande evenings and the sounds of cricket skeets while massaging each other's feet until falling asleep. How there was never a doubt in your mind, never one doubt you would ever leave this woman behind.

She made you laugh and, ironically, at times you laughed together. And I admitted I sort of knew you were in danger.

The agent patted me on the shoulders with chubby, warm, calloused hands and a silver band on his left finger and said, "Son, please don't let this happen to you."



Monsters



Scratchboard illustration

Monsters

The morning sky was a watercolor mess of nuclear teals and pinks. It splattered neon on everything in the room like a vomited butterfly salad. Italian opera, at bursting volume, echoed down from the acrylic clouds. The long notes fried and crackled as if coming from the speakers of an old radio.

It was not just the heavens that were new. Everything else was, too. All the objects in his room bristled with an electric charge that popped and poked him when he slipped his socked feet onto the carpet. The air drifting through the window was crisp and flat, like the air in a sealed bank vault, and carried faint hints of ammonia and lime. He turned his door handle. Pop. He stepped out into the hallway. Pop. He was almost not surprised to walk into the living room to find that his roommate, over the course of the previous night, had become a fat-bodied violet snake.

“What the hell,” he breathed, running his fingers through his hair. “What the hell.”

“Dave, shit,” remarked Snake Brian. His face was the same, which was somehow the worst part. “Hell isn’t hell unless it’s really hell.”

He backed away from the coiling body on the carpet.

“If this bothers you,” continued the snake in a hollow parody of his friend’s voice, “wait til you see everyone else. Wait til you see Jeff. Hehheheheheh!”

The gaunt shadow of something coming down the stairs, thrown on the wall by the sick Seventies glow of the morning light, was spidering toward him. He reached for the nearest object, which happened to be a ceramic Laughing Buddha on the table, and held it as a shield in front of him.

An eight-foot-tall naked thing, hunched to fit the room, wearing a white mask with two black eyeholes, was doing a languid balletic walk down the staircase, holding a machete straight-armed in one hand like a banner.

It was, judging from the birthmark on its belly, Jeff.

Still wearing nothing but his socks and flannel pajama pants, Dave dashed out of the apartment, slamming the door behind him.

Outside, the ordinary sounds of morning in the suburbs were gone. Traffic and chatter had been replaced by howls, roars, and manic laughter.

The obscene colors of everything exclaimed themselves like lunatic shouts. Veiny vines were claiming the walls of the buildings. In every direction, he saw what must have been his neighbors scampering, crawling on four legs, six legs, or none—their features flattened and stretched to fit on the skulls of bounding, heavy rhinoceros creatures and soaring, winged hammerhead sharks. He looked up and saw a horned gargoyle crouched on the roof of his building. A smaller reptilian monster

was clutched in its fanged jaws, twitching and dying, its eyes growing blank with horror and resignation. He looked away before either of the faces could begin to grow too familiar.

With dread blooming inside him, he sprinted toward Sadie's apartment, tearing blisters in his feet and holes in his socks.

It didn't take long to find her.

Before he recognized her, his eyes had jumped to the worst of the monsters filling the square. She was the one that was the most awful to see, for it looked the most human.

"Oh God," he said.

"Babbo pietá, pietá," wailed the sky.

She was shuffling on the roof of her apartment in shreds of her summer dress. Her black tail, ending in a teardrop-shaped stinger, flexed and whipped through the air with horrible strength as she moved. Long cracked-glass quivering dragonfly wings shot out from between her shoulder blades, and huge multifaceted green orbs had replaced her big brown eyes. Odd mucus oozed from her mandibles, a glassy bubble-strewn fluid that looked like Purel.

"Sadie!" he shouted. With a violent twitch, her head snapped back in his direction. There was no recognition in her insect eyes.

She shrieked, a noise that was halfway between the call of an eagle and the gasp of mock outrage she made when he teased her about something, and lunged at him, her wings whirring to life and her sharp teeth bared. He felt the awful familiarity of her hand on the side of his face before he brought the Laughing Buddha down over her head and she crumpled onto the asphalt.

He had not felt like going back to his apartment to face his armed and serpentine roommates. Instead, he had lifted the unconscious Sadiebug into a shopping cart and pushed her into one of the new model homes on the other side of town. She had always been bigger and taller than him, something that had been uncomfortable for them—for him, anyway—and it took some effort.

The orange orchard off of his normal jogging route was now a forest of giant flowers. Lavishly petaled orchids the height of streetlights were bent with heavy fruits, huge strawberries with thorny vermilion skins and wet green meat. Not knowing what else to do, he went down the rows with his shopping cart, picking the biggest, least soft and spiked fruits. Back at the model home, he neatly sliced and sugared a bunch of them into a bowl as a dinner for Sadiebug, who was tied to the chandelier in the dining room with a thick cord made from two intertwined jump ropes he had found abandoned in the neighborhood playground.

She hovered around the room, her wings humming, studying him and her new home with vacant glances.

"I hope you like it," he said quietly. He placed the bowl in front of her and lit a candle in the middle of the table.

She squatted on the table over the bowl, questioning him with her sliced jade eyes and inquisitive cocks of her head.

She forked a slice into her mouth with her mandibles. After a moment of chewing, she spat it out, clicking in disapproval. He sighed. Maybe she was a carnivore. Would he have to go out and hunt other monsters to feed her? With what? Jeff was pretty skinny. Maybe he could overpower him and take his machete.

He laughed without smiling. "Huh. Well, I have to guess what you want because you can't tell me. Some things never—"

The lash of her tail across his face happened before his mind registered it. The sharp pain of her stinger's slice did not fade, and he knew the wound was poisonous.

He stumbled out of the room and slumped in a daze on the sofa in the foyer. He could feel the pain being buried in thickening numbness below his eye as the wound swelled, the warm sweat of fever already beginning to ooze on his forehead. From the dining room, he could hear the creature's muffled howls of triumph and rage.

He thought about the fact that he had never told her any of the little things she did that annoyed him. They had both been too nice for that. He thought about how he had never told her any of the little things she did that he had loved, either. He had only said things anyone could say to anybody—that she was beautiful, that she was smart, that she was a good person. He wished he'd at least done the second one.

A quote from Dante flitted through his head: "No greater grief than to remember days of joy, when misery is at hand." He vomited a rush of seedy green.

It had been no dream. The next morning, when he awoke, everything, everything other than him, was still different. Today, if it was a different day, the opera was gone and instead coming from the sky was the screaming end of Mahler's Resurrection Symphony.

In her anger, Sadie had spat thick mouth secretions all the over the dining room while he slept. Pearly strings of her mucus were everywhere, dangling like syrup from doorknobs and flowing in thin needles from the chandelier onto the kitchen table.

Bleary-eyed, he looked at the mess. Between the burning of the venom and the classical music, he hadn't slept well.

As he rubbed his sore swollen cheek, he quietly decided what he had to do. He went to the kitchen and got the knife he had used to cut the alien strawberries.

It was for the best, maybe. He changed to fit people. She had liked him for

TAR

whatever he was, and he hadn't known who to be for her. They had floated between each other.

With the knife in one hand, and Sadie's rope in the other, they went to the top of the hill overlooking their neighborhood.

Sadie was looking at him, blinking her sideways eyelids. Her forehead was creased as if in deep or troubled thought. Though the eyes were emerald and glittering, though the furrowed ridges above them didn't have her thick eyebrows, and the teeth visible through her parted lips were thin and pointed, it was a look he recognized. He thought, maybe, that some part of her brain, some spark of her that was the same, was remembering him. Stupid or not, he didn't care, and let the feeling warm him inside.

He leaned in and kissed her. Her mandibles scraped his cheeks, but her lips felt the same.

"I love you, Sadie," he said. "I'm sorry I never said it. I still do. I don't know if I'm...still allowed to, but I still do. I really do."

He cut the jump ropes. Then he broke into tears.

She shuffled around a bit on her bent-backwards legs, testing her new freedom. Then she stretched her long spine and began slow beats of her fairy wings, tensing in readiness, and lifted off the ground, muscles rippling and straining, her tail arched proudly, and she flew away.

Below, the jungle of giant flowers nodded and swayed in faint breezes, and a rippling grassland, dotted with herds of loping people-faced gazelles, stretched where a strip mall had been. Above, a green rain fell in tropical patches here and there from the rolling clouds, drawing a new species of petrichor from the sidewalks, and the sky glowed with the technicolor lights of the different sun, gleaming when it shone through her wings.



While I drove off into the black slate of the central coast,
 If the waters around Pismo would open its mouth, I would
 And somewhere in that smooth ink of the Pacific
 at the bottom of its sable waters I would rest amongst the rocks and sand
 cradled in a row of kelp
 and the fish would eat my body and the waves my bones
 and the tide would wash away the memories of you
 until what's left of me would roll up on the beach
 Tar on Santa Barbara's shore

Or maybe I just drove that long road home
 And drowned in my sorrows instead.



Tug of War

Floating between the wavelengths of the world
 hidden in the cryptic with a twist
 lie opposites that exist
 daunting in the darkness of bright curtains
 a path to choose
 while battle between both continues

Holding so much power in each of these energies
 concealed within the daily constantly
 tugging at your weakness whichever it may be
 be mindful in thinking strategically
 depending on how strong the vitality
 wills the way in which you survive
 either you suffocate or come out alive
 what may you ask is

Floating within your sphere
 the two most powerful emotions
 Love and Fear



Women Warriors at Wasteland



Watercolor

Eureka



Photography

Hope Fled First

Mother told her once before bed, sotto voce under a sunken moon: we are god's containers, each and every one of us. Before the skin withered and shrunk from her, Daughter had forgotten to ask what exactly they were meant to contain. She had faded quickly, with a trembling repose that reminded Daughter of the few dead dogs the family tended to find before the desert painted them hard and white in its likeness. The bones of men and hounds were as familiar to Daughter's cold sulfur yellow eyes as the sight of her Mother leaving and returning to their tent, a welcome silhouette coming and going through the endless void of the desert horizon. Wandering in the desert brought little else in the way of signs, but it was the only thing to do before the dust storms returned to blot out the sky and bring the season of distended bellies.

The only way to cure such enduring hunger was to journey out from the two ripped tents that held Daughter, the Old Man, and Mother. The tents were all they had in the vast desert that so meagerly sustained them; yet Mother had Daughter and the Old Man had his treasured book, whose purpose only his eyes could decipher. He said they spoke of another time with men on seas of water, not sand, and tents that rose tall in wood and stone, and not merely the excessively abscess-ridden canvas of their tents. Yet the Old Man could not say if this time was of the future or the past. In the desert, neither things mattered alongside the morning awakening of empty stomach gurgles and howling wind.

Among the crumbling glass towers—like lone islands of unknown origin from a long-ago past in the endless tide of the sand dunes—were the wasteland's harvest, what the desert provided: the desperately skinny dogs with limbs as slight as sunrays and the jealously prohibitive spiky plants. It was on such a gathering journey that Mother had returned, empty-handed, only to be reclaimed forever by the desert in a matter of days slight enough for Daughter to count off on her hands and fingers. On the first day back to their shared tent, Mother had stopped keeping down whatever meager edible scraps could be found in the wasteland. It had all poured forth from Mother's belly, framed in a bloodied bile, the meat of the aggressive desert flowers whose thorns they braved long journeys to find. As the days passed, Mother spoke less than normal, ate less than normal, which is to say, not at all.

The last day was difficult to pluck from the dried mud of the days that would come after; Mother had been a shriveled tree for a while then. It was just that when she finally waved for Daughter to draw close, the words she spoke held the same alien weight of the Old Man and his Book (from which he had obstinately intoned over Mother's still body not long after, claiming his right as the only other living human being there to witness her passing).

"Find the flower petals...to the setting sun," Mother had said, reaching out with an already waning wave in the direction of where she had stumbled forth out of the desert and back to Daughter not too long ago.

The only other sounds to provide accompaniment to these words—before and after—were those that marked the hissing harbinger of a coming dust storm still half-born. It shook the little ragged tent to provide a break in the total stillness that otherwise reigned within.

These were not thoughts that made her footfalls now any faster, but the past was all that seemed left in the numb light of the present. Daughter had left the Old Man and the tents behind days ago, towards the setting sun. Every step she took was a step closer to the only inheritance Mother had passed to her, a journey for a flower sought for filling an emptiness that felt much like the inner rumbles that led them to hike out into the dust storms to hunt the fruit of unfriendly desert thistles. But not quite the same.

The howls in the distance were not unlike the regular coming of the blinding walls of dust and ash that stormed the dry white landscape, though they could just as well have been the howls of far less distant starved hounds. She had passed the tall tower of glass and wrenched metal buried in the sand's stubborn embrace not long before; the Old Man had told her that the families that came here before on other days found food and slept in the black towers. The thought of Mothers and Daughters up high in the clouds was the same for her as the Old Man's Book of the dead man named Captain whose heart bled drops of red: a chant that held little attention.

"Oh Captain, my Captain," he had said.

Daughter's eyes had wandered elsewhere, to the clouds of thick dust collecting on the horizon with a sure malevolence that had once been the exclusive realm of humankind. Time spent on the mistakes of others was just a sure way of making your own, her mother had told her once on another chilled night.

The Old Man's fingers wandered along the strange ink marks of the Book as he told her what they were saying, applying the same ginger energy Daughter used every blighted day to summon forth edible parts of the rough desert thistle blooms that liked to prickle forth a blood price for the sustenance they gave. The

unyielding flowers had left long accursed cursive script along the hands of Daughter and Mother, the raw scratches and cuts of desperate desert gathering. As he spoke, the Old Man's eyes were those of a hawk hunting the last straggling dog of a pack.

"These marks are blessings. They speak of other families and what happened to them on many days before today. There are no other marks like these." He bristled with an authority whose ferocity was marked by the loneliness of its solitude. The marks in the Book spoke to no one else.

Daughter's eyes had taken that same speech from the Old Man as they withstood the storms of fine airborne dust with far less brightness. The Old Man's words made her feel warm and tired enough to fall asleep on desperate nights when there were no long walks for cover or thistle to blissfully fatigue. The symbols and marks could do no more, and it was a dead man's dream to expect them to, as she did not believe the Old Man understood these marks as well as he could read their thoughts.

The contoured wrinkles that worked canyons around the faded, dusk-blue of the Old Man's eyes told her far more than the little coupled marks of his Book and his Poetry. They were the only light that guided her thoughts as she crept alone now towards the crumbled stone pillars that framed what she took as the flower in Mother's final words. It was no desert thistle, married as it was against the broken flat face of an upturned gray monolith, flat-faced with a brim around it of the same markings in the Old Man's Book. The markings remained silent, as the Old Man had not come along. Below, where desert met the concrete of the ruined, decapitated building, there lay scattered little rods with a sickly faint glow. These were not prickly thistle flowers nor snapping dogs nor clinging dust. Wherever the rods had begun their journey, Daughter felt, they were still resistant to the desert's claim. They were containers with innards that had not been fully dulled by the dust that hung over the air and kept the sun captive.

There were few steps left, and then fewer still. It was there, below the unreadable gray marks that seemed like stolen orphans from the Old Man's Book. The discovery of this discordant ruin in the desert was the gift her mother had passed down to her, a thing that would neither fill the tingling of her belly nor protect her from the fangs of starved whelps. And yet it felt more precious than prickly.

Indeed there were no prickles here; this flower shown as if she were looking down upon it, just three black petals spaced around a single black disc—like the core of her mother's eyes. It was a trefoil of sorts, poised right above a drawing of neatly cleaned human bones, just the head part, of course, a common sight among the desert dogs. And the great round black dot with its three orbiting ebony blades held in a great yellow sun spoke of a radiance she had only glimpsed on the furtive peeks afforded by the dust. They were not here to be plucked, she could see that

Failure of Faith

well enough, but the prettiest blooms are always those too precious to take with you.

“Hope...springs eternal...human breast...”

Those were not her words, despite the fact there wasn't a single other living soul in the room as far as she could tell. Their final destination had been the parting of her lips, through which they had sprung, but where their journey had begun seemed too far to see.

She traced the grayed symbols and marks on the wall the way she remembered her mother's fingers tracing against the soft burrows of her hair when she was too young to help find food among the prickles. Daughter imagined each strand of her hair among Mother's ragged fingertips, until it was hard to distinguish the thistle cuts from her fine splayed locks. There emblazoned on the crumbling wall was the mountain peak A, the tender moon C, the withered tree T, the twins H, her face right now through the collected cheek puddles U, the snake's trail N, the clenched fist G. Perhaps the Old Man would have understood them in a different way, but whatever force had driven him to survive alongside her and Mother had not delivered him alongside her during the journey. Maybe he had read the tale of the Captain's journey too often and forgotten that the desert could still hide wonder in its predictable flat horizons and cyclical curves. There were more silent shapes and marks, but she dared not trace along them as they ended in a time-scratched gray void, R, A, D, I, O, A, C, T, I, V, E, and then the abyss that took the rest of their little queerly scrawled family. Their old men, their mothers.

Some great unmentionable machine began to grind its gears in the space behind her head, animating her lips with words that felt like a blessing, for whom she was not sure. They slipped out like foreign wriggling trout, containing a life of their own that seemed incomprehensible, doubly so as the seas that bore such things had long since dried up.

“Sky...flower. Petals of the cloud's black tower.”

Whatever she was made to hold, it was what her mother had held gripped inside, within the raw sinews of her form.

That was a Comfort, true,
no matter how long before it stopped.
As with Pandora, too,
it's never alone when it leaves its box.



I was in my twin-sized bed, looking up.
He was in a hospital bed, looking down.
I was a night light that flickered,
whose light seemed to grow dimmer and dimmer.
“Ask God to make him better,” they'd say
and night after night, I'd pray.
I whispered prayers into the air;
they fell on deaf ears and I became a weeping willow.
My faith was a flower that never bloomed
no matter how much my tears
watered the soil.
God never heard me.



The Cotard Delusion

The first time I realized I was dead was at a dinner the man I called my dad held for some of his surgeon friends. They brought their families, looking elegant and the way you're supposed to look. I always wished I could seem like that, but I'd probably look too dull. My dark hair would be too dark for the suit or I'd have a corner of my dress shirt untucked. I was in charge of taking the guests' coats and putting them in the closet; I probably hung them up wrong. They would hand the coats to me, the women gave me their purses, and I'd stare, but I think they looked past my green eyes into the foyer. I excused myself from the gathering, and some people looked in my direction as I walked out, but they were probably just curious about the painting on the wall behind me.

I don't know how long this had been going on, but it must've been some time.

There's something unique about the feeling you get after you've been dead on the inside for longer than you've been able to comprehend. Feeling something is equally as engaging as feeling nothing at all, and emptiness shows potential for never having anything to begin with. I don't remember when or how it happened, but the faces of the people I called my parents began twisting from what they were to circular masses lingering above what I think used to be my head. I still saw mouths move and heard sounds, but they came from the other side of the room.

I had already begun deteriorating. My last semester at Harvard was just like the previous five, except I went from a "straight-A student" to "Dan with a B." I didn't deserve the title I had been given before and I guess my new one fit better with who I was anyway. I kept constantly being reminded of what my father the surgeon and my mother, a Roman literature professor, expected of me, what I simply could not manage to become.

When I was alive and young, the surgeon would tell me ER stories, mentioning tips and tricks for when I'd be in his position one day, and the professor would make me recite Catullus. A doctor is what they really wanted, a lawyer was second best, but depression tightened its grip and they would just have to settle for me. For weeks I lay in bed, completely still. If I wasn't able to add anything of substance to a situation, confinement seemed like a more uplifting experience. My eyes stayed fixed on the ceiling, trying to create shapes and figures in the skip trowel texture, but I couldn't help hearing the sound of the man and woman in the hallway discussing

the car failure they had this morning. They were saying "car," but I knew they were talking about me. I was the failure.

I wanted it all to stop. I had been dead for too long, but for some reason my vision and hearing couldn't keep from doing their job. I lived for years and deteriorating was the best thing that could have happened to me. If only I would have withered away completely. Living in solitude wasn't enough if I was still reminded of who I was supposed to be.

I cleaned the bathroom that morning, soaking a rag in bleach and scrubbing out the sink. I lined my toothbrush up next to my deodorant and placed my razor at the end. I turned the water on in the bathtub, putting the plug in the drain, and kept it at room temperature. I pulled the bottle of Ambien out of my pocket and poured the last of the pills I had left into my unappealing hand. I tilted my head back and dropped them in, then bent down and took a sip of water from the bath to guide them down. I took the rag downstairs into the musty garage where the red lawnmower sat. I unscrewed the gas cap and held the rag at one corner, spinning it around like a tornado till it was thin enough to go into the opening. I submerged as much of the rag as I could. The corner and a couple of inches below it were the only sections of fabric that remained dry. I waited until every fiber was saturated before I pulled the now dark-colored rag out and formed it into a ball in my palms, applying pressure to make sure the gas bled into the dry parts. The surgeon and the professor were gone. It was just me now and I was about to be the closest thing to a good problem solver, like they wanted.

I trudged up the stairs with the rag as it dripped gasoline down my forearm. Into the bathroom I went and set the rag on the counter, removing my shirt and revealing the pale skin that no one ever seemed to care for. I unfolded the straight edge shaving blade, which the surgeon had given to me when I was good enough to deserve it, and held the weathered wood handle firmly. I pressed it against my wrist and applied pressure, holding it still. My mind should have been racing, but it wasn't. I was already dead, so doing this could only do good. If it failed, nothing would change and if it succeeded, I wouldn't have to be a lifeless body subjected to this world any longer. The past wouldn't matter anymore either: the shame, the guilt, the inadequacy. I wouldn't have to remember living as a should-have-been.

I slit my wrist deep; blood gushed out immediately, so I transferred the blade to my other hand as blood soaked the handle and gouged the other side to match it. I dropped the blade on the floor and picked up the rag. My vision was already starting to fade, so I knew it was working. I submerged myself in the overflowing bathtub with the water still running, spilling over onto the tile. My pants clung to my legs like peanut butter on the roof of your mouth. I held the gasoline-soaked

Cradling the Other Side

rag tightly over my face, opening my mouth and using my fingers to stuff part of it inside as I sunk my head under the water. I was either going to bleed out, drown, or overdose; one way or another I wouldn't have to be a letdown. I heard a faint ringing in my ears, but nothing else. I opened my eyes and saw nothing. I had been dead for a while, but I had never felt as alive as I did in that moment when everything went dark.

I suddenly processed the thought that had just run through my mind: I felt alive for the first time in too long. Thoughts of my mother and father rushed to my memory: my father working late hours as a surgeon, saving the lives of people who would give anything to experience life for just one more day, my mother reading me stories I couldn't understand as a child while my eyes closed and I drifted off. And now they'd come home to this. I was losing blood fast and I couldn't open my eyes. The clear water had mostly turned red and the tile had surely already become stained. I used every ounce of energy I could muster to pull the rag off my face. I turned to my side, reaching over the lip of the bathtub as my face protruded from the water and I gasped.

I began pulling myself over the edge of the tub, my hands in front of my body as my fingers curled against the wet tile. I managed to get my chest onto the edge of the tub. I needed to call for help, but my phone was on the counter. I gave myself one last push as I tumbled over the bathtub, falling front first onto the floor. I felt a sharp pain radiate through my torso and the floor beneath me getting wetter, and then I was still.

My mother came home first that day. I remember her face as she curiously walked up the stairs and then that unforgettable shock of horror when she opened the bathroom door. I could hear that scream from however far away the sky is. She dropped to her knees, putting her hand on the back of my head, gently rubbing her thumb across my wet, dark hair as she sobbed. My face was pressed against the floor, my chest was hovering about a quarter of an inch from it, and my legs were still halfway in the tub. She called my father and had him rush home as soon as he could. When he got there, he turned me over and found me lifeless with the bloody straight edge I had dropped on the floor plunged through my heart. I had lived, I had been dead, I had been awakened, and I had died.



Photography

Despair



Oil painting

Routine

Her dead gaze coated the hallway. She just stood there, eyes telling of sleepless nights and haunted daydreams. They painfully moved from one focal point to another. She knelt down, pulled the stainless steel bucket close to her, and grabbed the metal scrub inside. She didn't blink. Just washed half-heartedly, hands worn down, cracked and bloody. She was part of another universe. A universe of thought coaxing her every action into painful existence.

In her Colorado home with never-ending ceilings, the chandelier hung like the sensitive and fleshy teardrop in the back of her throat. The walls echoed with the laughter of children and the keyboard clacking of a husband steadily at work.

She got up off of the floor when she realized it was time to make breakfast. Tea, soup, all of their favorites set out nicely on the table. A ghostly chill blew through the kitchen window. She clasped the window shut.

"Good morning, honey," she announced.

Nobody responded.

She went about her day, picking up the bowls, still full of soup, off of the table and pouring them down the drain, one by one. Two little bowls, two big bowls; this was the way. Each morning she sat, watching the soup spiral down the drain into nothingness. This in itself felt like an eternity to her. An eternity that would, as always, too suddenly be gone.

Her next task included filling the children's lunch pails and presenting them on the dresser next to the door. She set them down, twitched anxiously, and twisted her son's lunch pail so that it faced just right. She turned and walked down the hall. As she passed her husband's coat hanger, dressed and appearing almost animate, she pulled a sleeve desperately to her nose, filling her nostrils with a scent long faded and no longer recognizable. Her imagination jumped in anticipation, attempting to recreate the smell of her husband. She could not remember. At the shock of this, chills consumed her. A single tear fell. She brushed it off.

She looked at the clock: 9:01 a.m. By this time her children and husband would have been walking out the door. Her husband always drove the boys to school and dropped them off on his way to work. This was her cue. She climbed up the windy wooden staircase to tidy up the boy's room, as always. Making their beds felt silly, but she did it anyways. Each fold, each crease, taking her deeper into a trance that kept her half in this world and half out. When she finished, she lay down on the floor, not a single thought penetrating her mind.

She awoke several hours later to find herself on the floor of her children's bedroom. This was normal. She acted as an infant who had just barely found the will to confront gravity, wrestling with the floor to lift herself up. She peered outside the window, too numb to notice the peach and vanilla color of the clouds, which stretched across the setting sky. She feared only the dark, and as long as the dark had not come to bruise the sky, she was okay.

In a daze, she floated down the stairs and into the kitchen. She stared at the refrigerator, her eyes lingering on school paintings still hung on magnets. One of them fell. It was one of Percy's, his little handprint made into a turkey for Thanksgiving. She snatched it before it could hit the ground and attached it back in its exact place. For a moment, she remembered his little blonde head running into the house, painting clenched in hand. Chills crept down her spine once again.

After preparing dinner, she sat down at an empty table. Two big plates, two small plates—this was the way. She ate only one or two bites and then stopped; she didn't want to be the only one eating. She noticed darkness approaching.

Darkness fell and after tucking the boys into bed she hurried down the stairs. At the bottom she kicked over the stainless steel scrub bucket, which hid in the shadow of the night. Water splashed about the floor. She stared blankly, but inside emotions began churning. The thought of anything out of the ordinary, especially in the dark, caused her to remember. Her blood turned into molten lava, reaching places in her body that had remained cold and untouched for several weeks. She ran into the kitchen and sat down on a chair. She fidgeted, moving from the middle to the edge of the chair. She lifted her fist up against her chin, then back down again. Out of the corner of her eye, her son's automatic toy rolled to the legs of the chair. She looked down to see nothing beside her. Becoming aware of her state of mind, she struggled to force down the swelling sensation just underneath her chest.

She anxiously ran to the kitchen sink and began scrubbing dishes. A drop of blood fell from her hands and into the soapy water. The entire sink appeared to be filled with blood. She twitched.

"What is happening to me?" she cried.

She rushed back into the living room, picked up the metal scrub lying on the ground, and threw it in anger. The scrub struck one of the still full lunch pails from earlier and caused it to fall to the floor. Next to the lunch pail, she noticed a newspaper with the headline "Father and Two Sons Die in School Shooting." It had been almost a month since she had faced the reality of what had happened to her family. For a moment she remembered arriving at the schoolyard that day, wrestling through the arms of a pale-faced policeman to reach the place where her family lay bloodied on the ground. She remembered the reflection of red and blue lights in

the windows of the classrooms and several strangers with faces appearing to have cried for an eternity. She snapped back when she noticed the swelling within her chest like a tidal wave. She ran outside the front door and into the night. A feeling of intense vibrating energy electrified her senses and combined with the rising emotion that had moved up and into her throat. She let out a scream.

When she awoke the next morning, every cell of her body felt alive. Her breaths were full and satisfying. She looked around her room; it was all fresh and new. She opened her window and stuck her nose into the coolness of the breeze. She noticed the humming of the bees in the lavender sway. Making her way carefully downstairs, she felt the coolness of the wood against her warm flesh and smiled at the glowing wooden handrail. She then opened up a cabinet, noticing that the handle was a metal knob in the shape of a heart with intricate designs in the center. This cabinet was where she had hidden dozens of letters from friends and family in a box.

She sat at the windowsill, gazing out into the wonder of the rising sun, and opened the first letter.



Broken Dolls



Scratchboard illustration

Broken Dolls

I didn't find my mother crouched in my cramped closet, absentmindedly folding laundry under the pretense of normalcy. I didn't find her standing in the garage, suddenly enraptured by a speck on the wall. I didn't find her waiting in the barren hallway either. Really, she found me.

I was smoothing out the matted hair of my least favorite doll—the only one that wasn't disfigured by scissors and gum—when she hurled herself into my room as if hit by blistering wind, lifting me up by the waist and scattering my toys aside in the process.

"Anna, baby." She was breathless, caressing my shoulders with her trembling limbs. Pleading with wide eyes, she said, "We're going somewhere, but we're not coming back. I need you to pack some of your favorite things."

I lowered my eyes from her nervous gaze, scanning the colorfully painted walls of my room: giraffes and elephants, zoo animals that she had painted herself. The paint was thinning with time. My zoo animals suddenly seemed so out of place. The room should've been sacred, but it was not a happy place.

Her steps were much more frantic now, not the carefully placed steps I knew. Gone were her inhibitions as badly packed suitcases and pieces of furniture were lugged and then hurled down the hall with vicious intent. Sleeves and pant legs spilled from the inside of the suitcases. I think I heard the crunching of wood. Gone was grace, and gone was patience. This was my mother, finally unravelling, blossoming into this free woman. She was not afraid. She didn't have anything left to suppress. I didn't dare say a word.

Her change frightened me.

"No, sweetie, it's all right," my mother said in a soothing voice while smoothing my back with her delicate fingers. "We'll find a new home." Tears spilled from the corners of her eyes as she tucked strands of long, stringy hair tightly behind her ear, holding it in place, holding her life in place. If she tugged on it any harder, it would all fall out, I thought. The most unusual smile stretched across her freckled, youthful face and twitched as she struggled to compose herself. She was vulnerable, childlike. No, I knew then that most things were not "all right."

She ran out of my bedroom almost as quickly as she had come. Off to my brother's room to reveal more antics, I was sure. All I could do was stare down at my hands and wonder when it all went wrong. My family was broken. At age nine, I still had half a mind to know that, to know when structures were abnormal and when things just weren't quite right. I picked up the doll again and held it in

Grandma's Buttons

my hands a bit tighter. Fingering the one eye, I remembered how my father had thrown the doll in one of his fiery tirades. The thick musk of sandalwood had drifted behind a blur of muscle as he lumbered after my mother. "Jack, please!" she shouted. She cried. He never had to say a word. It was just that look of blankness in his eyes, like a part of him wasn't there. The plastic head hit the wall and out popped a glass eye. My mother's frantic shouts absorbed the sharp, clanking sounds of glass on wood. He had backed her into the garage. The glass orb just wouldn't stop bouncing. I clamped sweaty palms over my ears, squeezing tight, willing my frenzied thoughts away. The harder I squeezed, the louder her screams. The glass ball just kept bouncing.

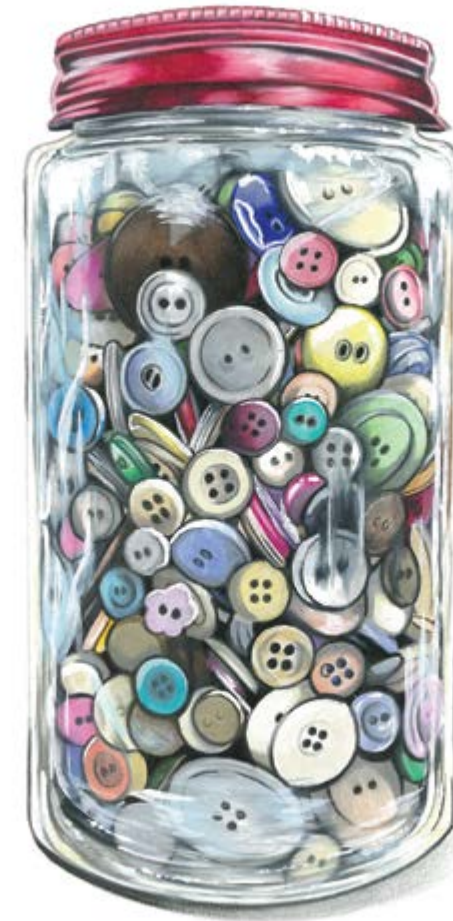
My family's perfect smile was cracking in place, but the miserable doll smiled on with that vacant eye. Her name was Nini. I should've hated her, but she was perfect to me.

Our home wasn't quite barren when we left. It was a bizarre scene, like a movie backdrop to a nuclear accident. Articles of clothing were left strewn across the floor, and discarded dishes and various trinkets that couldn't fit in the van seemed to stack higher and higher on counter tops. My brother, Benny, cried and lunged for a broken train, a toy that he had insisted on keeping, only to be pulled back by the hips and whisked away by my mother. We were ushered out of the house before I could even look back. Soon, we were both stowed away into the back seats of the van, hearing only gravel and dust under the tires as the car skidded out of sight.

"Why isn't Daddy coming?" Ben whined several times. The thought crossed my mind, but I dared not ask. He thrashed and kicked in his seat as well as any classically unobservant child can. I wanted to kick him for his naivete. Our mother only squeezed the wheel tighter.

It had been sunny skies for hours. My mother stretched her arm back between the seats, lending her hand for me to hold. I squeezed it and she gasped as if in pain. Cautiously examining her wrists, I noticed marks I could not have left that were purple and slowly fading to a dull yellow in some patches. I could recall several of the same dark splotches concealing her beautiful skin. Nothing unusual. What angered me was that I knew where they were from.

I lowered my eyes into my lap where they rested on the mangy doll. I hadn't realized how much of her hair I had ripped out in my frustration. Perpetually smiling, Nini stared back with that one vacant eye. It angered me to see her smile, like she was mocking me. I should've hated her, but I still loved her. For the life of me, I couldn't understand this puzzle. With my next breath, I lowered the window and raised her to the edge, holding only one of her chubby arms. I released her from my grip and she fell into the wind.



Colored pencil drawing



Aubrey Howell

Meet Ana

Food.

Fattening, gluttonous, and life threatening.

The perfect burger glistening with grease clinging to your thighs.

The cheese perfectly melted that adds to your stomach.

The perfectly toasted bun that adds yet another mark on your skin.

Starvation.

Pretty, skinny, and perfect.

Eating kills.

300 calories a day, 3 hours a day at the gym.

Counting calories, pounds, and ribs.

Food mocks me, hurting my body, stretching me out, covering me in ugly marks and hideous curdles under my skin.

No food. You won't get me in your clutches.

Food whispers in my ear, drawing me closer, telling me to binge my way through another night.

It only leads to a morning purge.

Laxatives, throwing up, and simple starvation.

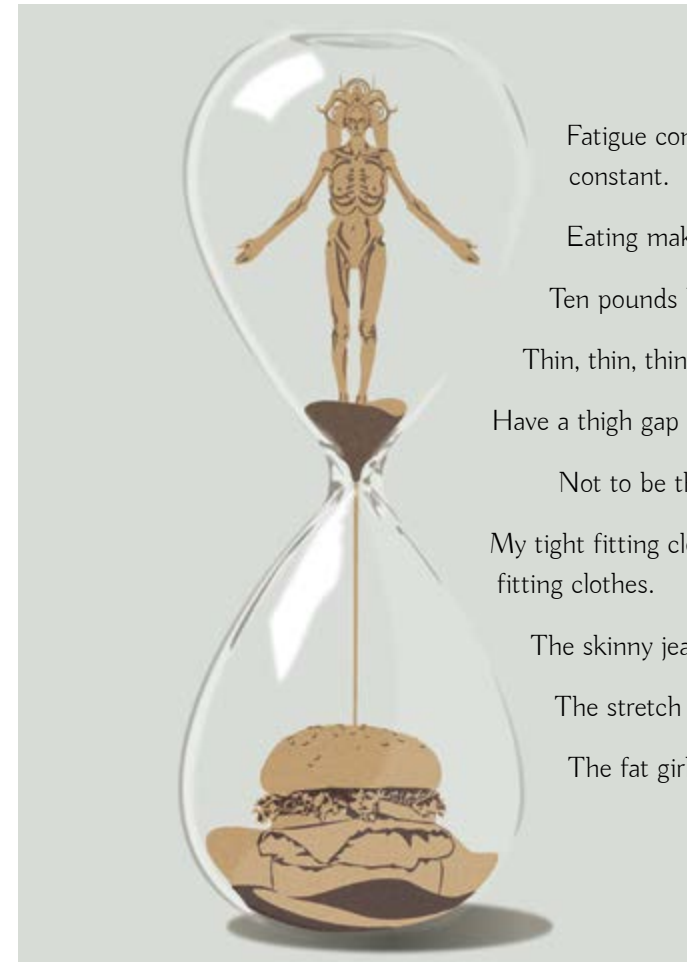
I WILL be beautiful.

Skin and bones.

Perfect.

Hyunsoo Kim

Meet Ana



Fatigue comes easily. Headaches are a constant.

Eating makes me feel worse.

Ten pounds left.

Thin, thin, thin.

Have a thigh gap

Not to be the fat friend

My tight fitting clothes aren't my friends' loose fitting clothes.

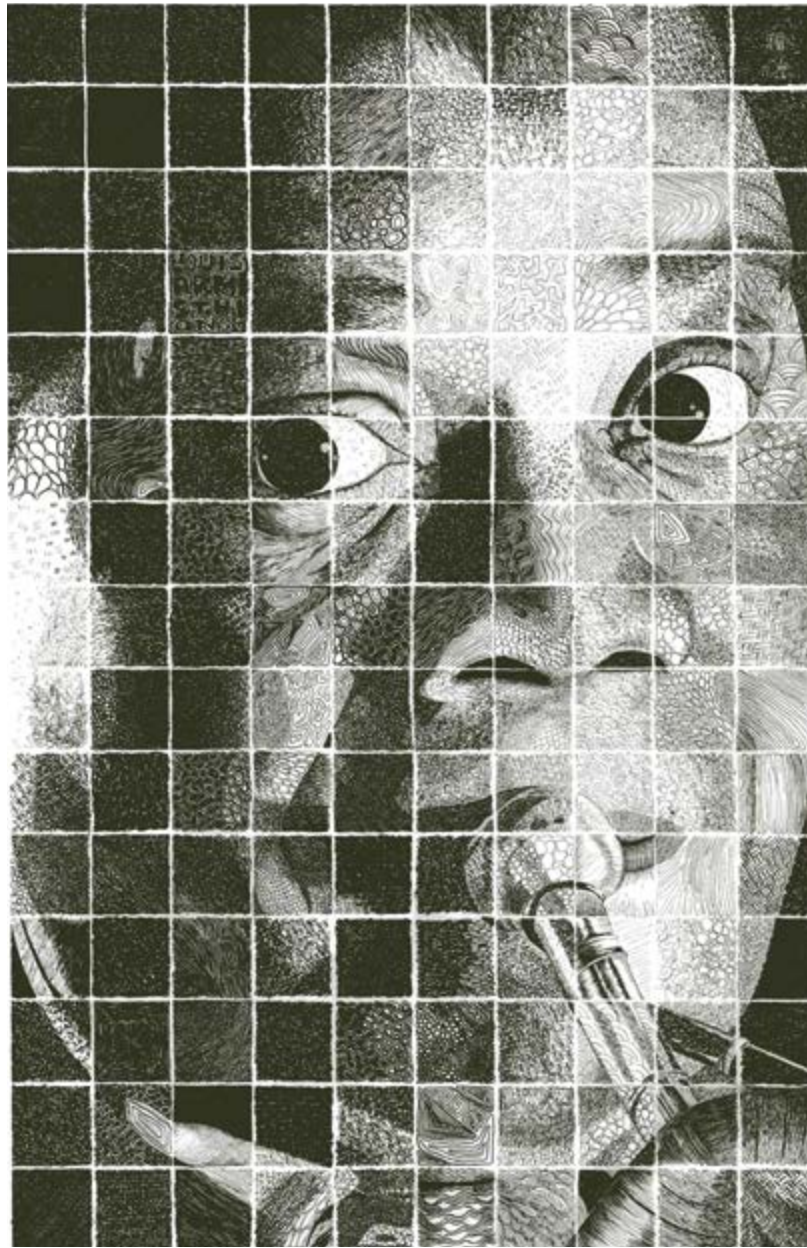
The skinny jeans aren't sausage casings.

The stretch marks will fade.

The fat girl fades away.

Digital illustration

All That Meat and No Potatoes!



Ink on bristol board

Fingersnaps

Dear Mrs. Manger,

You are a fat pig. I hate your guts, especially after you ate my Twinkie.

"Little brat," Neyta snorted, taking another bite of her muffin before marking the letter with a large red "F" and a "see me after class" note scrawled in the top left corner of the paper. Assigning the honesty notes was the counselor's idea of coming to terms with mean feelings in the second-grade class Neyta taught. It had been a tumultuous start of the year, and Neyta already had the worst devils in her classroom. *Pig, fatty,* and *tubby* were already nasty little nicknames those horrid little brats whispered behind her back.

"I am not fat," Neyta announced aloud as she finished off the muffin and licked her thick fingers clean from crumbs. Her left hand reached for the tray of blueberry muffins as the other hand continued to grade papers. As she sat in her small parlor-turned-office, the desk set under the large window facing her expansive and highly cultivated garden of flowers, sun poured in and warmed Neyta deep in her bones as the birds outside chirped, lulling her into a soft calm and slumber.

Dropping the pen that sat between two chunky fingers and leaning her head back, Neyta soaked in the solitude. Her left hand still rested on the muffin tray as the other nestled over her large belly. A startling but not unwanted breeze trickled in through the window, stroking her round cheeks and she brushed soft fingers through her twirling thin hair. As she began to drift off, thinking of the next batch of muffins baking in the oven—chocolate chip this time—an odd tingling and almost biting sensation began to gnaw at her fingers. Slightly unnerved by the feeling, Neyta wiggled her fingers and moved her hand away towards the edge of the tray, brushing them up against the muffins. She pierced her fingers into the deep flesh of the muffin top and brought the piece to her mouth, her large fingers engulfing her mouth, before dropping her left hand back onto the tray.

Seconds later, the sensation returned. As she groaned, the gentle call of slumber fled and the tingling turned into an odd stroke of her forefinger, followed by an awful bite. Neyta jerked forward, drawing her hand into her chest, and opened her eyes with a gasp. Squinting against the bright sunlight, two beady black eyes peeked

at her through her potted gardenias on the sill of the window. Neyta shrieked and jumped to her feet. Blinking, she looked around wildly for whatever she had seen. But it was gone.

Heart thumping, she pressed one shaking hand to her robust chest and sighed.

“Trick of the light,” she nodded. Raising her left hand to rub her sweating forehead, ashamed at her sudden, almost silly fright, Neyta froze.

One...two...three...four...Neyta blinked after counting the large, round, and stubby fingers on her left hand. Shaking her head, she counted again.

One...two...three...four...Neyta shrieked and staggered back, her large round bum crashing against the wicker chair behind her, her hand outstretched as if attempting to keep some monstrosity at bay. Losing her balance, she toppled back and slammed the back of her head against the hardwood floor before blacking out.

“Just a bout of bad luck, Mrs. Manger; I know losing a finger seems terrible, but just be extra careful and you’ll do fine.” Neyta marched out of the doctor’s office in the early morning, muttering under her breath about the insipidness of physicians. She had not spent the entire night in the emergency room screaming and squawking over the loss of her poor forefinger so the idiotic man could tell her it was a round of bad luck. She had seen those freaky black eyes, damn it!

Neyta hated the sneering looks those paramedics had given her as they wheeled her out of her home yesterday, shaking their heads at the utter disarray of her home. The ground was littered with cookie wrappers, empty trays that once contained brownies and muffins, and even a half-eaten pie—probably enough for those animals to think she was some porker!

“Looked at me as if I had gone and eaten my own finger,” Neyta barked to herself, “I would hardly call myself a glutton!”

Well, she would have none of it, and if the blasted creature that took her poor finger was still roaming about her home, she was going to get it. After buying every trap, insect killer, and rodenticide the hardware store sold, Neyta spent the rest of her afternoon planting them in every nook and cranny of the house, and, for good measure, all over her precious garden. The little bugger was going to come out and she’d have an end to it. Neyta shuddered at the thought of those beady eyes peering at her with a malicious glint, disgusted by their accusatory glare. Those eyes reminded her of the very same looks the little brats in her class gave her during lunch. Whatever creature it was that stole her precious finger, she was going to end its sorry life.

Despite her best efforts the tickling, prickling sensation returned in the night and with a jump towards the lamp she briefly glimpsed a flash of black eyes before

the room was lit. This time the rodent had gone too far, taking four of her lovely fingers away.

“Damn it all!” she screeched. Rushing down the stairs in her nightgown, she pulled the Yellow Pages out from her coffee table drawer and wrote down the names and numbers of every exterminator in the neighborhood, intending on calling them straightaway to her house in the morning. And in order for the beast not to steal any more of her fingers, she put on her gardener’s gloves and sat on her small hands throughout the rest of the night, eyes wide and wary.

Morning came and three exterminators arrived. Two exterminators decided the house was clear and bid their goodbyes, but Neyta was sure there was some sort of flesh-eating beast around and she persuaded the third exterminator to have one more look around with the promise of freshly baked gingersnaps.

As she was preparing what she promised and eating some for herself, Neyta took off the gloves she wore to wash her hands and shrieked in surprise when she noticed that yet another finger had simply vanished. The exterminator rushed into the kitchen in concern.

Neyta whirled around, jabbed a stubby hand at him, and screamed, “I want this entire house fumigated! You’re going to gas the thing out! I want an end to this. NOW!”

The man did as he was told and Neyta returned to her house, where every crack and hole that could be found had been boarded up, and traps were still laid about. She was sure the thing was definitely dead and despite being sad over the loss of five lovely fingers that the blasted rodent seemed to take a liking to, she had much to look forward to now that her home was safe. The finger stealing, bone munching, and knuckle crunching were gone.

The next day, as she was rummaging in her drawer for a clean pair of shorts, the nipping, prickling sensation again found its way to her hands. Withdrawing her hand in a flash and raising it high in the air, Neyta screamed out in anger. Now that it had taken her thumb, she was determined to end the little bugger once and for all.

Stomping down the stairs, Neyta shook her head. “No, no sir! I will not have this nonsense continue any longer!”

Running into the kitchen, she declared, “I’ll just burn you out!”

She set her house ablaze.

Neyta watched as her entire home burned, the sirens of the firemen drawing closer. Her heart swelled in happiness and with a laugh, she turned her back to the flames, ready to leave the uniformed men to their work. Neyta’s heart thumped wildly in her chest as she suddenly felt guilty for what she had done. Her mind raced with the thoughts of her panic; in the midst of her anxiety, she noticed that

she had bitten off a bit of the fatty skin at the edge of her finger.

She had taken a nibble and was repulsed by the thought of what she had done, but just as she was ready to spit it out, Neyta stopped. Her finger's skin didn't taste so bad. In fact, she found the taste to be ... absolutely delicious. She tasted chicken and ginger and blueberry all at once. She took another bite, and another and another, and before she knew it, all her fingers were gone.

Neyta couldn't resist her succulent flesh. Her mouth watered and she excitedly continued, eating away at her hands and up her arms. Her appetite grew insatiable and within moments she was on the ground, popping off toes. After five large bites of legs, Neyta continued feasting on her flesh. Before she knew it, only her head remained with her mouth wide open and her eyes flitting about. Unquenchable thirst for more set her eyes on the next morsel of flesh, and with a roll, she bounced down the road, mouth munching in anticipation.



I.M. Nepomuceno

I Am Not Discriminated Against

I have not been careful of the clothes I wear
 I have not been careful of the words I speak
 I have not been careful of the places I can freely walk
 But that is because
 I am not discriminated against

I have not seen people walk the other way
 I have not seen people grip their purses tighter
 I have not seen people lock their doors as I pass by
 But that is because
 I am not discriminated against

I have not come home with tears staining my face from harsh words
 I have not come home with blood and bruises on my body
 I have not come home in handcuffs and with chains around my hands
 But that is because
 I am not discriminated against

But why do humans discriminate against each other?
 Is it because we have done something wrong?
 No.
 It's all because of the little difference
 In the color of our skin



Daniela Sindoni

Me, Myself, and Eye



Photography

Meghan Gruhin

Becoming a Me

Look inside to find
a crippled, crunched and crusty
dark and damaged
broken (barely) I.

Drowned drunk—but still alive
So snuffed, so small,
hardly visible to the naked eye
The (barely) I.

Hardly—but seen
The (visible) I
now sees hope
and grows.

Struggles, strives, survives
and thrives!
The (barely) I
becomes a Me.

Finally, see
a Me that I would like to be.



Finding Myself in New York

I slowly woke up to the sound of my roommates quietly conversing over granola bars. I hid underneath the thick covers of my hotel bed so that they wouldn't know that I was awake. I didn't want to get up, but at the same time I couldn't believe that I was going to the Empire State Building in a couple of hours along with my classmates. It was our third day in New York. I was with my school's distinguished choir, and before we performed at Carnegie Hall, we were enjoying the sights of the Big Apple.

When my choir teacher, Mrs. Brantt, first announced to us that we were going to New York, I was blown away. To me, going to the Big Apple seemed as tangible as becoming an astronaut. There was Broadway, Times Square, Central Park, and I was going to go there? I waited for someone to pinch me awake as we performed our usual concerts and fundraised for our airfare. Even when I woke up early that Wednesday morning, drove to LAX, and walked to the terminal with my classmates, it still felt like a dream. But with each minute that passed, flying across the country, getting on the bus to go to Manhattan, and finally settling into our hotel, it became more real.

"Rachel's still asleep?" Ingrid, one of my roommates, asked.

That was my cue; I yawned as I emerged from the covers. After finishing our granola bars, we were dressed, with our teeth brushed, faces washed, and makeup applied. We walked down the hall to the elevator where two groups of four choir members were waiting. I looked to the left side window where curtains veiled Times Square. Just then the elevator doors opened and we all piled inside. When we reached the lobby floor, we ran to join the rest of our group, checked in with our chaperones, and departed from our hotel, descending to the subway.

As my classmates passed through the turnstiles, I opened my bag to get my subway pass. I couldn't find it. I had forgotten it in my hotel room. I turned around in a panic but immediately noticed a ticket dispenser. I jumped in line, formulating a plan. *If I can just purchase a temporary packet of tickets, I can jump back into the group without anyone noticing.*

I got to the machine, punched in the appropriate buttons, and within a minute, a packet of tickets spat out of the machine. I turned around to rejoin my classmates, but everyone had vanished. I felt the blood drain from my face. My eyes slowly widened in terror. Then, my mouth gaped open as I uttered to myself in disbelief, *No...No! There's no way they had gone that fast!*

I bolted to the subway entrance, praying that there was a chaperone, or one or two of my classmates waiting for me. *Please! Please! Please be there!* My eyes settled on the entryway, desperate to catch sight of any familiar face I knew, but no one was there. Everyone was gone and I was all alone in the subway.

I faltered, my mind racing as I started to panic. *What am I going to do? WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?! Gosh DAMN IT! DAMN IT, Rachel!* I paced frantically around the small subway station, hyperventilating and chastising myself for what I had done. *Are you actually that STUPID?! How stupid could you get?! You really are THAT naive! You're just a STUPID child! You always have been!*

I suddenly grabbed hold of myself. *Wait. Calm down, Rachel. Calm down. It's okay. You made a mistake. It's all right. You have your phone in your pocket. You can call someone for help. It's the only way you can get out of this. You can do this.* Taking a few long, shaky breaths, I took out my phone and dialed.

One of my roommates, Sam, picked up the phone. "Hello, Rachel?"

"Yes, Sam?"

"Where are y-? Hold on, let me put Mrs. Brantt on the phone."

Shoot. What was she going to say? Is she worried or mad? I don't know. I waited anxiously for an answer, listening to the silence on the other end. Then I heard my teacher's voice in my ear.

"Rachel," she said in an agitated tone.

My mouth pulled back into a thin-lined smile as I closed my eyes. *She's disappointed in me.* "Hi..." I said sheepishly.

I listened to my teacher's directions to stay put; she, along with a classmate, Lexi, were on their way to pick me up. I sighed with relief. *Everything's going to be okay. They're on their way to pick me up and they'll be here in a few minutes.* After a long, anxious wait, I heard Lexi calling my name. I turned around and there they were. I exhaled as a smile grew on my face. *Thank goodness.*

My teacher slowly repeated my name as she and Lexi approached me. Mrs. Brantt then proceeded to tell me that the next time I was faced with this kind of dilemma I should notify a chaperone. I told her I was very sorry for my mistake, that I would pull over a chaperone for future reference, and that it wouldn't happen again. After I apologized to them, my entire body relaxed. *It's all over. They found me and everything's going to be all right.*

The three of us passed through the gates and started to wait for our train. Then Lexi turned to me. "Rachel are you okay?"

"Yeah," I told her, smiling, glad that I was reunited with my group.

"Oh, I wouldn't know what I would have done if I was in your shoes."

“Yeah,” Mrs. Brantt joined in. “If I was you, I would have been very afraid of being all alone in the subway.”

Lexi jumped in. “Yeah, I would have been so traumatized about getting lost in the subway, I wouldn’t have been able to call somebody.”

Then my teacher and classmate threw their heads back and started to laugh.

I looked at them as my body froze. *Are they actually joking about this? What is happening?* Then I noticed that the two of them were looking at me, still laughing. I quickly joined in, faking a smile. “Yeah!” I said. “Good thing that didn’t happen!”

Then Mrs. Brantt pulled out her phone and said, “Hey let’s take a picture!”

“Yeah!” Lexi immediately replied. “This can be counted as one of the many highlights of our trip.”

They immediately grabbed me and posed for the photo. I looked around frantically, searching for someone to pull me out of their grasp, but there was nothing I could do. I painfully pulled the corners of my lips back to reveal my clenched teeth, struggling to keep myself together, but thin streams of tears still managed to glaze my cheeks as my teacher snapped the photo. Just then, our train arrived. I went inside with Mrs. Brantt and Lexi tagging along. I grasped onto a subway handle, with frantic questions springing out of my brain. *Why are they making me feel so guilty? I already apologized to them for my mistake. Why couldn’t they just move on from this?! A sob choked out of my throat as the train started moving.*

“Are you okay, Rachel?” Mrs. Brantt asked.

“No,” I moaned.

“I’m sorry. Is it because you were scared?” she asked, concerned.

Of course I was, but didn’t she know that that wasn’t what I was upset about? “No!” I blurted out, sniffing.

“Well, what is it?”

I then muttered a jumble of words about not liking the way she and Lexi were treating this situation as a joke. I knew I wasn’t telling them what was really going on in my head, but I was relieved when they decided to give me some space. For the rest of the subway ride, we were silent.

Soon our train eased to a stop and the three of us jumped out to meet up with the rest of our group. When I caught sight of them, I hoped that this experience was finally over, but instead, my classmates came to me one by one, asking if I was okay after getting lost in the subway. I fell back into my guilt, all the while hiding it from my classmates. As we walked towards the Empire State Building, one junior walked next to me like an excited puppy and kept asking about the incident. I restrained myself from screaming aloud and struggled to fake my happy demeanor. Everyone meant well, but all I wanted was for them to let me move on.

Just then, we looked up and saw the Empire State Building, pointing and stretching towards the sky. As my choir group reacted excitedly, I stood silent, pondering what had just happened. I felt winded and hollow. And just then, memories rushed back to me.

I remembered walking alone on the school grounds, looking straight ahead or downwards to avoid eye contact. I would be getting out of a class where I had just said something stupid while answering a question. My classmates’ eyes would still linger on me, their snickers muffled but still clear in my ears. We were all kids then; they meant no harm, but I always heard them say, *Gosh, Rachel. Why even open your mouth at all?* I would cringe as I would tuck another part of myself away, until I became more introverted and meek.

The memory dissolved as I found myself at the top of the Empire State Building. Everyone rushed out to check out the view. I followed, slowly stepping outside to be greeted by the cold winds of high altitude. At that moment I felt like I was walking on air. I grasped the bars of the observation deck and looked out onto the view of Manhattan. My chest felt heavy from the anger, guilt, and sadness caged inside of me, but at that moment I realized that throughout my whole life, I had tried to cater to everyone’s opinion of me when the only opinion that mattered was mine.

I’m not going to hold myself back anymore, I told myself. When I get back home for graduation, I’m going to let my built-up walls crumple to my feet. If people think that I’m weird or odd, I’m not going to care because I’m going to be happy that I’m being myself. On that Friday morning, on the third day of my choir’s trip to New York, I looked down at the city, inhaled the cool, crisp air, and exhaled the heaviness from my chest. I closed my eyes and felt like myself again.



The Gromble



Photography

Gifts of the Season

I have never considered myself to be a professional vocalist, but simply someone who loves to sing. Luckily, I am talented at singing, which fed my ambition at an early age to improve my ability and become a famous singer. However, I later resolved to set that dream aside. Not that I believe my voice is mediocre, but I have often wondered if it was selfish of me to invest so much time in my voice if I was not going to make a career out of it. Everyone can understand that lingering feeling you get when you have a talent but are not really sure what part it is meant to play in your life; fear of the unguaranteed often inhibits people from pursuing their goals.

Although I now know that gifts are meant to be shared, I did not fully appreciate this until three winters ago when I joined my high school chamber choir in caroling for the patients at the Mission Hospital in Mission Viejo. It was then that I understood a gift is always worth more when shared—especially when shared with someone who needs it most.

It was a white Christmas, a bleached white hospital bed sheet Christmas. The halls were scattered with IV bags dangling like ice crystals, and filled with the smell of pine cones and disinfectant. I had been to the hospital several times for sick relatives or visits to my rheumatologist, so this was not a foreign place to me. However, for many of my peers this was their first visit ever, and I was simply amazed by their lack of decorum. The hospital staff was begrudgingly patient with our rowdy group of high school choir kids, who were eager to impress with their heavily rehearsed carols, bouncing down the hall to the elevator. Chaperones corralled us with sharp “hushes” and “shushes” wherever we went, so we huddled together like a mass of whispering sheep. Soon I would not be alone in noticing that our enthusiasm clashed with the somber environment of the hospital.

Our audience, however, was not like our typical audience. We had sung before judges, overbearing parents and relatives, the entire student body, other choirs and even strangers on the street, but we had never sung in front of an audience so humbling. The first ward we entered was the children’s ward. Inside was a melancholy little girl, her head tilted heavily to the side. Although the bed was child-sized, she looked like a tiny doll tucked under the heavy blankets. Her parents were on either side of her, holding her hands and whispering softly. Upon seeing us, the little girl sprung up, lifting her small frame off of the bed to greet us. We introduced ourselves and asked if she would like to hear a song. We couldn’t stay long, but her delighted smile and warm “thank you” was all we needed to know that she enjoyed our short visit. As we turned back into the main hall, I heard a shrill, childlike “Merry Christmas!”

ringing from behind. We were off to a good start, but my peers and I were about to face a far tougher crowd.

Since our group was not allowed to go to certain places in the hospital, the staff led us to the rooms of specific patients who needed some holiday cheer. We often encountered family members comforting their loved ones. While we always received a grateful applause from them, the patient lying in bed was often indifferent or too weak to reply. A few were overjoyed by our visit, requesting encores, but plenty of others were rather disengaged. I began to notice that the others in my group had grown ill at ease; they spent more time arguing over which carol to sing next than actually singing. I was the shyest one of my peers, but to see my normally exuberant friends become timid in the face of sickness and suffering made my heart sink. We sang, unwavering, but with each step, my feet became heavier.

At last we reached our final and most difficult test: the cancer ward. A short debriefing from our chaperones made us feel solemn about the experience we were about to have. The only audible sound I could detect was the dull hum of the lights above us in the hall. A young nurse in pink scrubs, with dark hair and smiling eyes, approached us and led our group into one of the rooms. Inside was a woman lying in bed, hooked up to many different machines. The room was dark, but you could still see how pale she was. She looked like a skeleton, her eyes sunken and dark. Her gaze lay heavily away from us. She looked helpless and in pain. Apparently, her whole family was with her, sitting at the far end of the room. Everyone in our group was reluctant to enter, so I went in first, moving closer and closer to the family and to the bed to make room for the others. As our group filed in, the woman in bed didn't move or even acknowledge our presence.

I do not remember what song we sang, only that it had to be our best performance of it ever. We started out steady and rehearsed, but everything changed when the woman suddenly lifted her head as if she had just noticed us. We could see into her somber eyes, void of life and scanning each of our faces down the line. I felt uneasy as if she would discover that my heart was not nearly as cheerful as my voice led on, that behind the glad tidings I had set out to bring, my soul was low and aching. I saw her face wince in pain as she adjusted her head again, and something inside me snapped.

The weight of guilt finally broke me and I began to question what I was doing here, barging in on this private family visitation, barging into perhaps the most difficult time in this woman's life. I dreaded the thought that this amateur high school choir had no effect on her state of mind except as an annoying episode in her day, that this was all just a pointless charade. From that look of pain, I feared that my voice could not bring this woman any peace.

Then suddenly, the woman began to cry and I immediately thought I had done something wrong. I glanced around at my friends, and many of them had also begun to cry, not in sobs but with gentle tears streaming down their faces. Maybe the woman thought we sounded terrible or maybe she saw right through us, but it was not as it initially seemed at all. I looked back at the woman and I was shocked to see that she was smiling; her tears were not tears of pain but tears of joy. My confusion quickly evaporated as I realized that in that very moment, I was part of something so much bigger than myself. I began to feel the tears streaming down my own face. Everyone was crying now. Never before had I felt so much emotion in one room.

At the end of our song, we were all smiling again, filing out of the room saying, "Merry Christmas" and "Happy Holidays!" while the woman used all of her strength to nod her head and whisper "Thank you," tears still spilling out of her eyes. While we regrouped outside, sharing tissue packets and sympathetic smiles, the nurse explained that the woman had been diagnosed with terminal cancer; this was likely her last Christmas.

Now I know what real empathy tastes like: it is bitter like a tear. I saw that those patients lying in bed were no different than me, no different than my friends, no different than the chaperones or the doctors or the hospital staff. They just happened to be people who were sick during the holidays. Didn't anyone tell the illnesses that it was Christmas? Didn't anyone tell cancer that these people had someplace else to be? That they had families they needed to go home to and celebrate with? What were we celebrating here? I was lagging behind, losing the group, making no effort to catch up as I contemplated the gravity of what had just occurred. My heart was heavy and my throat was dry, making it impossible to bring life to a song.

Then, all of a sudden I heard it: "Carol of the Bells." The group had reassembled—their tears not yet dry on their cheeks but their voices rising to euphoric sounds that filled the hall. I lost my inhibitions and trotted up to the front of the company, joining in with a triumphant voice: "Hark, how the bells, sweet silver bells / All seem to say throw cares away!" We were more than the sum of our parts now; we had meaning in our song and we sang as one voice. At the end of the piece, an abrupt silence followed and we all held our breath until—after what felt like ages—a great applause erupted from an invisible audience all around us. I looked to my left into a darkened room where anonymous sock-covered feet poked out from under blankets, attached, I assumed, to a body that disappeared behind a curtain. I heard a loud cupping of hands, and I felt joy.



Passages



Photography

For the Ones We Leave Behind

Annette stood in the foyer greeting guests for as long as she could. There was only so much “I’m sorry for your loss” she could take before she excused herself and made a break away from the swarm of people offering their condolences. She snuck up the stairs of her childhood home until she found her mother’s room.

When they were children, Annette and her older sister, Carey had each silently claimed a specific spot in their mother’s room. Carey usually sat on the floor in front of the bed or in the plushy red chair in the corner while Annette always found herself curled up against her mother’s side in the middle of the bed. It was Annette’s favorite place in the entire house, and she would often be found wrapped up in the blankets on the bed even when her own room was just down the hall.

The night before the funeral, Annette had searched the house for remnants of her childhood, but in preparation for the reception, Carey had spruced up their family home with bouquets of fake flowers and cheap candles. Her sister was getting an early start on preparing the house to be put up for sale and had packed up most of their childhood items in boxes in the garage. Annette never thought her sister would touch their mother’s room without her. She was wrong.

Annette stared longingly at the bed her mother used to sleep in. She wanted to hide under the covers while her mother consoled her.

“They’ll be gone soon,” her mother would say. “You can stay here for awhile, but eventually you’ll need to go back downstairs.”

“Why?” Annette would ask. “They don’t need me there.”

“Not everything is about you, Annie.”

Annette knew that if she curled up on that bed, she would never want to leave, and while that was the preferred alternative to socializing with mourning guests downstairs, the thought made her uncomfortable. The sheets had been washed, and the bed was made up with fresh, yellow-flowered sheets she’d never seen before. The comfort she was searching for could no longer be found there.

She decided to sit in her mother’s bathtub instead. There wasn’t much you could change about a bathtub, and Annette was happy to find something that remained familiar. She liked that she could hide inside of it. When she was small, she would lay her body flat against the bottom of the tub like a corpse, and the only way anyone could see her was if they were standing directly over the tub. It was an excellent place to hide. Her body was too big for that now. If she wanted to lie down completely, she had to crumple up her body and bring her knees as close to her chest as they would go. It was very uncomfortable.

Annette scratched at the itchy, black pantyhose she had borrowed from Carey, who had admonished her that morning, saying, “No one shows their bare legs at a funeral.” While Annette admitted that Carey was right, she took particular pleasure when her nails ripped a small run in the tights just above the knee. Annette lightly tugged at the sheer fabric and encouraged the tear to continue down her leg toward her foot. Her glee was cut short when she remembered that her mother would disapprove.

The muffled sympathies and cautious movements of the guests downstairs were still audible, and Annette craved something to drown them out. No matter their relation to her, they all said the same thing. She wasn’t sure if that was a reflection of her lack of relationship with them or if there was simply some script lying around that people unknowingly seemed to follow when faced with death. They all had pleasant things to say about her mother, but Annette wanted them to stop reminding her that her mother was dead and that she was still here.

She wanted to correct them and say, “No, she’s just running late. I’m not sure where she is, but I know she’ll be here soon.”

Annette didn’t like the way the past tense felt in her mouth. It was too final. It lacked hope.

The bathroom door slid open against the carpeting and soft footsteps entered the room. On instinct, Annette ducked her head and slid down the back of the tub until her body was completely folded up. Her head hit the bottom of the tub with a loud thunk and she groaned in pain.

To the left of her, someone laughed.

“Are you really trying to hide?”

Annette wriggled her body back up into a seated position and scowled at the intruder. Her sister, Carey, stood over her, a half-empty bottle of red wine in one hand and a blue paper plate piled high with appetizers balanced in the other. It was impressive how many wontons she had managed to cram onto the small plate.

“You’re missing out on all the fun,” Carey said with a smile.

“That was kinda the point,” Annette said, rubbing her head.

“It’s getting better out there. Most people have already left or they’re just talking on the porch. It’s pretty safe now.”

“How did you know where I was?”

“I didn’t. I thought you had gotten in your car and left completely, but Joy said she saw you go upstairs. Are you hungry? I brought wontons.”

Carey held out the appetizer plate like a peace offering.

“No.”

“Good,” Carey said. “I didn’t want to share these anyway.”

Carey set down the open wine bottle on the bathroom counter and plopped

herself beside the tub. She leaned her back against the porcelain and dipped a fried wonton into the artichoke dip before popping it into her mouth.

“This,” she said, still crunching on the wonton, “is one of those weird food things where you’ve got two items that shouldn’t go together but do—are you sure you don’t want to try some?”

“No. You know I don’t like fried foods.”

Her sister seemed offended at hearing this.

“Since when?” Carey asked.

“Since forever,” Annette said tiredly. “Please go away.”

“Didn’t you eat the calamari at Suzanne’s engagement party?”

“No. You ordered it, but I didn’t eat it.”

“I could’ve sworn you did. Are you sure? What about fish and chips?”

“That’s fried.”

“Hush puppies?”

“No.”

“Churros?”

“Can you stop?” Annette snapped. “Just go away.”

Carey turned to look at her sister. Tears were streaming down Annette’s face now.

Carey jumped up, kicked off her heels, and pulled her black blazer from her shoulders before tossing it defiantly in the bathroom sink.

“C’mon,” Carey said playfully, smiling down at her sister. “Shove over.”

“No,” Annette said stubbornly, wiping eyes with the sleeve of her sweater. “Go away.”

Carey stretched one long leg over the side of the tub. She pulled the wine bottle off the counter, and the rest of her body followed gracefully as she slid down to the bottom of the tub across from her sister. As she stretched her legs out the length of the tub, Annette pulled hers closer to her chest.

“So why the bathtub?” Carey asked.

“Do you not understand what go away means?”

“I used to hide in here when Mom got mad at me,” Carey continued, ignoring her sister. “She would stomp in here, furious, hoping to catch me hiding in the closet or underneath her bed, but she never checked the tub.”

Carey took a swig from the wine bottle and extended it to her sister. Annette shook her head.

“Why did you change Mom’s sheets?” Annette asked as Carey took another drink.

Carey wiped her lips. “Because they needed to be washed.”

“No. They didn’t.”

“I’m not going to fight with you about Mom’s sheets. That’s stupid.”

"You should've left them alone. They were hers."

"They were sheets."

"But they were hers!"

"I knew you were going to make a big deal out of this," Carey said, shaking her head.

"And so you did it anyway?!"

"Things needed to be washed. We needed to start putting things in boxes. Someone had to do it."

"And you decided to start without me?"

"I wasn't going to wait around for you to finally show up so we could start. You took too long." Upon seeing her sister's face, she backtracked quickly. "I'm sorry," Carey said quietly. "That wasn't entirely fair. I know you had trouble getting someone to watch Sarah. Not to mention trying to buy a ticket out here on such short notice."

Annette was quiet for a while. "It wasn't just that," she admitted finally. "I had a hard time even thinking about all this. Every time I tried to book my ticket I was reminded that even though I was going home, I wasn't going to see her. I just really didn't want to get on that plane and then drive here and find out that I had completely missed her. I didn't want to be in this house when she wasn't here. It doesn't feel right without her. I don't like it."

"I know—"

"And then you packed up all of our stuff, and I felt like even more of a stranger. I felt that this couldn't be real because I didn't recognize anything. Hell, I didn't even recognize half the people downstairs who were trying to tell me stories about Mom. I was listening to them all talk and I started to wonder if I even knew her at all."

"Why? Because some neighbor told you a story about how Mom saved the cul-de-sac Christmas light display because she had two extra extension cords and a blow-up snowman?"

"You heard that one, too?" Annette asked, smiling a little.

"Yeah. Joy told me about it. They were all standing around complaining about how there just weren't enough lights and if only we had another extension cord, we could drape this bunch over this shrubbery. Mom drove to the store and bought the extension cord because for some reason, no one else thought to go out and buy one."

"And there was something about a snowstorm?"

"Yeah, there was a lot of snow and no one wanted to drive, but Mom drove anyway," Carey said, laughing. "She was quite the hero."

The sadness returned to Annette's face quicker than Carey had expected. She grabbed Annette's hand and squeezed.

"You're not the only one who misses her," Carey said.

"I never got to say goodbye."

"Is that what you're hung up on? Saying goodbye matters a lot less than you think it does. You get to remember her healthy. She was sick for weeks. She was miserable when I was with her."

"But you got to say goodbye."

"So did you. You just didn't know it."

"Somehow I think that's worse."

"This isn't a competition. We both cared about her. We both lost her."

Tears flooded Annette's eyes, and she gripped her sister's hand.

"I won't pack up anything else without you," Carey said. "I promise."

Annette fell against her sister's chest, and Carey wrapped her arms tightly around her.

"Come back downstairs," Carey said. "I'm sure we can find some non-fried food you can eat."

"I can't believe you didn't remember that I hate fried food," Annette said, trying to wipe her eyes again.

"You can't expect me to remember everything," Carey teased.

That night, the two sisters sat on the floor of their mother's bedroom and went through the things their mother left behind. They ate lasagna off paper plates—Carey used their mother's recipe—and drank copious amounts of wine. Some items were put into boxes and some were sorted between the two sisters, but by early morning, Carey and Annette had packed up everything in the room. It took another two weeks to completely pack up the house, but they eventually did that, too.

That night was the beginning of a tradition for the two sisters. They called each other more often and always made time to visit one another on their mother's birthday. They ate dinner and talked about their lives, and they always told stories about their mother. This didn't mean that they missed their mother any less. Grief had a way of creeping up on them when they weren't paying attention, but each year it became less debilitating. Eventually the sisters stopped counting the days. Time was sneaky when it came to grief; it only repaired things when no one was paying attention.



Leanne Black

Zen



Photography

Madeline Gonzales

A blank sheet of paper

A blank sheet of paper
Under the weight of a hand
Begs to be transformed
But the pain it can't withstand

An empty cup on a counter
Thirsts for something more
But cannot support the ocean
That another has in store

Wishes upon wishes
We harbor in our hearts
Long to swell and be fulfilled
Afraid of being ripped apart

Upon the transformation
From youth to weathered soul
An essence is forgotten
Left out in the cold.



Guodong Wang

Peace

Looking out of the window,
I can recognize the shape of raindrops,
running along,
one, two, three
comes along.
It becomes the stream on the crystal.

Walking along the beach,
feeling the warm water run through my toes,
I can taste the salt from the air,
wind touches my face softly,
close my eyes,
I am flying with seagulls.

Sitting on grass,
I am surrounded by green elves,
smelling the fresh odor,
which runs into my nose,
sniff as hard as I can,
I become a mustang running in the prairie.

At the top of the mountain,
the city lies under my feet,
the moon climbs into the sky,
tail lights become the sands of the desert,
I stand still under the moonlight,
appreciating the beauty of the world.



Chaoyi Guo

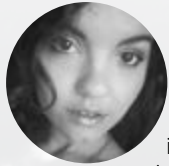
Sunset



Photography

WALL

2016 STAFF BIOS



Karyn Renee Bailey Editor-in-Chief

Karyn Renee Bailey fell in love with writing in her moments floating in an abyss of sorrow and confusion. Her favorite type of writing is creative nonfiction because it reworks the truth in a way that brings meaning to even the most chaotic of circumstances. She is inspired most by the brilliance of her peers and the support of those who love her unconditionally. Keep an eye out for her spoken word performances at the coffee shops that don't begin with a star or end in the casual term for money. She can be reached at karynrenee@yahoo.com.

Gina Victoria Shaffer Faculty Advisor



Gina Victoria Shaffer teaches composition and creative writing as a professor of English at Saddleback College. She previously served on the faculty of UCLA Writing Programs. Before becoming an educator, she worked as a newspaper reporter, magazine editor, and theater critic. A published playwright whose works have been staged throughout Southern California and in New York, she earned her Ph.D. in English at UC Irvine. She is perpetually inspired by the creativity and innovation of the students who staff WALL and of those who contribute their words and images to it.



Sara Humzeh Fiction Editor / Copy Editor

Sara Humzeh spends most of her days slinking along cobblestoned paths in the shadows of ancient towns, gazing in awe at the jauntily dancing flags bearing the crests of kings and queens, and trudging across legions of land in search of gold. An avid reader of all fiction genres and a Star Wars fanatic, she is always listening out for the familiar wheezing of a Type 40 TARDIS. Sara is majoring in creative writing with a keen interest in Romantic literature and medieval history. She dreams of scriptwriting as she works towards completing her first novel. Sara is inspired by her loving family, Korean melodramas, and the rich history and culture of the Arabian world. May the Force Be With You.

Christopher Shonafelt Fiction Editor



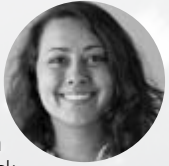
Christopher Shonafelt is an English student who likes coffee, beaches, hikes, city streets, redwood trees, strange conversations with friends & strangers, and, occasionally, writing about these things. He has appeared on stage in Saddleback's productions of *All in the Timing* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and his work has been featured in previous issues of WALL. Send him your questions, comments, critiques, anonymous confessions, odd anecdotes, and rambling monologues at christophershonafelt@gmail.com.



Leanne Black Art Editor / Graphic Designer / Layout Editor

Leanne Black is Wall 2016's enthusiastic and energetic art editor and graphic designer. With coffee as dark as her last name in hand, she embraces the creative process in design and photography. When she's not creating design solutions, she's probably cheering for her beloved LA Galaxy at a soccer match or spending time outdoors with her crazy dog Cozmo. You can visit her website at www.bylmb.com.

Tawnye Vaughan Graphic Designer / Layout Editor



Tawnye Vaughan has been studying graphic design at Saddleback College. As owner of Flame of the Soul Design, she is a self-proclaimed romantic with an eye for design and an empathetic connection with her clients. One of her main philosophies is that anything can be a canvas: a wall, hair, makeup, nails, a desk, paper, concrete, even skin. You can contact her at www.flameofthesoul.com.



Megane Browne-Allard Personal Narrative Editor

Megane Browne-Allard enjoys buying books but unfortunately does not end up reading most of them. Her talents include pointing out cute dogs, practicing yoga, and making tea that she usually forgets to drink. She will be venturing up to Oregon this fall to study English and creative writing. She is very fond of stories and is always happy to receive book recommendations. You can contact her at mbrowneallard@gmail.com.

Alik Christiansen Poetry Editor



Alik Christiansen is a simple man who finds solace in creativity. He can often be found patiently perusing through crates of records or scrupulously sifting through clothing at dime stores and thrift shops. His precarious endeavor as a writer began at Saddleback College and will continue at whatever institution his wavering mind chooses to attend thereafter. He is very grateful for his family, colleagues, and friends for their affection and contribution to his life and story.



M. Monge Poetry Editor

M. Monge is an aging human being who traverses the great unknown. All she knows is that she knows nothing, and yet she hopes this nothing might be filled with possibilities and plight. "I don't know, maybe" is etched in her soul to remind her that when she writes the future is ever changing. Impractical ideas are her specialty and being neurotically on time is her defining trait. She also loves to sleep. Mad is dedicated to those who know they have nothing to lose to this empty world.

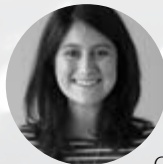
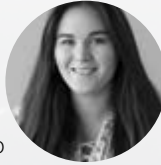


Carlos Marquina Photography Editor

Carlos Marquina is an ambitious photographer with talent prevailing early in the photography realm. His eyes hold fast to skateboarding with artwork recognized by skateboard magazines. More of his work can be found at www.flickr.com/photos/carlosmarquina/.

Madeline Gonzales Personal Narrative Committee / Publicity Chair

Madeline Gonzales is a 20-year-old communications major with a strong love for dance, photography, and her family. She is not a writer, but she appreciates a well-written book. A lot of things still scare her, but she is doing her best to ensure that her imagination isn't one of them. Inquiries: madelinerae14@gmail.com

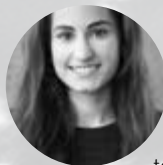
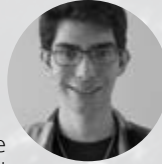


Rachel O'Shaughnessy Personal Narrative Committee / Copy Editor

Rachel O'Shaughnessy is a first-year student at Saddleback who plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in creative writing, a minor in performing arts, and a master's in education. She hopes to attend either Chapman or UC Riverside due to her love of California. She's thinking about becoming a freelance writer or novelist while being an English teacher for K-12 students. When she is not studying for her classes, she can be found spending time with her friends and family, practicing her music, through piano and voice alike, and writing articles for theodysseyonline.com.

Blake Puchalski Fiction Committee / Copy Editor

Blake Puchalski loves to read and become engrossed in a variety of stories and formats including, but not limited to, books, shows, movies, or even comic books; he's a DC Universe guy. His passion for seeing fictional worlds become clear, unique, and defined environments helped pave his aspiration to one day become a professional editor and writer. Blake's ideal reading realm is the fantasy genre, but fiction in general is his forté. The constant encouragement from both family and friends helps generate his desire to share amazing stories.



Lauren Weiherer Fiction Committee / Copy Editor

Lauren Weiherer has had an affinity for words since she was in second grade and wrote a story (admittedly rather unoriginal) about a dog and his adventures. She is transferring to UC Berkeley in the Fall to earn her English degree, after which she hopes to pursue a career where she can continue to utilize her love for literature; she also hopes to pursue a life that is just as full as the pages of those books. Her favorite activities include losing herself in a story, viewing and capturing the world through the lens of a camera, and finding transcendence in music.

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Kingsley Abel studied informatics and psychology at UCI after attending Saddleback College. He loves richly worded poems and Nature.

Arnold Agustin is a graphic design student who enjoys being creative and utilizing all forms of media. Additional pieces can be viewed on his website at agustindesign.com

David Alexander is a financial artist who's taken his passion for quantitative information into creating new worlds through the power of words. His writing is inspired by the endearing strength and fears of the human spirit. For free trampoline lessons, inquire at d.romero215@gmail.com.

Ashley Beck earned her BA in English at University of California, Santa Barbara, in 2005 and has worked as a full-time editor ever since. While she spends her workweek reviewing technical reports, she daydreams about talking cats and sprouting wings. When she isn't defending the serial comma or scrolling through Internet memes, occasionally she records her reveries for others' enjoyment.

Sarah Bidgoli is an English major who plans on becoming an English teacher. This is her final semester at Saddleback, as she will be transferring to California State University, Fullerton in the Fall. You can contact her at sarahtbidgoli@yahoo.com.

Jacob Campbell is a California native and full-time college student. He enjoys writing, but his true passion is drumming and music. You can contact him at jakecampbell777@gmail.com.

Teresa Chen is a graphic designer who loves continuing education at Saddleback College. More of her creative portfolio can be found at <http://tcstudioschen.weebly.com>.

Tyler Christ is currently working an illustrious career as a barista at one of the many local Starbucks. When not serving people coffee, Tyler spends his free time playing music in and out of a three-chord punk band or reading paranormal romance novels.

Dylan Churchill is an individual who practices creative expression through writing, music, and the arts. His inspiration comes through personal experience and mindful observation. He believes beauty is to be found by observing life as it naturally unfolds. He looks forward to this piece as the first of many publications to come.

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2016 CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Claire Culver is passionate about writing, research, education, and firsts—the first philosophers, writers, scientists, humans. She will attend UCI as a comparative literature major starting in Fall 2016. When not pondering how to change things up, she can be contacted at c2culver@cox.net.

Nadya Diaz is a music photographer and student at Saddleback College. More of her work can be found on her website at nadyadiazphotography.myportfolio.com/ and her contact is nadyaD.ND@gmail.com.

Matthew Durham, who served as editor-in-chief of WALL Literary Journal in 2015, will major in English with an emphasis on creative writing as a Humanities Honors student at UCI starting in Fall 2016. You can contact him at mattds85@gmail.com.

Hugh Foster is a Saddleback sophomore and aspiring commercial and fine art photographer. More of his work can be found on his website at hughfosterphoto.com.

Mostafa K. Ghoneim is an accounting major who decided to get out of this comfort zone and pursue a certificate in graphic design. For more info, please contact her at mostafa.kamalghoneim@gmail.com.

Chaye Grable is an English major planning to teach college English. She had to submit something from her creative writing class and never expected this to get picked. chayemadison@gmail.com.

Meghan Gruhin enjoys sharing her experiences and expressing herself creatively through writing, speaking, and painting. For more information about her or her work, contact her at msgruhin@gmail.com.

Jordan Hall is a first-year psychology major at Saddleback College with a passion for writing tracing back to several articles she wrote in high school about her choral program that were published in the *Orange County Register*. Currently a member of the Honors Student Council and Alpha Gamma Sigma Honors Society, she is hoping to transfer to UC Berkeley to major in creative writing. jhall57@saddleback.edu.

Morgan Heaslet is a computer science major who enjoys writing things other than code when he finds the spare time. He is a fairly new writer who has never been published until now. He loves reading/watching/writing science fiction, the Green Bay Packers, and highest above all: Cassandra Nicole.

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2016 CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Max Hosford is a writer living in Arcata, California. This will be his second poetic appearance in WALL, and a short story of his has been published in College of the Redwood's Poets & Writers Literary Magazine. When his nose is not in the spine of a book or his spiral notebook, he can be contacted at mwhosford@yahoo.com.

Aubrey Howell has finished her last semester at Saddleback and will be taking a gap year to travel before transferring to UC Irvine to pursue a degree in English with a concentration in professional writing. Her greatest aspiration is to become a lawyer. Life circumstances inspire her and hypnotizing chickens keeps her busy. She also enjoys writing long sentences.

Miranda Kalagian is a college student and independent musician. The poem "Holiday" may also be found as a song on her EP "Calm Down." Miranda enjoys making her writing as sassy as possible and aims to create both a literary and musical time capsule of her youth. You can contact her at mirandakalagian@yahoo.com

Zia Kanani studied physiological science at UCLA. He has spent the past year traveling to Asia and working on a collection of short stories. He will be starting medical school in the Fall at Medical College of Wisconsin. Please contact Zia at ziakanani@ucla.edu.

Victoria Killeen, an award-winning artist and 30-year Dana Point resident, is an accomplished graphic designer who has returned to painting. She has earned top honors from the City of Dana Point, Laguna Festival, OC Fair, and San Clemente Art Association. More can be found on VKilleenStudio.etsy.com and VickieKilleen.wordpress.com.

Hyunsoo Kim is a Saddleback College student and aspiring illustration major. E-mail address: hkhyunsoo@gmail.com.

Jody Kummer is a first-year graphic design student but has been taking drawing and oil painting classes specializing in painting animals at Saddleback College for eight semesters. She is very honored to have been chosen for this publication.

Nicole Kurrasch is a Saddleback sophomore. She is currently pursuing writing and hopes to teach English abroad. Nicole likes to make art for others' enjoyment as well as her own and plans on continuing to sell commissioned pieces in the future.

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2016 CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Jim Langford is a lifelong photographer who has found his way back. You can view some of his other works at www.JimLangfordPhotography.com or contact him for tours, tutoring, or prints at jlangford@saddleback.edu.

Chad S. Leslie recently finished an Associate Degree in Fine Arts and Humanities at Saddleback College. He is especially fond of crows and great-tailed grackles, and absolutely wolf obsessed.

Ali Marcotte, formerly a street cop, is now an aspiring photographic artist using the street's "dark personality" and light to captivate her audience. Imagination is always in her driver's seat, but her intention is to have the viewer drink the "Kool-Aid" and go deeper into their psyche as there usually is a message within her craft. Artisticlightimagery@gmail.com.

Ariel McAlister is a California-grown creative individual who enjoys adventures, beach days, and long drives. She loves the little things in life. Photographer. Reader. Writer. Traveler. Highly Intuitive with a Mind Deeper than the Ocean. Everything she does is a matter of Heart, Body, and Soul.

Case McQuillan (@zecheese) is a multimedia artist who seems to make a mess of life, and his dumb drawings and silly scribbles are a representation of that. Follow the madness at www.StupidDoodles.com.

Ariel Navia is a graduate of UC Irvine who came to Saddleback to pursue an additional degree in English. When she is not writing, she is either rock climbing or knitting in her free time. She can be contacted at anavia1212@gmail.com.

I.M. Nepomuceno is a science major who dedicates her work to anyone who has been unfairly judged and disrespected because of discrimination. She hopes for a better world where the color of one's skin does not dictate how they should be treated.

kmp wants to know everything, feel everything, be everything; she won't settle for less. More of her work can be found at ashandabstraction.tumblr.com or in her chapbook //UNBOUND//.

Kelly Persson is a computer graphics student with an interest in business matters. Kelly can be contacted at kmd.persson@gmail.com.

Matthew Rinehart is pursuing a career as a graphic designer and illustrator. He has been involved in the art programs at Saddleback College to further his education and develop his artistic skills. You can find his work on Instagram @mattrineh.art where he posts traditional and digital projects.

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2016 CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Yongji Shen is an Irvine Valley College student and computer science major. More of his work can be found on his Instagram at [YONGJI_SHEN](https://www.instagram.com/YONGJI_SHEN).

Sara Shillman, a visual artist based in San Clemente, is currently studying graphic design and illustration. You can see more of her work at www.sarashillman.com.

Daniela Sindoni is a classical violinist and meditation teacher in the Dzogchen tradition. Her passion for photography offers her a unique portal to explore and uncover the richness in all of life's moments—each part a reflection of the whole. She can be found on Facebook as Lama Daniela.

Sanbud Tehrani is a flowering sociopath who wields deadly surrealist automatist techniques with the masterful skill of a ruthless and merciless visionary guru in the written word. He has composed and released two compilations of his poetic works thus far and has been published in such journals as *Juked* and *The Brasilia Review*.

Guodong Wang is pursuing a degree in economics. He tries to explore his potential and also enjoys beautiful trivial moments in life. You can contact him at guodongwang13@gmail.com.

Baron Wilhelm considers himself a wordsmith and works tirelessly as a student, English tutor, surf coach, storyteller, and folk singer/songwriter. An English major, he plans to transfer to UCSC, UCLA, or UC Berkeley, depending on how the cards fall. His influences include Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Johnny Cash, Jim Morrison, and Wyatt Brady. You can contact him at chophousesurf.com or his Instagram @uncle_bear.

Kelly Wobst is a Saddleback College student who has been accepted to Cal State Fullerton, with a major in English and a minor in creative writing. She enjoys writing in her journal and hopes to have hundreds of journals to read in decades to come. She would like to work for a nonprofit organization someday.

Celia Wu is a Saddleback College student with a passion for painting with oil and watercolor. More of her work can be found at her Facebook pages and www.celiawu.blogspot.com.

Kareemah Yameen is a continuing education student at Saddleback College in the Ceramics Department. She is a brand new artist in her first semester. More of her work can be seen at kareemahyameen.com and she can be contacted at kareemahyameen@gmail.com.

Katayoun Zamani is an English major and an aspiring writer with a passionate interest in mythology. Unsurprisingly, she is not very fond of math.

TAKING IT TO THE WALL

Submissions for the 2017 edition of WALL Literary Journal are being accepted through January 25, 2017. Each work must be an original, unpublished piece submitted by a Saddleback College student enrolled Spring 2016, Summer 2016, Fall 2016, or Spring 2017. For a submission form and guidelines, please go to the WALL website at www.saddleback.edu/la/Wall.



Design by Leanne Black

JOIN THE JOURNAL STAFF

If you are interested in being involved hands on in producing WALL, enroll in ENGLISH 160: Literary Magazine, a 3-unit class that focuses on creating our award-winning literary journal. Staff members are responsible for reviewing and selecting student submissions; layout and design; copy editing and proofing; and publicity. Also, students on staff have the opportunity to have one of their own pieces published in the journal. We seek students in English, creative writing, journalism, art, photography, and graphic design, but the class is open to all students and no experience is necessary. For further details about the class, please contact Professor Gina Victoria Shaffer by phone at (949) 582-4544 or via email at gshaffer@saddleback.edu. You may also check for information on the WALL website at www.saddleback.edu/la/Wall.

