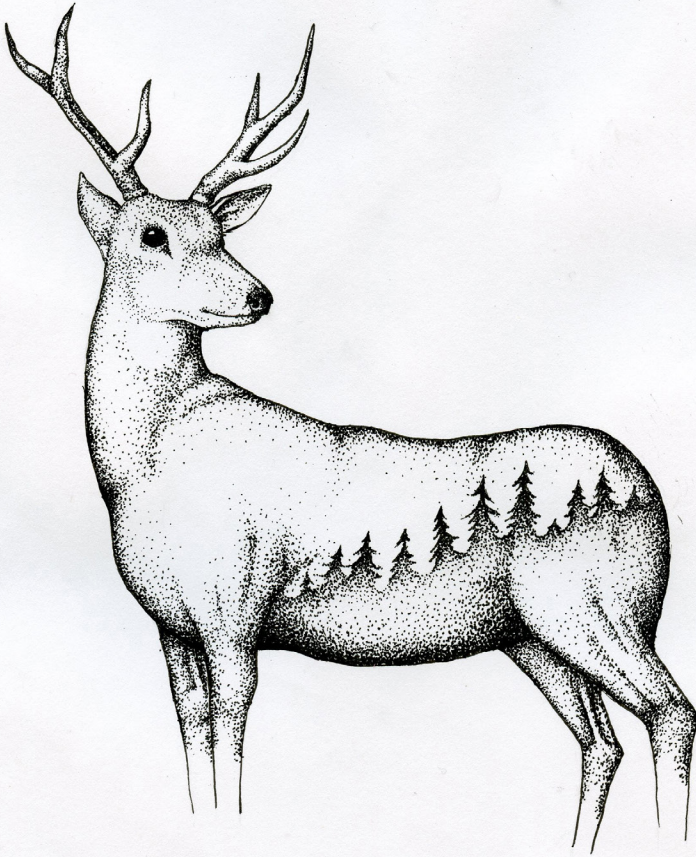




PEGASUS
2015

PEGASUS *2015*



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COLD

Isabella Wu

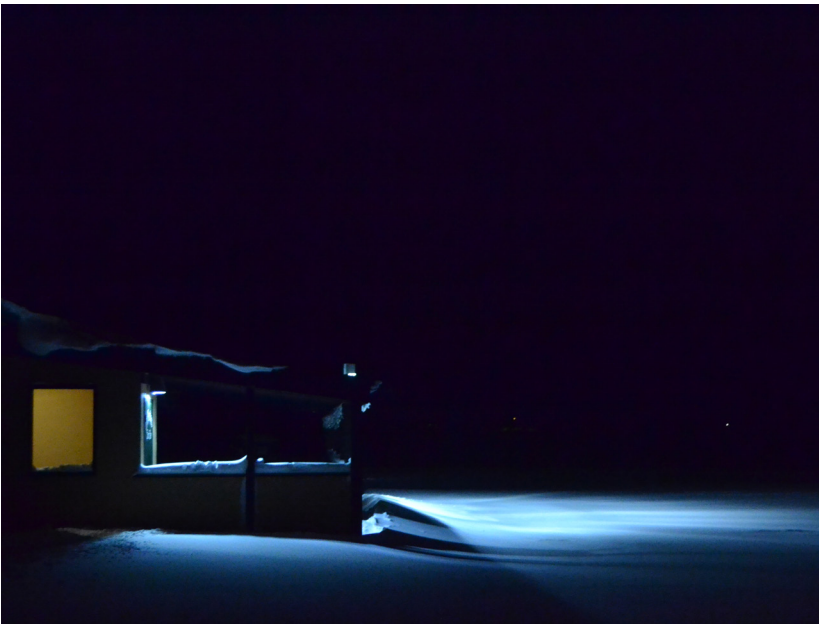
And through the burning cold
we marched

With barely a musket for
one of three

And lo' the snow fell
dreamily

As we trudged through
the silent white

Dawn broke, setting the mountain ridges on fire
A lone piper sailed through the mist



Gillian Moore

STOCKHOLM

Oliver Ash

In the glaring light of the streetlamps, the pavement of Stockholm takes on a ruddy glow, magnified twofold by the scattered puddles and streaks of rainwater running off into the drains. The whole city is bathed in the dull light of the summer dusk, filtering in patches through the mist to illuminate the occasional pedestrian. All of this can be seen in the water as you walk the many bridges of the archipelago that is the Swedish capital. The inky blackness is choosy about how much light it wants to show you, and so the beauty of the city is seen only through the darkened lens of the depths, and you can envision exactly what it would look like if the sun ever bothered to set.

The city is injured, marred by a massive outcrop of soil rock that elevates one half high above the other. In times long past, the wealthy occupied the upper half of the city, and the poor were condemned to the squalor of the lower half, forced to trudge and climb over the hills and rocks every morning on their way to work. Nowadays, the only thing that separates those that live above from those who live below is how much you want to pay for a view of the bay. A massive elevator carries passengers between the halves, but the stairs do exist for those who feel unvexed by the burdens of a tight schedule, or those who partook of too much *korv* and feel they need to walk off the calories. In the shadow of this elevator, this behemoth of transportation, two men face each other, hidden by the shadows of the buildings around them, so that even the neverending light of summer cannot reveal their features. One man stands off-balance, his left foot slung over the frame of a bicycle, his right planted firmly on the ground. A bicycle lock lies in a pool of water near his front tire, ripples still emanating from its frame to die on the edges of the puddle. This first man had evidently been in the process of either locking or unlocking it, but it's hard to tell for sure, as any sane man would not be focused on his bike, but on his hands. Both are held above his head, the middle

fingers almost touching, as if he was in the middle of performing a grounded jumping-jack. His face is turned away, but he is clearly a Swede: the yellow-blond hair and fair skin are telling signs, as is the lilting and warbling nature of his frantic babbling. The Swedish language, silly by its very nature, seems out-of-place in more “serious” situations. Though his head is turned to the side, the angle of his face is clear, and so it does not take a deductive genius to understand where all of his focus is directed.

The point of a short, rigid blade is aimed at his solar plexus. the knife seems to draw in all the light around it, until the blade gleams with an unearthly and awful splendor, throwing off arcs of lightning with even the slightest change in its angle. All the space around it has been robbed of light, leaving only an empty void surrounding the weapon. It’s hilt is not visible, all that can be seen below the iridescent edge is a Kleenex, wrapped loosely around the handle, held in place by the hand of the second man. The skin on the hand is brown, white at the knuckles where it grips the enrobed handle of the blade. The hand is trembling, and the tremors rock the arm that it is attached to. The second man is Turkish, easy to tell because, as anyone who has lived in Stockholm knows, if you’re not a Swede, you’re a Turk. The dark skin and darker hair bears further testimony to his place of origin. He is wearing blue jeans and a red t-shirt, in sharp contrast to the khaki slacks and white windbreaker of the Swede. His dark eyebrows are knitted together, his mouth hanging open slightly, having just finished babbling in frantic Turkish to the local in front of him. He waves the knife around in the air, spitting more unintelligible words at the Swede, and then jumps forward. The knife advances a foot closer to the fair man’s chest, and the Turk gives him a sneer, his face full of contempt and masked urgency. He takes a step back, widening the space between his arms in what is almost a half-shrug, as if to say, “You see? It would be nothing for me to gut you. You cannot run. Why try?” Their eyes meet, and in that moment, all of their attention is focused on each other. They don’t see me.

I have just crossed the bridge that connects the island of Gamala Stan to the northern half of the city, and I am making my way through Slussen, the market district. I walk along the sidewalk, and the two men are off to my left, in the small plaza that surrounds the great elevator. The lift is down, turned off for repairs on the belt, so I can look forward to a long climb up the stairs to get to my apartment. I see the men out of the corner of my eye, and I turn my gaze towards them. My feet move me into a brisk power walk, and my hands find comfort deep in my pockets. My head turns away from the pair, and I fix my gaze on the staircase in the distance. The white cord of my headphones bobs up and down as I walk, heavy metal blaring into my ears. My eyes are hidden behind a pair of cheap airport sunglasses, the kind of glasses you wear in any level of light, just because they look good. "Huh, that's funny." My mind wanders through the experiences of the day now over, before finally settling on the two men I have now passed by. "That guy sure was excited about his new knife, his friend didn't seem so impressed with it though. Must've been pretty pricey to warrant wrapping a tissue around the handle just so it doesn't get dirty." I walk on, passing by a few Swedes coming out of McDonald's. They pay me no mind, my high cheekbones and prominent chin allow me to blend right in with the natives, so I never receive the same treatment as more conspicuous tourists. I begin my climb, opting to take the longer, more level route, as opposed to the steep stairs. For some reason my legs are tired, and the prospect of climbing a cliff doesn't sound very appealing. The view from the top of that cliff is staggeringly beautiful; the entire city shines with light, and a cool breeze rolls in from the water, unsettling a few stray hairs on my head that didn't make it into the ponytail. Up until this point, my legs had been moving automatically, pressed onward by some inner inertia. My pause at the scenic overlook takes all of that momentum away, and I can walk no longer. There is a short, stone wall that discourages people from moving too near to the edge of the rise, ending just above waist height so that for most people, it makes a convenient bench. Sitting on this wall, ages old, I hold my head in my hands and choke back a sob, the realization of my folly suddenly coming in with the breeze from the water.

People walk by either just heading home or just heading out, depending on their age. They see a boy on the wall, doubled over as if in pain, and they turn their gaze from him back to their destination. Some have their headphones in, and the cords wobble back and forth, smacking against the fabric of their shirts. No-one sees, no-one hears, and every one of them keeps on walking, just as the boy on the wall had done a few minutes earlier. He rubs his eyes and smacks his thighs, apparently trying to restore some functionality in his useless limbs. he has a black belt, but they don't know that. He is a Christian, but they couldn't know that. He has been trained to defend, taught to love, and raised believing that he was the wall of light against which the darkness breaks. Too dark in the shadow of that elevator, apparently, and the only light worth noting is the wicked lightning of the Turkish man's blade.



Maggie Cottrell

It takes a few minutes, or maybe more, but my breath comes back to me, and my legs can again support my weight, albeit not without a good deal of trepidation on my part. I do not know the Swedish emergency number, and it never crosses my mind to call anyone. The door of my apartment opens, the blanket on my bed folds back, and my mind is blank as soon as my head hits the pillow. The next day, a girl stands outside of my apartment door. Her hair is red as a fire of ambery coals, her posture is timid, shoulders hunched over and arms folded over her chest. She bites her lip and knocks again, rubbing her bare arms to fight off the unprecedented chill of the July morning. The door swings open and she quickly glances up, seeing me there, and her face breaks into a beaming grin. Her cheeks flush and she gives a little wave, and when she sees me return her smile, she throws her arms around me. My frame shudders as I hold her, but eventually the tremors stop, my heart ceases to beat against the back of my chest, and I can breathe easy. We have plans for that day, and there is no time for melancholy.



Zach Burdett

EDGY

Aquil Sheikh

Empty streets:
City sounds
the stars are asleep,

lost in sweet illusion;
as distorted cats walk on walls,
paint runs thin where it shouldn't.

Cold and plastic,
the marriage of mind and body ends in divorce,

past the invisible white river of souls,
under the city.
Walking through the trail of the sinner,
vandalized walls all around,
walking through the trail of the judge,
the twisting halls,
cats running through ink on stone,
to the Dead God's room—
Dead but still lives forevermore.

Through a burled maple door
with swirling grain of beautiful chaos,
it just screams end game.
Then finally,
to the room of reckoning

GRAY MOURNING

Kaitlyn Walker

It's been dark lately
I've been looking out the window
 I haven't seen those pictures in awhile

I change the song
Now I see your face
 Hear your laugh
It's chilling, really
I suppose I miss it

This recording
It sounds like it's from another life
Another time
Yet I'm not nostalgic
Even if our conversations were
 Some of the greatest I've
 Ever had

I can smell the leaves
They're floating to the ground
 And landing in my hair

I can smell last night's storm
 I wonder if you sent it
To remind me that
 Hope still exists
And that you have to enter the storm
To find the silver lining

I've been thinking a lot
 (As of late I've nothing else to do)
And I've come to the conclusion
That you're gone
 (I accepted that long ago)
You left before
She even thought about it
But now
She's gone too
 (I accepted that a few months ago)

So it feels like there's nothing left
There's nothing left to remind me
Of
That little girl
Who just wanted to dream

I remember how she danced
She didn't keep time
Or even know how
 She just did it anyway
The same way she
 Tumbled down to the creek
To catch the crayfish
 And stare at the sky
Swinging on that rickety old swing set
Just
 Dreaming
 (Her mother always worried)

That little girl
Is gone
She started packing her things when
Her father packed his

But you were still there
I could count on you
 A phone call every birthday
 And some weekends too
 When her father would
 Come back around

I could count on her too
 A simple “hello”
 Once a day was enough
Growing up and
Turning into adults
 That tore her from me

So that little girl packed her toys
 Her dolls and
 Stuffed animals
With puberty she packed
 Her innocence

So when you left
 (It wasn't time for you)
The little girl packed up her laughter
 Her giggles
 And her memories
Of the man with the beard
 Who loved penguins

While the best friend
Filed her nails
And decided her fate
 (I always thought she could do more)

So the little girl
Packed
 And got rid of the color
The bright blues and greens
The coloring books were thrown out

She wouldn't need those where she was going
And she boarded that school bus
 (That little girl)
One last time

Her primary mode of transportation
 Was a fraud
And now
Now she sits
 Waiting
For her stop
But

She won't ever
 Get off that school bus
Because I sent her to you
So that she can chase her dreams
While I try to figure out
 What they really meant
When they told me that
The best people live the shortest lives
 And that people change

So know I miss you
 (I don't really miss her—maybe just a little)
I'll give you a call sometime
 (When I finally have some)



Addy Schuetz

So take care
 Of yourself
 And Snoopy
And please look out
 For the little girl
She's still on that bus and
 I can only hope that she
 Makes it
 (She misses you too)

TO THOSE WHO DARED NOT LOOK

Nina Stornelli

“All right, settle down, settle down,” said Mr. Caedis as he strode back into the room. Like any other day of class, it took everyone a moment to stop their conversations and focus back on the subject at hand. “Where was I before Mr. Wells came in?”

“You were talking about the Faerie Rivers,” piped up willowy Anael, whose memory was perfect.

“Right, the Faerie Rivers. The term Faerie Rivers really applies to two things. Can anyone explain what I mean by that?” Mr. Caedis looked across the room for hands. Two lookalikes of Anael had punched the air the moment he asked the question, almost dancing with barely contained knowledge.

“Well, Anael, I’m fairly certain that you could teach this class,” Mr. Caedis drawled, “but let’s see how your doppelganger does with this question.” The class laughed as the second Anael’s features changed, melting away until the only similarity between the two was their respective slightly pointed ears. She squirmed sheepishly. “Come on, Bree, you’re Fae too,” prodded Mr. Caedis.

“Umm... there are rivers in the old Fae country, but, uh, there are also the reverse rivers underneath the actual ones?” Bree answered hesitantly.

He paused. “That may have been vague, but none of it was incorrect. Anael, why don’t you elaborate before you pass out? Try to keep it under four sentences.”

Anael looked alarmed. She started rattling off information, mentally counting sentences. “Faerie works on principles of opposite- *Seelie* and *Unseelie*, magic and unmagic. Therefore, under the four cardinal rivers of the old country, there run the reverse rivers of Truth, Light, Shadow, and Deception. These rivers flow with the magical energy of their attributes, and it is upon these rivers that binding magical contracts and rituals can be enacted.”

“Three sentences! Impressive, Anael,” said Mr. Caedis remarked. “Can anyone tell me a little bit about the historical impact?” When nobody raised a hand, he looked around the room evilly. “Let’s see... Lisbeth!”

Lisbeth, a tiny, blond-haired girl, had been quietly staring off into space. Surprised, she promptly squeaked and turned invisible.

“Just because I can’t see you,” said Mr. Caedis pointedly as the class laughed again, “does not mean you don’t have to answer my question.”

Lisbeth faded back into visibility, blushing hard.

“Any time you’d like to name a historical significance of the Fae Rivers...” he prompted.

“Um,” she said, trying desperately to recall something that we had learned. “The... Elf Wars?”

“The Elf Wars were fought on an entirely different continent. Study those notes before the quiz, and try to read the textbook passages when I assign them for homework. How about... Maeven?”

I looked up from the note I was making. Mr. Caedis was one of the few who didn’t shy away from my empty black gaze. “The Industrial Revolution. The pollution detrimentally corrupted the Fae Rivers, which caused chaos due to magical instability.”

“Very good. Now-”

Mr. Caedis was cut off by the loudspeaker clicking on above.

“A temporary hold-in-place is being assumed,” said the headmaster’s voice, made metallic by the school’s antiquated speaker system. “Teachers, please close off the classrooms. All students must find a classroom and exit the halls.

“Maeven Somnusangui, Zoe Somnusangui, Nikri Animis, you are to report to the headmaster’s office. That is all.”

In the silence that followed, I gathered my materials and stood to leave. Zee unceremoniously dumped her various disorganized papers into her bag as well. She walked out the door that Mr. Caedis held open without a second thought, but I paused,

looking at our teacher's expression. His face was as blank as his voice, his eyes holding within them only a nameless intensity.

As soon as the door closed behind us, Zee started chattering in a flurry of speculation. "We're missing Myth and Hist! Maybe the quiz will be pushed back. But Maeven, this is so random. Do you think this is a drill? What do you think the headmaster wants us for? I wonder—"

Zee subsided at my sideways look. Our opposite demeanors made it hard to believe that we were related, but we also kept each other balanced out. She tended to immediately run after whichever tangent she was on, hardly stopping. I decided to reserve my judgment of the situation until I had all the facts.

Nikri Animis had beaten us to the headmaster's office. He was folded into a chair, waiting somewhat grumpily for us. He usually seemed pretty annoyed, but at least he was stable. It was a scary thing for a telekinetic to be volatile— but for him, it was obvious that the calming influence of his companion, Danny, was a major part of what kept him grounded.

"Nikri, Zoe, Maeven," the headmaster said fretfully as we took seats to the left of Nikri. He took a moment to look at all of us, his eyes flitting the quickest over me. "I have somber news to deliver today, and the first ones to hear it need to be you three." He sighed, looking honestly upset, and continued, "Daniyel Antesci was found beneath the Mythologies and Histories Tower this morning."

Nikri looked up at the headmaster, confused, and yet some part of him all too understanding at the same time.

"We think that he fell near dawn, and died shortly after," he went on. "Nikri... my condolences."

For a moment, Nikri was completely still. Then his clothes and hair began to flutter, until everything immediately around him looked like it was caught in a small hurricane.

The headmaster winced. He continued speaking, more to Zee and me than to the grief-maddened Nikri. "So, you see that we have a... problem. And someone seems to be at fault for his death." He sighed again. "That is why you are here, Maeven."

I raised my eyebrows. “You are accusing me of murdering Danny Antesci?” He cringed at my bluntness. “Headmaster, wouldn’t suicide be the way this looks? He jumped out of a tower. Assuming that it’s murder, and that I did it seems to be a bit of a stretch.”

“He left no note,” said the headmaster pleadingly. “He exhibited no signs of depression or mental illness- he was one of the happiest, brightest students here! You two have always had a bit of a rivalry since you met.” He held up his hand as I made to interrupt. “Maeven, he fell out of the tower backwards.”

Backwards. The way he would step out of a tower if someone – someone whose power relied on eyes – was controlling him.

If I had killed him.

“Since you are the prime suspect, I must take action to ensure the safety of our students. These are special circumstances, considering the nature of Ardsinger, being a school for special young people like yourselves, but until there is conclusive evidence one way or the other, I must insist on some sort of confinement. This applies to Zoe as well, since your schedules are simultaneous. I’m sorry, but do you understand?”

He was not sorry. I felt all their gazes on me – Nikri’s, filled with the anger within his tempest; Zee’s, questioning and concerned; and the headmaster’s, just missing my actual face in its fearful but officious leadership – and I said that yes, I understood.

* * *

It certainly wasn’t I, I could say that. Daniyel’s death looked incredibly suspicious, but despite the fact that yes, I could have easily killed him, and yes, it did look like I had made him jump out of the Mythologies and Histories Tower, someone else was guilty. Whoever did it had deliberately made it seem that Danny had either committed suicide or been murdered by someone like me. To the person’s credit, I was the perfect person to blame. I didn’t have close connections with much of anyone,

nothing to link me into the lives of others and make me seem like more than a scheming specter in the background. No one would have any sympathy or alibis for me. My demeanor didn't help matters either; even now, I could only find detached and apathetic curiosity to approach the situation with.

So I accepted the confinement that the headmaster so badly wanted. It wasn't too much, really. I could still go to classes, but as soon as I was done, I had to return to my room. I ate breakfast as well as dinner there, and I had been taking my lunch to class anyways.

The Ardsinger School could pretend that it was safer this way.

With another week of classes drawing to a close, I was headed up to my room. Getting somewhere was a long process in the labyrinthine passages of the school, which had once been a castle, but I had nothing except time on my hands.

"Nikri," said a voice from the stairwell ahead. I paused to listen, leaning onto the cold stone wall. "It's about Maeven."

"Lisbeth, don't tell me you're going to try to look into this," Nikri sounded extremely worried. "You might get hurt too, I-" He must have taken a step toward Lisbeth, because the sound echoed through the hall. "You can't. If anyone else was hurt-"

"Nikri, don't," Lisbeth said, more fiercely this time. She didn't seem at all her usual timid self. "Look, I know exactly what happened."

"What? How..." asked Nikri incredulously. "Then you could prove that Maeven..." He sucked in a breath between his teeth. Another footfall sounded on the stone. "And..."

"Yes, and I-" Lisbeth said. Then a second later, "No- I didn't- innocent-" She sounded terrified.

Briefly, there were scuffling noises, and then a breathy gasp. One of them muttered something. Feet pattered, up and away- and abruptly, stopped.

"N-no- wait, you can't!" he shouted. "Come back here!"

I waited a moment, and then rounded the corner, nonchalantly sweeping away the end of the dark bangs that fell diagonally into my eyes. “Nikri,” I said in a curt tone. “Have you seen Lisbeth? I thought I heard her.”

“She was here a second ago,” he said hollowly, speaking to a spot on the wall a foot to the right of my face. “But she turned invisible and ran off.”

I stepped closer to him, narrowing my eyes. “Nikri, do you know anything about what happened to Danny?”

He flinched and looked down. I could see a single tear weave its way down his cheek. “Danny-” Nikri’s voice failed.

“How could you, Maeven?” The ragged whisper broke away from his throat. “Don’t you feel anything?”

He spun on his heel, disappearing up the stairs. I was left at the bottom, eyes narrowed, trying to decipher the meaning of his words.

* * *

I was still puzzling it over in my mind. It was the next evening, and even though I had been spending almost all of my time using some part of my brain to mull it over, I was no closer to any answer. There were simply too many possibilities to make any logical conclusions. I furrowed my brow as I worked through my last math problem.

“You’re doing it again, Maeven,” Zee singsonged in my ear.

I didn’t bother to look up. “Doing what, exactly?”

Zee laughed. “Sometimes when you’re lost in thought you start humming a bit. That song you like about dreams and nightmares.” She paused, then said seriously, “Hey, speaking of nightmares, have you been-”

I glanced up. “Zee, stop. I’m fine.”

“No, you aren’t,” she huffed. “You barely know what fine is, let alone how to gauge it. This whole week you’ve barely been eating or doing anything at all. And don’t think that I didn’t see those notes that people have been slipping under the door, telling

you to go take a walk off the Myth and Hist Tower. You don't need to put up with this."

I didn't move or speak. Zee sighed loudly. "Maeven—"

"Zee," I interrupted. "Why do you care?"

"Stop it," she said, frustrated. "Don't think that way. Maybe everyone else thinks that you're emotionless and cruel, but I know that isn't true. You're a good person, Maeven. And you're my sister."

"I'm not," I contradicted. "Zee, I'm not—"

The dormitory intercom crackled on. "Maeven Somnusangui, please report to the headmaster immediately. Maeven Somnusangui, to the headmaster. Thank you."

I tucked away my papers and stood up. Zee buzzed worriedly around my shoulder.

"An urgent meeting, and this late? What does he want? It's too late for this, and you're in no shape..."

I looked at her sideways. "Zee, make sure you get to bed soon."

She groaned and muttered something about mornings as I closed the door behind me.

* * *

"Maeven, please sit."

The headmaster looked even more distressed and discomforted than he had the previous week. I sat silently, watching him fidget. Finally, he sighed.

"Maeven, did you or did you not adhere to the agreed upon conditions of suspect confinement?"

"I did," I replied coolly.

"Did you... see or speak to anyone outside of class?" the headmaster asked awkwardly, struggling to phrase the question in the least insulting way possible. "Excluding Zee?"

Curtly, I replied, "I spoke with Nikri Animis."

The headmaster inhaled sharply. "Why? What did you converse about?"

I raised an eyebrow. "I asked him about Daniyel's death when I happened upon him in a stairwell. He ran off without answering my question."

"I see." The headmaster pondered quietly for a few moments. Again he sighed. "Maeven, Lisbeth Anderson has disappeared. She hasn't been seen since before dinner last night. After dinner she was supposed to meet with me – she had scheduled an appointment that morning to tell me something about the case." A pained, imploring note entered his voice. "You can see how this looks, Maeven?"

"There is still not enough evidence to prove anything against me," I reminded him. "I understand this is a special case, given the school, and my abilities, and the fact that my parents left me completely in the school's care. However, even in these circumstances, I am innocent until there are witnesses or confessions or any sort of concrete proof against me."

The headmaster shuffled around papers on his desk, clearing his throat. "From now on, a guard will accompany you around the school and keep watch outside your door at night. You may return to your room."

I rose. "I might actually feel something about this case, about this school even, if anyone here would look me in the eye when they called me a murderer." I laughed darkly and left, not looking at whatever expression was on the headmaster's face, not glancing at the man who strode after me.

* * *

The room was still lit.

I raised my eyebrows as I closed the door behind me, quietly noting the way the guard stationed himself outside the door.

"Zee, stop waiting up for me when you're here alone," I said. I walked past the empty beds towards our bathroom. "If you're pretending to be brushing your teeth again, I didn't fall for it the first time."

I was talking to voiceless air. Zee was not in the bathroom.

On the counter a wet toothbrush lay dropped. Next to it was a note, written with jet black ink in a jagged hand. I picked it up, careful not to let it touch any water, and only when I sat perched on a bed did I begin to read.

Are you more monster than not? It read. Do you care that people have died, their deaths labeled with your name? If you do not come, she will be next, dead by your hand.

Slowly, I closed my hand, crumpling the note until it was covered inside my fingers. I lay back against the covers, words still flashing before my eyes and throbbing in my ears.

Monster. Murderer. Do you care? She will be next.

I closed my eyes and let my body go limp. In my own darkness I listened: to the silence of the room, to my soft breaths, to the beating of my only faintly audible heart, and to the minutes slipping away.

* * *

Quietly, I climbed the Tower of Mythologies and History. I felt no remorse over what I had done to the guard outside my door, who had not looked away quickly enough when I slid it open. Answers were finally within my reach, after all.

I reached out toward the door at the top of the stairs, which opened silently. In the empty classroom, the only light came from the flickering torches in the stairwell and the moon outside, filtering in through the curtainless windows. Stepping inside, I saw that the curtains had been torn from their rods and heaped in a corner. On top of the pile a familiar figure lay askew.

I strode quickly towards her. Halfway across the room, I froze, my legs suddenly and immovably halted.

“No farther, Maeven,” said someone behind me.

“You haven’t harmed her?” I asked softly.

“Perfectly alive and intact,” he responded. Suddenly Zee sat up, eyes flying open, like a dreamer jerking out of a nightmare. “And she’ll stay that way since you’re here.”

“Then let her go,” I said. “Swear on something meaningful, and let her go. This no longer concerns her.”

He sighed impatiently, “As long as she swears silence, so too I swear, by the blood in my veins, by the true rivers of Fae, that no harm by my hand or my will shall befall Zoe Somnusan-gui, called Zee.”

“I witness and accept this oath,” I replied.

“Maeven?” Zee whispered. “What-”

“Swear.” I ordered. “Then go to the room, and get to bed.”

She opened her mouth to protest, looking at me. “I-” She bit her lip. “I swear by my blood and the Fae rivers to keep silence.” Then she left, her feet pattering gently behind me and down the stairs as I murmured witness again.

The door closed itself behind her, leaving the room lit only by the silver moon.

Light footfalls sounded in the room, deceptively innocent sounding, like a child’s step. They paused a few feet behind me, and I heard a rustle that pointed to hands being slipped into pockets.

“I imagine that you know why you are here?” he said, almost jokingly.

I cracked a small grin he couldn’t see, but my laugh made it visible enough. “Please. How many reasons could there be for us to be on top of the highest tower in school at this hour? And it’s not like you were subtle.” I considered. “Well, you also did get sloppy as you started running into variables and issues.”

He laughed too, but it was a sharp, forced crack of frustration rather than any noise of humor. “It doesn’t matter much does it? Does it?” I imagined the grin of a maniac spreading across his face, filling his eyes with an eerie light as my arms began to twist, forming angles unnatural enough to bring pain, but not yet enough to break bones. “Everything has worked out just fine, and you’re not going anywhere.”

“Of course,” I said in an almost airless voice. “That’s what it always boils down to, especially for those like you.” I took a few seconds to breathe rattlingly before I continued, mockingly naming my captor. “Oh, Nikri. Your nature is to control, yet you have none. And your hunger for it has made a monster of you, too.”

He inhaled sharply, and his momentary lapse in focus released me. Limply, I fell down onto my knees, but I didn’t stop. “That’s why he’s dead, isn’t it? My foresighted valedictorian rival

caught wind of your plans for me. We might not like each other, but noble as he is, he tried to stop you, and somewhere along the line, you snapped.” I shook my head. “You woke up in the morning, and it wasn’t until you heard the news that you remembered where you had been, what you had done, the horrified expression on Danny’s face when his unresponsive foot slipped—”

“Shut up!” he shouted, and my throat closed off. “Shut up! You’re more monster than I could ever be, and you know it! Don’t preach- you’ve worse than killed. You- you obliterated your little pet sister. She’s already dead because of you!”

Spots dancing in my eyes, I brought my hands up to my chin. Nikri, breathing hard behind me, released my throat belatedly, but I just took my face in my fingers. The press and bite against my skin kept me anchored, so that I didn’t stray too far into the memory.

The nightmare of what I stole and could not return slipped into my eyes, made worse against the backdrop of my childish innocence and the happily beaming sun. There had been a girl there, a small excitable thing walking down the street with her parents. She hadn’t thought twice before introducing herself as Zee, or before exclaiming that she wanted to be friends. *Maybe*, she had said, *we could even be like sisters*.

“I don’t know how you found out about what happened to Zee. But she isn’t a pet.” *I never had a sister*, I had said. *Just myself*. “I made a mistake when I was young and didn’t have any self-control, and someone else paid for it.” *Maybe you should go inside*, said the people who had forgotten their child too easily. *Your parents wouldn’t want you and your sister alone this long*. “I took Zee’s life away from her, and her away from her family, but even if all that was lost inside of my eyes, I tried to make a new life for her.

“I know I’m a monster; I don’t need you to tell me that. I’ve done things that I can’t justify, and it’s hurt others.” I half turned, raising my brows in question. “But who are you still trying to justify to? And why?”

In the next second, Nikri lifted me up, sending me stumbling off towards the teacher's desk. "Go. Write yourself a note. There's paper on Caedis' desk. Just- just shut up and write."

I picked up a pen and lined paper, inking words rapidly. I only needed a moment's thought before I knew what to say.

People are gone because of me. I am sorry. I will bring this all to an end tonight.

"I'll leave this here, if you don't mind," I said, setting the pen aside.

"Whatever," he said. Other things were on his mind.

My feet moved forward, striking the ground in a way that would have been purposeful if I had any control over the situation. As I approached the fenestrated door to the balcony, it opened, but I gripped the wooden frame to force Nikri to stop.

"Are you scared, Maeven?" Nikri taunted, seeming confident again now that he had the momentum. His voice drew closer to me, bringing him practically to my back, but I could feel a subtle pressure behind my head that told me he wouldn't let me turn around. "Not ready to fall? It takes no time at all, and you barely feel it for a second."

I took a deep breath, letting the air leave my chest wisp by wisp. "I was just thinking about how nice it would be not to dream," I murmured. "To close my eyes and see nothing." That, I thought a little ruefully, was hope, which was a dream anyway. There wasn't really anything that I would be leaving behind or going towards.

"That's the spirit." Slowly, he began to pull my fingers away from the door. "Any last words? Last demands?"

The night air brushed my face, and with it I let dissipate the heat from my cheeks and the thoughts from my mind. I found my reflection in the glass, its gaze sharp despite its translucence. *It's time to move on*, it seemed to say. I might have felt like I needed to pay my debts with isolation and self-neglect. I could pay them no longer, though, from that place of darkness. I shifted my focus behind my own eyes.

"Yes," I said, quiet and steady. "I do have some things that I'd like to ask of you."

In the morning, they found us there, sitting knee to knee and staring at each other unblinking. Zee was the first to enter, flying through the door and to my side. I presumed that she was followed by others, perhaps the guard, now awake; perhaps the headmaster, now in the light.

I leaned against Zee as she sat down. “Someone... get Caedis... he can keep hold of Nikri...” I exhaled.

“I’m one step ahead of you.” Mr. Caedis said, approaching and bending down behind me. “Well, well, look who the problem student is.” He touched my shoulder. “You did a good job.”

I let go of Nikri’s eyes. He stirred, almost regaining control for a moment before Caedis took over.

“Hey,” Zee said. “You can rest now.”

“We need to talk,” I told her. “I need to tell you... about you and me...”

“Later,” she said, letting me slump against her. “It’s been a long night.”

So I slept. For once I dreamed of nothing but streetlights and kind eyes.

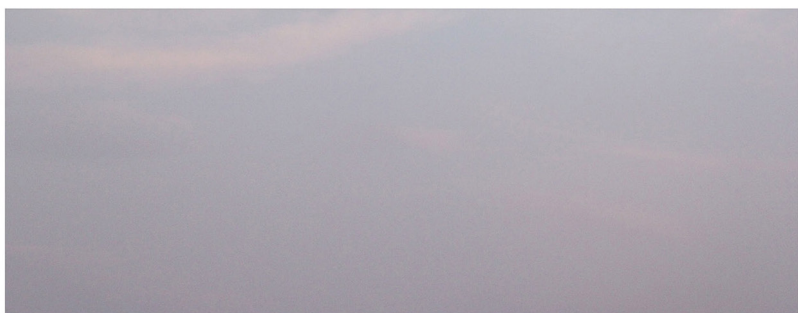
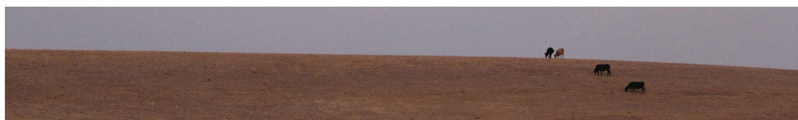


Zach Burdett

PASSENGER SEAT OF THE JEEP

Rachel Schaefer

While in the passenger's seat of the jeep
As the peachy light melts into pudding
And the branches burn into silhouettes
As the molten colors reach a pastel
I slip further into the calm
Though next to me words are spoken
I hear only muddled sounds
They coalesce, the words and colors
Words like spice when spoken alone
But when stirred into the sky
Becomes a creamy dessert like macaroons
The words and the colors



Gillian Moore

THE SEA FAR OFF

Addy Schuetz

The sea far off, washing its hands
Swallowing up the earth and the grit
All that dirt
And the souls of children.

When he had to go, he
bicycled west, off the edge of California.

Those children crawl after him
Babies pacified, baptized, still in the water
Newborns, blue eyes
blue the sea that caught them
Water and oil and butter for good measure.

They crawl across America:
You can see their handprints in Appalachia
Footprints in the plains
In the little prairie towns next to deserted gas stations
A continuous trail to the coast.
Inland I watch them drown
The dust of the Midwest caught in their chests.

It is better for mothers to
give birth in bathtubs, did you know?
The water a safe haven until the first breath
Mother's hands, flushed.

Today he leads them back to their bathtubs.
Their cries are joyous, I think.
I think.
A safe haven after all that dust
Still in the water.

WASTELAND

Jack Strang

Miles upon miles of endless, indistinct ice,
Waves and ridges repeat, none different from the next,
More lake than land, a horizon touched down,
Beauty but boredom, too much time on one canvas,
Miles upon miles of déjà vu...

Except for us.

A single ink drop marrying the white veil,
We huddle together, as the elements scrub away.
Weathering the storm, we are left weathered,
Skinned skeletons, memories not men.
But what a recollection it is:
Sunlight streaming 'cross my back
Our bow splits the sea, exposing unseen lands,
Yet the crew watches me, focused on my every move.
Then came Amundsen's laughing flag,
Marking our destination as we climbed glaciers
But also, by its very existence, stating our failure.
Second by seconds, the prize of despair.
Leaving those once gleaming orbs, eyes of ice,
No longer seeing, but staring through.

Terra Nova, what an apt name!

First plunging into an earthly unknown, now stumbling
Into that ultimate unknown, a new territory to tread.

My next exploration will soon begin—

This time, certainly not the first to arrive

But with no need to return.

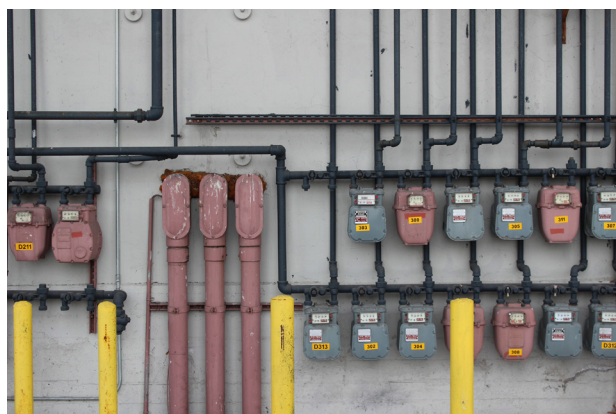
The cold has faded into a soft rumble, known but not felt;

Flakes cloud my vision, world turning white.

My companions lie still and cold beside me,

Their fire consumed by mine, mine by this place.

I see Oates, keeping his oath.
Some time has passed, and he has returned.
And I see our tent, sinking through the ground,
Splitting the veil, consumed by snow and ice,
Becoming just a slightly higher wave.



Charlie Constantino

THE GAS STATION

Michel Liu

This the last time I'll check, he promised to himself as he
Rose from the counter to check the coffers of the gas pumps,
His fingers scraped against metal and air but
Not in the shape of coins.
Third day in a row.
The road lay empty and the only sound was the rasping of the
sun-burnt grass.
In the shapes dancing behind his eyelids,
He saw his still body sitting behind the cash register,
Behind the rack of candy and cigarettes,
His skin waxing,
Bones protruding,
Dissipating without a single witness—
Not even a stranger.

There was a line of trees across the gas station that obstructed
the horizon but seemingly Lengthened the road into a ceaseless
number line

With him as a tiny, immobile point,
While he mulled over fragmented sentences through the static
of his faulty radio:

World war—

Tearing through continents—

Across oceans—

... the incongruity wore down on his mind.

And sometimes he looked down the dark bend of the road and
Would start gasping for breath,

Suddenly very uncertain about the existence of humanity be-
yond the trees.

The silence would crush him from all sides.

Nevertheless,

He ironed his shirts,

Dusted his shelves,

Shaved his face.

Ready for the odd car to rumble down the pavement,

Ready to drink in the driver's words more hungrily than the car
guzzled gas.

Ah yes—

He was a pious man,

And his faith sprung up without fail when the

Missionaries from afar visited.

But as the shadows of his building stretched toward the murky
stretch of trees,

He suspected his beliefs to be futile.

TAPE CURLS

Gillian Moore

When she locks the doors at night, it isn't because she's afraid they'll steal the television or the Matisse that hangs over the mantle. She's afraid they'll come for her fluid in her spine.

She can just imagine them creeping up with that ten-inch syringe and taking the first three drops—imperceptible. They'll take the first three on a Tuesday night. She can feel it. And then they'll take three more on Wednesday, and they'll be back on Thursday, and so on until one day when she wakes up and her brain says she should stretch, her vertebrae will lay cast in stone, unresponsive. Maybe the pang that goes along with moments of panic will reach her stomach and small intestine. Maybe it won't.

She won't be able to sit up in bed. She won't be able to scream because she had the house insulated well, so well, to keep all the heat in during the cold New England winters. The neighbors always play music while they cook anyways, so they won't be listening. Her jaw might not move in any case. And she won't be able to reach the phone. And even if she is able, her knuckles may have disappeared overnight, and the digits on the dial pad may have turned to Russian. She doesn't know the Russian for 911.



When her mother was on her way out, it was the little things that went first. Sometimes when she stood by the stove stirring something that smelled like garlic or rosemary, her eyes would widen and she would freeze, and her wrist would stop making the stirring motion but her fingers would stay locked onto the wooden handle of the spoon. Locked in place. She wouldn't say anything but everyone sitting at the table would turn so they could see out of the corner of their eyes, and no one would ask *are you okay* because it always passed after a minute or so.

She was so statuesque in those moments of not moving, like a saint on the mount. (It's a shame no one ever had a portrait made.)

A few weeks after that she wasn't writing letters anymore. She stopped lacing her fingers at the dinner table like she used to. When she signed receipts at the supermarket, it looked like an EKG and every consecutive time she signed, the heart rate slowed a bit.

Of course it was foreshadowing. No one in the family said otherwise.

No one in the family said much of anything.

* * *

The idea of losing her knuckles stirs something on the inside—north of the stomach, south of the lungs. Something churns in there. Knuckles are for typing. Knuckles are for brushing teeth. Knuckles are for biting nails and turning door handles. How will she hold onto steering wheel?

Maybe her wrists will be the next to go. Then she'll really be in a predicament.

Now she's just getting herself worked up.

She tapes the door at night so if they come for her she'll know they were there. She's not getting much sleep these days.

Her spine feels hollow. When she walks, she's convinced she can feel the fluid sloshing around inside her bones. Sometimes her knees pop on the stairs. And when that happens she freezes, on foot above the other, like a saint on the mount.

With wide eyes like those, she looks a lot like her mother.

* * *

She sits on the couch on Tuesday watching late night television—one part situational comedy, two parts commercial advertising—with a plate full of white in front of her. White bread, white pasta, white milk. Green broccoli for variety, but that’s cheating because the cheese melted on top is white. The way she sees it, the battle’s already lost, so there’s no point messing around with whole wheat anymore.

And as she drinks her milk she gets to thinking that she’s had a pretty good life. Nothing exceptional, granted, but that trip to Paris a few summers ago was nice and she still talks to her high school sweetheart on occasion. God knows, no one even remembers the disaster that was junior prom, complete with vomit in hair and high heels snapped off. Things could’ve been a lot worse.

She checks to see if the tape is still on the door. It is.

The studio audience laughs to indicate that viewers at home should be laughing. One man in the crowd laughs so hard he starts to joke. He’s putting too much effort in.

It occurs to her that they’re laughing *with* her and not *at* her. This is a reason to smile. Things start to seem a little less muddled. When she leans forward to set her plate on the coffee table, the fluids in her bones slosh around. She tries not to spill her milk.

* * *

You can pull a trigger even with a stiff index finger.

She keeps the gun under her pillow, anticipating the morning she wakes up and her knuckles are gone and her wrists sealed in place. The note on the bedside table reads “only as a last resort,” and when she signs her name, it still has all the dips and peaks of an ordinary heart rate.

She sleeps well for the first time in months.

* * *

The neighbors call after a while.

When the police come in to search the apartment, they make note of all the strips of torn masking tape on the door frame. Strange.

I’m pretty sure it was already ripped when we got here, boss.

SCRATCHES

Kate Johnston

She told me it was her cat.
I forgot to clip his nails, she said.
I asked how her cat became so good,
at making lines so straight,
and parallel.
She didn't answer,
and I didn't push.
Why didn't I push?

The beep of my phone shatters the silence of the church,
one unopened voicemail.
I stare at the reminder until the screen goes dark,
my hand trembling.

She told me she didn't need it,
her new laptop.
You'll get more use out of it, she said.
I asked what she would use for school.
She didn't answer,
and I didn't push.
Why didn't I push?

The guests swarm like flies.
They buzz from table to table,
hugging, whispering, crying.
In front of me two women stand,
black fabric hugging their curves.
They talk with heads bent close.
What she did was a sin,
I watch their lips.
Their words fall like knives,
and tear open her lifeless body,
until the memories drip like blood,
and I'm drowning.

She told me I was worth it.
Don't give up, she said.
She told me my scars were beautiful,
battle scars.
I asked why the same didn't apply to her.
She didn't answer,
and I didn't push.

In the cemetery the air is cool.
Headstones dot the grass,
gray stars in a green sky.
I search for her name and find it carved into the rock,
like the skin on her arm.

I told her I would always be there.
Just call me, I said.
I told her that no matter how far she fell,
I would pick her back up.
But when she called,
I didn't answer.

My phone beeps,
one unopened voicemail.
I take a deep breath and press play,
waiting for her voice,
ripe with regrets.
Help me, she says.

DARKLING PLANE

Megan Murata

You stand in front of the dark overturned earth, smelling the musty, living scent fertile soil carries. Only the sentinels – the hawthorn and yew trees – sheltering the small plot from the departing storm mark the place and its significance. But it's better that way.

No longer do the crickets call you to join in their song, nor do the birds encourage you to sing. Now the moon cannot comfort you any more than the wind. Their voices are silent – sealed with medicine and the strange quiet that engulfs the area around a grave. You are affected by the silence, too. Still you stand before the trees of contradiction and illusion with your right hand, crumbling the butterflies you trapped and displayed three years ago, clenched.

She had laughed when you caught those butterflies, just like she had when you shared your secret technique of grass whistling (you need a long, thick piece to get the best noise. Then you pull it taut between your hands, clasp them together as if you were praying to the Old Gods, and blow through the small hole between your thumbs). Nothing is, or was, comparable to her laughter. The Pied Piper would not have stolen the children away if she had been there laughing.

Perhaps it is ironic then, that her favorite instrument was the fife. You had bought one for her when your family had taken you to one of those replicated colonial villages (was it Jamevil-lage? Georgetown? Does it matter anymore, now that she is no longer here to impress?). She had loved listening to you play, slowly figuring out familiar songs by ear and the small fingering chart provided with the woodwind. Out on the edge of town, you would sit on your rock and play haltingly while she whirled around you like a bright, benevolent hurricane of sunshine and fire.

She would keep dancing even as the town kids called out, “Hey, look! It’s the crazy kid!” Nothing bothered her, though you would shrink into yourself. She would glare at you as your music slowed or ceased in response to the children’s insults and you would blush slightly and resume playing. You would always push yourself to be just a little bit louder on your fife when she was with you at those moments. In doing so, you thought that you could create a wall between you and the rest of the world with your music and her dance.

Now, your stone is cold and the weeds and grasses have grown over the trampled dead patch where she would dance (but it never was trampled by her in the first place). Your fife used to sit on your dresser, worn and filled with dust. Now it’s buried in memoriam.

The butterfly wings are now a colorful dust on your fingertips – a mix of black, blue, purple, and orange.

She loved orange. You can’t see the color, any shade or hue of it, without thinking of her. She would always wear a scarf you had fashioned for her that was probably the scrap of a grandmother’s dyeing project. That didn’t matter to her, though. She loved how it was all the hues of orange while just being one simple piece of cloth. You couldn’t even convince her to take that scarf off the one summer it nearly broke 110 degrees and you always felt like you were a melting pool of sweat as soon as you stepped outside the front door.

You don’t have the scarf because it wasn’t yours. The scarf was hers and only hers, but you couldn’t (wouldn’t) throw it away. It was proof of your time spent with her and so has now joined the fife.

Still, that scarf isn’t necessary for you to remember her. You have more permanent mementos. The thin lines of a deep garnet and black hiding under the gauzy whiteness of bandages, your shirt, and hoodie are just one testament to her abilities. There are other places, too... Your hand not occupied with crushing the butterflies slips around a pill bottle, a pencil sharpener, knocking against a screwdriver for glasses.

Suddenly the wind blows harshly from the north, interrupting your musing. Boreas is expressing his displeasure with the world. A corner of your mouth lifts in a parody of what would be a full smile. She hated it when you would devour the mythology books, surfacing only to regurgitate the information at her like Charybdis and the seawater in the Strait of Messina.

Despite her lack of interest in any mythology, she stayed with you when you read. She also stayed when you slept, ate, went to school, dreamed. Everywhere she was always in the corner of your eye if she wasn't directly in front of you or clutching at your clothes or your hands. You could rely on her to be with you.

Until then (*even then*)... Your fingers dig into the plastic bottle and pencil sharpener. Until then (*especially then*).

The memories break over the walls you had created through time, effort, help, and chemicals. Your brain becomes immersed in the torrent, each memory flickers like a film on fast-forward. Every memory cuts your heart and mind, leaving you standing there in the middle of the forest gasping for air. You wonder how you haven't dissolved into a crimson twister from the conflicting emotions and the continuous mental wounds.

Because, you realize in hindsight and through therapy, *she* was the reason you had no other friends. Her monopoly of you, your mind, and your time was the beginning of your illness. Her manipulation of you, your mind, and your time was nearly the end of you.

When you were younger, she was the reason you were called freak, crazy, insane. Now she is the reason that everyone treats you like a shattered mirror—broken and sharp, unintentionally dangerous. She was the reason no parent let their child near you—that they still don't, even if you *are* getting better.

Your grip on the pill bottle tightens and the cap digs into the palm of your hand, but the presence of the pencil sharpener stops you from tightening your grip further. You are recovering. You *are*.

Slowly you draw in a breath that shudders through your bones. You try to reassure yourself that your treatment doesn't matter (even though you know it doesn't work because it never has before). Everything has been wrapped up, closed, ended.

And somehow that thought of endings and doors (your favorite god is Janus, after all) gives you the courage to break the silence and whisper, "Goodbye."

You lift your hand full of butterfly dust from your pocket and scatter the powder to the wind over the earth like ashes from Walpurgis Night bonfires. The shimmering dust settles over the grave, sparkling as it mixes with the residual shards of mica in the soil.

Bowing your head, you release one long breath and clutch your right hand to the small locket around your neck. The locket is plain, just a simple undecorated circle of silver that contains a sketch of a girl with a bright orange scarf and a fife in her hand surrounded by miniscule butterflies. Within the locket is a sketch of a girl only you knew existed.

You had sketched her for years. She was your only Muse and she loved the times when she was the sole focus of your attention. When you were home, she would wriggle on your bed, messing up the sheets (except not) and laugh and chatter away if the day was good. It was the bad days on which you had to be careful.

She loved you and you loved her. So you told her everything. She was your confidant and that was very, very dangerous. She knew just what to say to make you do anything, playing on your doubts and insecurities. On bad days, she would list reasons why you shouldn't exist because you were a burden to your family. Or, she would dig at your inability to be social. Or your problems with school work and classes.

You would look at her, tears blurring the room and making her turn into a blob of color, and you would reach for your handheld pencil sharpener and your screwdriver. She would watch as you removed the screw that held the blade to the plastic case. She would watch while you would stare at as you made penance for your presence and failings.

She loved the color orange because that was the color iodine would stain your skin. You wouldn't be able to look at her for days after those bad times. Until the day someone else bothered to care, the day you nearly joined her as a transparent person in a solid world.

You shake those memories away and shove them back to the corner of your mind. Nothing more needs to be said or done and you turn your back on the grave. You walk away from the place that contains a bright orange scarf, the fife you used to play, and the remains of your butterfly collection.

In your pocket, your hand clenches around the pill bottle and pencil sharpener again. It's almost a reflex now to do so. You have to reassure yourself that you have control.

And you do. You are in control now. So you walk away from the grave, the hawthorn and yew trees, and out of the forest to the road. In the bright cherry-candy red convertible, your sister waits patiently with concern and understanding in her eyes.

"Ready to go?" She asks as you open the door.

You look up at the sky through the windshield as you buckle yourself into the seat. The sky is clearing, streaked with lighter, brighter clouds as the storm moves to the south.

"Yeah," you say.

She nods and starts up the car. Before she pulls back onto the road, you ask her, "Can you open the top?"

With a slight smile she complies, even though it's cold, since autumn is officially the season. But you don't mind the chill with the sky spread out before you as you lean back and relax.

You still carry the memories, the scars, the injuries. You will carry the medications for the rest of your life and the knowledge that no one in your family will ever leave you unsupervised near a sharp implement for years. But, in that moment, with only the sky in your vision, the burdens you carry are lighter than the ones you carried before.



Addy Schuetz

MIND READER

Michel Lin

Last night I felt open.
The plaster ceiling of my bedroom was missing,
gaping up at the speckled ink sky
like lying on the bottom of a jar.
Tucked up to my chin, submerged in night,
with breezes of all moods seeping into and through me,
I thought about you—
(Just you, alone, not
with me).
I wondered what swims in your warm liquid thoughts before sleep.
I know what's in mine:
hummed melodies, the afterglow of an orange lamp,
a dense fog of homework assignments and quizzes,
untimely reminders of horror movies,
and a vague longing to be kissed.
There had always been some bubbles of thought
for friends and kin, I think,
but for years there has been a place
in the back of my head for you.
A place where I imagine what you see
in the sleepy blinks before darkness.
I try in vain for a vague but solid certainty—
the mere color of your nascent dreams,
or the texture of them.
I guess a golden hazel hue,
But if I told you, would you even realize
that it's the color that rings your pupils?
Even with my best speculation,
your mind remains frayed static
that eventually aches my eyes and ears.
I can only wish that you occasionally see me
(or, more realistically, a likeness of me)
just as a likeness of you
lurks in the dimming haze before oblivion.

THE APARTMENT

Maddy Frank

Scene opens with a view into two neighboring apartments, 21 and 22, on the fourth floor of a building on 20th Street NW, Washington D.C. The apartment on the left is Chris; it is very modern with lots of chairs, couches, lamps, and tables placed sporadically around his living room. There are papers and binders everywhere. Kate's apartment on the right is more traditional and tidy, with only a sectional and a small coffee table. When the lights come up, an alarm goes off in Chris' apartment and the audience sees both characters enter their living rooms and get ready for work. Kate, a woman in her mid-twenties, is already dressed in business attire and is gathering her things from around the apartment; she appears to be running on time. Chris, a well-built man in his late twenties, runs out of his bedroom half dressed, frantically trying to get ready. A girl, Samantha, comes out of the bedroom and leans against the doorway; she is also half dressed.

SCENE I

Samantha: It's only seven thirty, just come back to bed for a while.

Chris: *(slightly irritated)* Though I appreciate the offer, Samantha, I do have a real life job to get to. Don't you have to be somewhere? Everyone has to be somewhere!

Samantha: No, actually, I don't. At least let me make you breakfast before you leave?

Chris: *(still gathering his things, not paying attention to her)* This is your first time in my house, how the hell would you know where I keep my kitchen tools? Where is the midterm report? Did you move it off of this table last night? I told you not to touch anything. *(finally turning toward her)* Listen, I had a great time last night, but I'm going to need you to put on some clothes and get out of my apartment.

Samantha: *(in a defeated tone)* Fine. Will I at least get to see you again? Maybe this Friday?

Chris: Samantha, I'm going to be honest with you—probably not. *Samantha heads back into the bedroom before emerging a few moments later with clothes on. She exits out his door as he ushers her out, following behind her. Kate is leaving her apartment as well, and Samantha runs into her.*

Kate: Oh! Excuse me, I wasn't really paying attention. *(looking to Chris)* She seems sweet, pretty too.

Chris: *(rushing past her)* Who? Oh, oh yeah. *He exits the stage, Kate is about to follow when a slightly drunken man bumps into her.*

Kate: Phil? Oh my god, you look awful! What happened to you?

Phil: *(slurring his words slightly)* Nothin' sis, just stopped by to say hi... and also for a place to crash.

Kate: Again? *(looking at his clothes)* Ok, just one more time, but only because I can't stand to see you in this condition. I'm sure I have something you can change into. *Kate pulls him into her apartment, taking off her jacket as she enters; when she disappears into the back bedroom, Phil makes himself comfortable on her couch.*

Phil: Kate! Do you have any Advil, or ibuprofen, or Tums? And also we should order a pizza. Aren't you starving?

Kate: *(emerging from the bedroom)* How can you be hungover? You're still drunk! And there's some left over Chinese in the fridge, you can have that. You realize I'm going to have to call in sick to work, right? This is the third time in the last month. You can't keep doing this. *Phil already seems to be dozing off as she picks up her phone to call work.* Hi! Yes Mr. Coul, it's me, Kate. I'm so sorry, but I think I ate something bad last night and I won't be able to make it in today...yes, I know this is a new job...yes, I do have those loan forms for Mrs. Sand filled out...I can get them on your desk

tomorrow...*(looking to Phil)*...no I don't think I'll be able to get it to you sooner...yes, Mr. Coul, I will see you tomorrow, pinky promise! *As she hangs up she cringes at her own childishness. She goes to sit down at the end of the couch.* Phil, this is getting ridiculous, I'm going to have to call Mom and Dad one of these days...*(sees that he is definitely passed out)*... one of these days... *Lights go down and back up again to reveal it is now later in the day. Phil is awake and in a different position on the couch and Kate is reading a book next to him.*

SCENE II

Phil: Hey, why don't you go grab us a bite for dinner? I swear if I have to eat another mouthful of those leftovers, I'll have a reason to get drunk again.

Kate: I'll go, but only because you're my brother. *She grabs her keys and wallet off of the table before leaving her apartment. Before she gets far, she bumps into Chris.* Sorry! Obviously I never look where I'm going...oh gosh, I knocked over all of your things...just let me help you.

Chris: You're fine! I wasn't looking either. Oh, and by the way, that girl this morning was—she was just a friend. We're not dating or you know, anything.

Kate: Did I make you feel uncomfortable when I talked about that girl? I always do that! I'm so sorry, I really didn't mean anything by it, I was just trying to be—

Chris: *(cutting her off)* Oh no, of course not, I just didn't want you to think I was that kind of guy. *(laughing nervously)* But I don't just work all day either. *They share an uncomfortable silence before realizing they are both still crouching in the hallway.*

Kate: Well, I should probably go, I'm going to get my brother food, we're not dating either. *She cringes at her failed attempt at a joke.*

Chris: *(continues to laugh nervously before nodding a goodbye and returning to his apartment)* He has only just sat down when his phone rings. Hello? Uhh yes, hi Mom. He begins to rub the back of his neck. No, no I'm fine. Yes, work was good today. When do you want to visit? Tomorrow? With Dad? I appreciate you wanting to come see me, but my apartment's not exactly visitor-ready at the moment. He looks around the room at the mess. Fine, fine, but I don't want any lectures this time. I'm twenty-eight, you know. Yes, I love you too. Bye. Chris then quickly hangs up the phone with a panic-stricken look on his face. He begins to frantically try to stack papers and clean up all of the trash.

SCENE III

Scene opens with lights up in both apartments. Kate is obviously getting ready for work, with Phil continually telling her to be quiet so he can sleep. There are a few beer bottles surrounding the couch where he sleeps. Chris is still cleaning his apartment and he is attempting to stack his papers without disorganizing them.

Kate: *(in a loud whisper)* Hey, Phil! I'm leaving for work now. Maybe I'll try to get out of work early so I can drive you to Mom's? Phil? Did you hear—

Phil: *(cutting her off)* Yeah, yeah Kate, I heard you. *(motioning his hand toward the door)* Just go, I'll be fine. Kate begins to head out of the apartment. And there's no way you're getting me to Mom's! Kate leaves without looking back. She then sees Chris coming out of his apartment with two black trash bags.

Kate: *(turning toward him)* Oh, doing some spring cleaning I see... Chris smiles, but doesn't respond... Here, let me help you with that. She takes one of the bags from him, forcing him to stop and talk. Hey, any chance you're going to be around today?

Chris: For once, yes. My parents are actually coming to visit. *(frowning his brows)* Why do you ask?

Kate: Well, it looks like my brother is going to be staying with me for a while and he can get a bit rowdy during the day when he's alone. If he gets too loud, can you knock on the door or even just the wall and tell him to be quiet? I don't want him to bother anyone in the building...*she starts to fidget and then continues...* actually, don't tell him anything. I'm sure he'll get the message from you banging on the wall. *Her tone becomes more nervous.* And, and don't try to talk with him if he doesn't listen, he can get a little... well....never mind I'm sure everything will be ok.

Chris: *(clearly uncomfortable, but smiles to make her feel more at ease)* Don't worry, I'll keep an eye out for him. Or should I say an ear? *He laughs slightly at his own joke. She smiles and follows him off stage, out of the hallway. Chris comes back on stage without the trash bag and enters back into his apartment when his phone starts to ring.* Hello?... Louise? Louise who?...oh yes, hi....yeah, sorry I haven't called... this weekend? No, I'm definitely not available...yup, I'm totally swamped with work right now, you know me *(starts to laugh to try and break the obvious tension)* I'm really sorry Laura, but—oh right, Louise—but I really don't think we'll be seeing each other again...sorry...no, I really have to go...alright bye. *As he hangs up, two older people, a man and a woman, knock on his door. They are dressed in "high end" attire and have clearly prepared for this encounter. Chris' body freezes before he can finally muster the courage to open the door.*

Chris' mom: Goodness, Christopher. It took you long enough to open the door.

Chris: Mom! Dad! *(looking them both up and down)* You really didn't need to dress up for this, you're just visiting for few hours right? Never mind, it doesn't matter *(still blocking the doorway)*...Actually, it's just that these stays have never gone very well, so maybe this time, you could just lay—

Chris' mom: Christopher, let us in. I do not have any patience for your nonsense today. *(rushing past him)* Is this a new rug? It looks horrendous.

Chris: Ah yes, Mom, please come in.

Chris' dad: Where's that report you were going to have me look over? Is it done yet? You know, I know a great editor that could help you with it. God knows you'll need it. *(flipping through stacks of paper around the apartment and then turning toward him, raising his eyebrows)* You did get it done, right?

Chris: Yes, Dad, of course I got it done. Do you want a drink or—

Chris' mom: Oh goodness, honey. You should have told me you needed help decorating. I could have been here with new drapes in no time at all.

Chris' dad: He begins to shift papers around and move them from their appointed places around the apartment. He picks up a packet to read: "Numbers from April 2014"? That's your title? I guess it's a good indication of what the rest of the paper will be like.

Chris: Can you stop moving those around? I have them in specific places. And I work as an accountant for an advertising firm. They want facts. Not creativity.

Chris' dad: You have them in "specific places," eh? Seems like you just don't want my input. That's fine, that's fine. Even though I *am* far more qualified than you. Wisdom comes with age, you know.

Chris: You worked in management! You have no qualifications! *(getting more worked up with every word)* I am tired of you two coming in my apartment every two months and thinking you can manage my life. You just march in here and interrupt everyth—

Chris' mom: Me? I would never, Christopher!

Chris: *(turns toward her, looking genuinely shocked that she doesn't see the irony)* This is ridiculous! It would be one thing if your visits were more consistent, but I never have enough time to prepare myself for your high standards. I have been cleaning and showering and cooking for the past twenty-four hours just to try to impress you. I don't even know why I do it. I have never gotten one compliment out of either of you. Yet, I am a successful twenty-nine year old man. Believe it or not, I can handle myself and I have done it pretty well so far. *Chris' mom almost gets a word out before there is an obnoxious loud knocking on the door.*

Samantha: Goddammit Chris, let me in! We need to talk. *Everyone in the apartment slowly turns toward the door but no one moves. Samantha begins to bang louder.*

Chris: *(opening the door cautiously)* Samantha! You know, this is so funny, I was picking up the phone to call you right before you started knocking. What are the chances? You look lovely by the way.

Samantha: *(storming past him)* You have not called me and I have been waiting. I know you said you weren't going to contact me, but honestly how could you not? We had such a great time. *(noticing the two other people in the room)* Who the hell are these two? Either you have some explaining to do or you're into some weird stuff.

Chris: Oh my god, these are my parents! Samantha, just take a deep breath.

Chris' mom: *(in a mildly disgusted tone)* Is this another one of your girls, Christopher?

Samantha: *(clenching her fists)* One of his whats? You listen here, lady. I am not just a side girl. So why don't you just stop talking?

Chris' dad: Christopher, do not let your girlfriend talk to your mother like that!

Chris: (*confused, and still slightly panicked*) What is going on?! Mom, please don't think you know what's going on in my life. I do not sleep with everything that walks, despite what you may think. And Dad, she's not my girlfriend.

Samantha: (*looking hurt, but still yelling*) I'm not? Are you kidding me! I thought—

Chris: Oh god, no, I didn't mean any of that. Really, I promise. You're definitely the only girl I've seen in the past three days. (*holding her shoulders and looking into her eyes*) I'm almost sure of it. *This seems to satisfy Samantha as she folds her arms across her chest and sneers at Chris' mom. Chris turns toward his mom and dad.* Maybe this wasn't the best time for a visit. And maybe next time you do come, you could show some respect for what I've accomplished.

Samantha: Yeah, like me. *Chris' mom and dad both look disgusted and begin to storm out.*

Chris: No, Samantha, not like you. Mom, Dad! Please come back! I didn't mean any of it like that—(*right before they shut the door*)—I do need help with the drapes!

Samantha: Well, I'm glad they're finally gone. *She looks at him suggestively.*

Chris: You've got to be kidding, right? Did you not witness anything that just happened? *She looks at him with pleading eyes.* Fine, you can stay.

SCENE IV

Scene opens with lights down in Chris' apartment and the lights up in Kate's. It is late at night and Phil is obviously drunk and has made a mess of Kate's apartment.

Kate: (*opening the door and stepping into the apartment*) Hey, Phil, I'm sorry I'm home so late, but I brought us some—(*seeing the mess he's made*)—what happened?! Oh my god, Phil! How much did you drink? *She picks up bottles as she makes her way over to him.* I was out working and this is how you occupied your time? I didn't even know I had so much liquor in the house! *She is now standing right in front of him.* Oh, you also smell awful. Beer mixed with body odor does not suit you.

Phil: (*slurring his words*) Hey, sis, just calm down. It was only a few drinks before bed. Really, I'm fine.

Kate: It's after twelve, Phil. You are not fine. I knew this would happen again, I knew it. I've done this for you time and time again and I'm tired of it. You know what? I pity you. That is the only reason that I keep inviting you back in here. You know that right? I don't want to have to deal with this anymore, you coming to my apartment every other week begging for a place to stay and some new clothes; and then when I let you stay, you won't even let me help you! I have a life now, Phil. A real life. If you're going to be drunk every time we talk, I don't want to talk.

Phil: Well, like it or not, you're stuck with me. You only got one brother and I'm it. And you're not so successful. In fact, I pity you. You think you have it figured out because you have a fancy apartment and a stable job. But you don't do anything, not really. I've never seen you do one thing that took any guts. What do you do with all of your free time?

Kate: Worry about you, Phil! That's what I do with all of my so called "free time." But I'm not letting you take up any more of it. I'm calling Mom. And this time, when you leave, you will not come back, I swear. *She starts to reach for her phone when Phil grabs her arm, more forcefully than is necessary.*

Phil: I will not be the guy that lives with his mother, I won't. (*now pulling on her arm even harder*)

Kate: Phil, stop. You're hurting me!

Phil: *He continues to resist her struggles. I'll let go when you swear not to call. Kate slips her wrist through his tight grasp and runs out the door. In the background, the sounds of Phil slamming doors and throwing things can still be heard. Kate sits on the floor in the hallway in front of her apartment. She begins to sob while rubbing her hurt arm. A light flashes on in Chris' apartment. He has obviously heard the commotion and leaves his apartment to see what's going on.*

Chris: *(upon seeing Kate crying on the floor)* Kate? It is Kate, right? Are you okay? I heard a ton of noise through the wall. *He bends down to her.* What happened? Are you hurt?

Kate: My brother is just a little tipsy. *She looks to him, trying to force a smile.* I'm really sorry we woke you up. Honestly, he was just a little drunk.

Chris: *He sees her bruised arm and bends crouches down next to her.* I would say he's more than "a little drunk." Are you sure you're ok? I'll go talk to him. *He starts to get up, but Kate grabs his arm.*

Kate: Please don't. I'm sure he's calmed down by now. I just need a little breather. I'll be fine in a few minutes.

Chris: *(sitting down next to her)* I think I might need a breather too. Families never turn out quite the way you want them too, do they? *Chris pauses for a moment.* When people say you have to love them anyway, you don't have to, Kate. I want you to know that you don't have to be good to him. And family doesn't always know best. Just because they were there when you were young doesn't mean they know what's going on in your life right now or what you need. I know I'm overstepping my bounds, but you don't have any obligations to him, Kate.

Kate: But I do. Phil's always been with me, whether he was drunk or sober. I can't just let him go off on his own. I told him I would, but I can't. It's like I have this inner need to fix him, because he deserves it, I really think he does.

Chris: Maybe he does. And maybe you just can't help him right now; maybe he'll come around... (*shaking his head*) I'm really sorry I'm saying all of this stuff, I don't really know what I'm talking about; it all sounds so cliché.

Kate: (*with a slight laugh*) I would have never pinned you as the guy to give deep life advice to a crying girl in the hallway.

Chris: Well, when I can't fix my own problems, I try to fix other people's. I'm no good at being an adult when it comes to my own life; my parents were right about that.

Kate: From what I can tell, you have the adult life figured out.

Chris: You mean the girls and the paperwork? It's more of a very intricately planned façade. I'm glad you think I have it together though, that's very reassuring. (*with a smile*) It's taken me years to build up this reputation.

Kate: Well, you had me fooled...(*taking a deep breath*) I should probably go back inside now, it must be after one.

Chris: Why don't you stay on my couch? Just for the night? It might help the whole situation cool down, not that I even know what the situation is.

Kate: (*standing up*) Phil is probably passed out by now. *She smiles.* I'll be fine. *She turns and tiptoes back into her apartment, leaving Chris sitting on the floor.*

SCENE V

Scene opens the next morning with lights up in Kate's apartment, where she is seen pacing around the room. The apartment looks much cleaner than the night before.

Kate: *(to herself)* Just say thank you. It's not that hard. Just walk over there, knock on the door, and say, "Thanks. You were nice to me last night." *(putting her head in her hands)* Oh man, that sounds so stupid. I'll just say "thanks" and then walk away. That's good. I'm sure that'll be fine. *She leaves her apartment and right before she gets to Chris' door, Samantha walks out, still putting on her heels. Kate almost runs into her. Oh! I'm sorry, I didn't expect anyone to be coming out of that apartment. Samantha pays her little to no attention and continues to walk off stage. Kate then turns around looking discouraged and angry. She heads back into her own apartment where Phil is sitting on the couch, completely sober.*

Phil: Before you say anything, I wasn't too drunk last night to forget what happened, and I'm sorry.

Kate: *(barely paying attention)* No, no, it's fine, just a couple of bruises, nothing big...I forget that sometimes people just do things that mean nothing. You know? Like someone could be really nice or really awful, but they don't have a reason, or a motive. I always forget that.

Phil: I can't tell if we're talking about me or not...

Kate: No, I'm just talking generally. *She is now pacing the room, moving her hands everywhere.* I just wish people would tell you their intent before the conversation even started, or if they even had any intent to begin with. Maybe it's me. Maybe I'm just awful at reading people. That's probably it. And to be honest, I've never stated my motives with people, why should they state theirs? Whatever, sometimes things just happen and I just have to move on. They're empty things.

Phil: I'm pretty sure you're talking about me, sis, and I'm tired of it. I'm done with you passively-aggressively trying to tell me something. If you have to say something, just come out and say it. You need to learn to speak and stand for yourself.

Kate: *(standing still and facing him)* This isn't about you, Phil, but if you want to make it that way, then fine. You're right. I do need to stand up for myself...so, get out. Get out of my apartment. I love you Phil, but I'm not going to watch you drink yourself to death on my couch. And after you leave, I'm calling mom. And this time, I'll make it to the phone; because you need help, but I can't give it to you. Maybe that makes me weak and messed up, but not as messed up as you. So leave. *They share a silent moment of tension.* Did that take enough guts, Phil? Or do you want me to go on?

Phil: *(through gritted teeth)* No, Kate, that was good enough. And if you don't want to see me again, you won't. Trust me, this time, I'm not coming back. *He starts to head for the door.*

Kate: No, you'll be back. I know because you've said that before. You said it a month ago and you'll say it again in a few weeks, but I won't open the door this time. I won't!

Phil: *(walks out the door with Kate right behind him)* *They are both standing in the hallway.* I may have repeated my words, but you'll continue to repeat yours as well. *He exits off stage. Kate is left standing in the hallway alone until Chris comes out from the other side of the stage a few seconds later. Kate turns and sees him. She almost sneers.*

Kate: Ah, look who it is, Mr. "I know everything about life."

Chris: *(unable to tell if she is joking or not)* I'm pretty sure I clearly stated that I know nothing about life.

Kate: Yeah, I figured that part out a few moments ago. *She looks over her shoulder to where Phil exited. Chris and Kate share an awkward silence before he continues*

Chris: It's funny we keep meeting in the hallway like this. I didn't even know you a week ago.

Kate: You don't really know me now.

Chris: I guess that's true...but we've begun to get to know each other. That's a start.

Kate: A start to what? You know what, never mind. *She takes a deep breath* But I do want to thank you for last night, I needed someone to talk to.

Chris: Well admittedly, I did do most of the talking, but you're welcome.

Kate: Maybe I'll meet you in the hallway later, but I'm headed to work now. *She starts to head off stage.*

Chris: *(calling after her)* Yeah, see you later. I have to go call my mom anyways. *Kate is now completely off stage.* That may be the dumbest thing I've ever said. Great. *Chris heads back into his apartment and paces for a few seconds before finally picking up his phone.* Alright, should I call Stacy? Or was her name Sarah? I should probably just call my mom...but I could always call Carrie. *He sits down on his couch and dials a number.* Hi, Carrie. It's me, Chris. I was hoping you would be interested in hang—hello? Carrie? Oh my god, she hung up on me. *He takes a deep breath.* Looks like I'm calling my mom then...hi, Mom...yes, I know I should've called sooner. I want to apologize for that, and the way I acted. I know I haven't been a great son lately and I want you to know that you were right, I don't have everything together, and I shouldn't pretend to...I

sound like I'm being forced to say this? I know this sounds cliché, but I really do love you, Mom...what prompted me to call? It was actually a girl...no, it wasn't Samantha, it was my neighbor, Kate...yeah, the one you say is pretty. Listen, I don't know if she wants to talk to me or not. I'm trying to be friendly, but I'm receiving a lot of mixed signals. I don't know if it's me or not. It's probably me...I do *not* sound like a romantic comedy. Mom, focus...ok, yeah. I guess I'll just keep talking to her. It's the only thing I really can do... love you too, Mom. *He hangs up the phone and the lights on stage go down.*

SCENE VI

Scene opens with Chris pacing around his apartment. He is trying to keep himself occupied by reading and organizing papers. Kate is still not back from work.

Chris: A walk would be good for me. Walks are always good. *He grabs a jacket before leaving his apartment. As he closes his door, Kate comes back on stage. They both stop and she looks at him and smiles.*

Kate: Well look who it is, I never would've guessed.

Chris: *(still standing on the other end of the hallway)* Hey, Kate. I, uh, hope you had a good day at work...listen, I'm really sorry for saying all of that stuff last night. You're right. I don't have any idea what I'm talking about, I realize that now. My life is a mess—I don't recognize help when I'm getting it, I don't know how to separate work from the rest of my life, I don't know how to organize papers and I obviously don't know how to talk to women.

Kate: *(laughing)* You actually did help me, whether I like to admit it or not. And I don't think all of that stuff you said was true... the women one however, that one is definitely true.

Chris: I would love it if you could help me out with it then. *He scrunches his face at his terrible pick-up line.* What I'm trying to say is, do you want to come into my apartment for a drink?

Kate: I would love to. *She walks toward him until they're standing together. They then continue on into his apartment. When they close the door, the stage lights go down.*



Mac Kaufman

HEROES OF OLD

Nate Bonsib

If someone were to ask you what a bard is, you would probably think of a brightly dressed midget walking on his hands and telling bad jokes. Let me just say you're flat wrong, although it is a pretty common stereotype. We bards are nothing of the sort. We follow a noble tradition of story and song, teaching the younger generations the feats of the heroes of old. At least, that's what I tell myself—my stories aren't always necessarily for children's ears. But, I digress. I should probably explain what I'm doing in fools' clothing—can I comment on what a hideous yellow and orange jumpsuit thing it is?—chained to the moldy stone wall of a dungeon.

As far as I'm concerned, this is all a huge misunderstanding. It all started a while back, when I was traveling home from the North Country, and was looking for a place to spend the night. Since I was nowhere near a decent inn, I had decided to take my chances in the forest. Upon a little investigation, my natural luck brought me to an excellent little cave situated at the foot of a small stone outcropping. I formed my meager belongings into a mattress and attempted to sleep. When I woke up some hours later, the moon was floating high in the sky, and I had a companion. Lying near the mouth of the cave, right next to my leather clad feet, was a hulking black bear, calmly asleep in the remains of my food supplies. Tucking into a small ball, I inched my way out of the cave with the clothes on my back and little else. Suddenly destitute, I fumbled towards the path, frequently falling over roots hidden in the oppressive darkness.

When I finally arrived back at the path, colorfully cursing my bad luck the whole time, I grudgingly continued my long journey, counting heavily on the hope that I could buy supplies in the next town. I must have wandered for days along that lonely path, surviving off berries and roots I fervently hoped were edible, drinking from every ditch and stream the path meandered over. Finally, on what I figured was the fifth day of travel, I walked

over the crest of a hill and was met with the light of a hundred torches, each burning a bright song from the windows and walls of a hundred homes, protecting those who dwelled within from the night's darkness. Sometime later I arrived at the gates, only to be stopped by a bored sentry.

"You there, halt!" I stumbled to a stop, standing as straight as I could manage as the guard sauntered over, both hands on his spear. "State your name and business in Hastings, and be warned, I won't tolerate any lies."

Thoughts racing, I decided to try and play off this obviously bored guard's ego.

"Noble Guard, I am but Ragnar the bard, a simple fool hoping to make a living through song in this great city's inns and taverns." I threw the "noble" in to distract him from the obviously vague lie I had just spun. "I am no judge of men, but can I guess a strong warrior such as you can show me the way to said establishments?" My plan was working; the guard had puffed out his chest and stood up a little straighter at the word "strong".

"All inns and taverns are located against the east wall of the city," the guard answered in a voice much deeper than when he had started. "I take you at your word, Ragnar; move along." He stepped back against the wall, boredom already creeping back into his eyes. Turning to the gate once again, I joined the stream of people hurrying under the gate.

Now I'm not trying to brag, but the first thing I did in the city was pull off a very smooth robbery. I went into a nearby bakery, easily identifiable by the smell of freshly baked bread wafting out of the open door and the loud scolding of a small scullery lad by a grossly fat baker. I had loitered outside the window a bit, making a big show of inspecting the neat row of loafs laid out on a stout wooden table. I did this until the fat baker stared at me, hinting I should probably buy something or clear out. I decided this was my cue, and I walked in.

"You've been hovering outside my window for some time lad" the baker huffed, his heavy garlic breath nearly making me gag. "You planning on buying something?" His eyes narrowed just slightly as he finished.

“Indeed I am, three of your finest loaves.” I paused to think. “And also a sugared muffin,” I finished, adopting what I hoped was a confident smile. The baker didn’t move.

“That’s quite the order, do you have the coin for it?” he responded, with a pointed look towards my ripped and stained clothes.

“Indeed I do, friend.” I held up a small leather pouch and shook it, watching the baker’s eyes light up at the telltale clink of coins.

“Your bread will be ready presently,” the baker said in a far kinder tone, the coins having spurred his manners. As soon as the baker’s back was turned I let out a sigh of relief. My bag of coins was nothing more than an old piece of leather I had found in a nearby alley filled with nails, also thoughtfully provided by the alley. However, if everything worked out, I would be far enough away when the baker discovered this for himself.

“Here you are, sir,” the baker said, interrupting my thoughts. He handed me a large sack, evidently filled with delicious bread, and looked expectantly towards the sack in at my belt. Unhooking it, I made a big production of peering inside, as if counting coins, before tying it back up and handing it over. However, just as he took it from me, I sprang into action.

“Um, excuse me, but your scullery boy just dropped a pan,” I helpfully pointed out. Instantly, the baker’s face turned a deep shade of crimson, and he whirled on the hapless boy, already shouting obscenities. At that moment I chose to make my exit, grabbing the food and ducking out the door.

After filling my desperately hungry belly, I decided to fulfill my promise to the guard and reluctantly looked for work, following the guard’s directions to the city’s taverns. Unfortunately, I had no instruments, having left them in the company of that bear, and no money. As I was walking I quickly discovered another problem: a grim expression on the face of every citizen, not even smiling at the best of my endless repertoire of knee-slappers. From my years of experience, I knew this wasn’t good. Unhappy people were eager for distraction, but grim people needed far more than a few songs to lift their spirits. I decided

to try and find the source of their woe. Looking around, I spotted a bored sentry leaning against a nearby wall, poking at rocks with his spear with all the nobility of one of His Majesty's Elite Guard. I approached him with the semblance of a simple laborer, pretty convincing given the sorry state of my clothing.

"Hello, friend!" I said, causing the guard to quickly straighten up with a fairly sheepish expression.

"What do you...I mean, can I aid you, citizen?" Boy, was he new at this. From his face I would place him in his teens. The King must be desperate for soldiers. Unfortunately this meant war.

"Well, I was surprised to see such a young fella as you working the patrols." The boy puffed himself up to full size, making like some ridiculous bird.

"I am seventeen years tomorrow, completely capable of serving." He said, visibly struggling to keep his chest puffed out. He continued, only this time with a slightly hushed voice, "Also, with the Norse raiders only a fortnight's march away, the King needs all the soldiers he can get." Well now, that was interesting. Last I had heard, the Norse armies were still weeks away. At least, that's what the King wants his subjects to believe. Having the information I wanted, I decided to end the conversation.

"Well then, congratulations. Anyway, I must be on my way, friend. Until next time." I said as I turned and strolled away. Things were starting to get exciting, a large battle could give me the inspiration for new material, and perhaps I could even regale the King with a song of his victory. But for now there were more important things to be seen to, mainly sleep, as my large meal was making me quite sleepy. I walked a little farther before finding an appropriate place to sleep off the rest of the afternoon—a nice little hole dug into the back wall of some large stone structure. Regardless of the cold stone floor, it was concealed from prying eyes and interruptions. Without further ado, I scrunched down and curled into a ball, falling asleep with hardly any effort at all.

After seemingly no time at all, my pleasant dreams were shattered by the sudden blast of a horn. I scrambled out of my hole, knocking my head on the stone in the process, and dashed

into the street to see what all the commotion was about. The first thing I noticed was the fires, leaping and dancing across the thatch and straw houses, mercilessly burning all they touched. The second thing I noticed was the battalion of Norse soldiers directly in front of me. With a swift swing of a club and a solid thud, everything faded to silence.

When I woke up, I was chained to this forsaken cell in who knows what castle, obviously left to rot. I also happened to notice someone had ever so thoughtfully provided me with new clothes, the torn and gaudy getup I had previously mentioned. After what I assumed was several hours, the door clanged open and a hulking Norman soldier entered the room. Without a word, he pulled me to my feet as easily as he would a child, unlocked my bonds, and led me from my cell. We walked down a dizzying amount of cold stone passageways, only illuminated by guttering torches. As we walked, the passages gradually increased in size, until we reached a large echoing hall to whose vaulted ceilings the light did not reach. At the end of this hall was a large wooden door, banded with iron and gold. I finally figured out where I was. It was the secondary throne room of the Kings court at Hastings, located under the fortress. I had a bad feeling something unpleasant was waiting for me behind those doors, and the hair on the back of my neck stood up as I shivered with fear. We reached the door. Using his spear, my escort rapped sharply upon the door. With the exception of a small creaking of hinges, the door opened silently, and I was pushed into the ordinate room beyond.

The stone floor was dressed with a smooth sea of crimson carpets, and stone pillars soared to the ceilings from the edges of the room. At the opposite end, concealed by the dim lights, was the outline of a massive marble throne, inlaid with streams of gold that flickered and danced in the torchlight. As I took in the scenery, I was roughly poked and prodded into the center of the room and forced to my knees. My escort then bowed to the throne, and retreated to a corner. I heard the boom of a closed door behind me. Shaking with fear, I attempted to penetrate the darkness shrouding the throne to get a good look at my captor.

A figure shifted on the chair and with a flare of the torches I realized how dead I was to become. Seated at the throne, with one leg roguishly draped over an arm, sat William of Normandy in full battle gear, accented with an odd smear of blood that paid homage to the recent battle. His face was a combination of amusement and cruelty, flashing eyes standing against its roughness, his mouth cocked in a smug half-grin.

“Well, Bard. It seems like you’re having a spot of bad luck,” William said, with a voice that sounded like a pickax on stone. I mean seriously, how did he expect anyone to hear him? Did he eat gravel for breakfast? I pondered similar questions as he continued to address me. “Perhaps you are wondering why I had you brought here. Or perhaps you aren’t wondering anything on account of my men knocking you senseless. Regardless, I need some entertainment. And you will do... nicely. Guards, take him. Make sure he is in the west courtyard tomorrow morning before I arrive. Dismissed.” Dragged to my feet, I was once again led away.



Will Corbett

I could feel the sun warming my bruised back complement that dreadful stone dungeon. Other than that, my senses were pretty much blind. A thick black hood had been pulled over my head, blocking my sight and muffling any surrounding noise. After what felt like hours, the hood was yanked off, and I was left blinking in the sunlight. As soon as I could see again, I took a quick peek around. It would appear that I was in the courtyard William had spoken of earlier. The whole place wasn't very big, but it was ringed by a massive garden. Near the far end of the yard was a long table with several seats. Servants were scuttling back and forth between it and a sally port; bring out a multitude of dishes, assembly for William. I sudden felt the aching pain of my own stomach; I hadn't eaten since the day before. Without warning, William and a few official-type men strolled put into the courtyard, talking and laughing. William sat down at the table's center, his advisors sat around him. After they had been settled and served drinks, William finally noticed me.

"Ah, yes, Bard! How good of you to join us. I have a task for you. I require a tale of great bravery and celebration to entertain me before I crush the rest of this sad excuse for a Kingdom. Tell me what stories you know." Wow, all of this rough treatment for a story? He got my nerves up for nothing; all he had to do was say he wanted me to perform for him. I would have arranged a clever and bold entrance. Now, what would I perform? I needed someone strong, a brave hero through and through, a champion of his people, an Anglo Saxon hero of old, I needed Beowulf. "Bard! Pick a story before I have your addled head cut off."

"Of course, Your Highness, I was merely selecting the proper story from my vast repertoire. Now, have you heard the Legend of Beowulf?" I decided to play up on the flattery. After all, the customer is always right.

"Ah, I have not. I look forward to hearing this new story. However, if it does not please me, I will kill you. You may begin." He sat back in his chair, flashing his stupid evil grin as he waited. I decided making him wait wasn't the best idea, and so I immediately began.

“A long time ago, the reign of God was challenged by great beasts of evil and darkness, haunting the foul seas and fens of the earth. One such monster was Grendel, and terrible was he. He was as tall as three men, wide as four. His arms could stir the very seas; his roar was known to create storms from a blue sky. Darkness was his clothing, and suffering his daily meal. Long he had been content alone, but he grew restless. Grendel lay claim over the Great Fens and all foolish enough to enter. However, human men learn quickly, and they now avoided the Fens and its terrible master. In his restlessness, Grendel left the Fens and strode out to find new prey. Nearby was the fair city of Herot, ruled by a just and fair king. Here Grendel found men in abundance. He waited till nightfall, and when black clouds covered the last of the moons light, Grendel struck. This continued every night, and many men were slain by the monster. The king was in shock, his warriors no match for such a stealthy beast. They would lay awake in full arms only to be slaughtered from behind. Hoping to find some end to this trouble, the king sent messengers in all directions, on a quest to find a hero.

“Enter Beowulf, the Hero of God and the Scourge of Darkness. He was an extraordinary man, strong enough to wrestle a bull yet faster than an antelope on foot. Renowned in his own kingdom, he had set to the sea to find even greater challenges than he had known in his own land. It wasn’t long before he came to know of the monster Grendel. He thought that alone he would challenge the monster, for no man or beast had a chance against Beowulf. For five weeks he traveled before arriving at Herot. When he arrived, the king fell on his knees and lamented, ‘Great Hero, I am in desperate need of your strength, for the beast known as Grendel is destroying my kingdom. He has killed many of my subjects, and my closest friend and advisor. I beg of you, dispose of this monster!’ Beowulf responded, his voice strong and confidence.

“‘Have no more fear, great king, for I am Beowulf, and I have dealt with monsters that this Grendel can’t begin to imagine. I am God’s hero, and Darkness shall stand no chance.’ The court, roused by such a bold display of bravery, threw a huge feast that

very night. Beowulf enjoyed some food, forming a daring plan. As night fell, all of the revelers set out to sleep in the great hall. A guard was placed out, but Beowulf insisted that they sleep as well. He alone sat awake guarding the throne. Hours he waited, not hearing a sound. Grendel had heard the celebration from a far, and was cautious with his approach. As Beowulf was on the edge of sleep, a slight noise pulled him to his senses. He turned very slowly, and saw a great shape blocking the doorway. Grendel saw these new men to prey on, and began to approach Beowulf. Beowulf waited until Grendel was nearly upon him, and then leapt up, stabbing the monster in the thigh with his great sword. Grendel howled in pain, more surprised than hurt, and swept his mighty fists at Beowulf. But Beowulf was just as fast, grabbing Grendel's arm from the very air, and like a steel trap he held tight. Grendel was very much surprised by this sudden attack, as he had encountered no such resistance before. He pulled against Beowulf, wishing to flee, but even his great strength was no match for Beowulf. He pulled and pulled, but could not loosen his arm. Beowulf tightened his grip even more, causing the great Grendel to whimper and howl like a newborn babe. Grendel struggled with all his might. Suddenly there was a great popping sound, and Grendel was flung backwards, free of Beowulf's grip. He jumped up as soon as he hit the ground and ran from the mighty Beowulf. The great commotion had woken even person in the hall, and they now saw Beowulf standing unharmed, holding aloft the massive arm of Grendel. His great strength had been no match for Beowulf, who had ripped his arm clear off. Beowulf then addressed the frightened king. 'Great King, by the right of God and the arm of our foe, I proclaim this kingdom free of Darkness! May the gods' light forever shine down upon us, for surely Grendel has died of this injury!' The crowd was stunned, and then broke into cheering and celebration, for the great ender of days was no more. The king was generous, and showered Beowulf in the wealth of a prince. But is this the end for Beowulf, now content to live as a very wealthy man? Or is a greater evil lurking in the darkness just out of sight, watching our hero and waiting for the right time to strike?"

RUMINATIONS ON A BEVERAGE

Oliver Ash

Has there ever been anything more refreshing
Than the sound that ice makes as it moves around the glass?

The rhythmic clinks are a thirst-quenching morse code,
Saying “Come one, come all! Parched tongues,
you have found your salvation!”

The first sip is unholy bliss, respite and nepenthe
From the torturous lip-smacking, tongue-wetting feeling that
accompanies the crack of dawn,

But alas, much like the diminishing marginal utility
of a ballpark hotdog,
All subsequent sips somehow sacrifice some satisfaction.

Refreshing? Yes, do not misunderstand me!
This beverage is still as cool and clear as the minute
it was given to me,

The very first minute I head the enticing siren song of its ice
When the waitress set it down on my coaster.

Funny how something so plentiful,
under the right circumstances,
Can turn an Outback Steakhouse into a glittering oasis of satiety

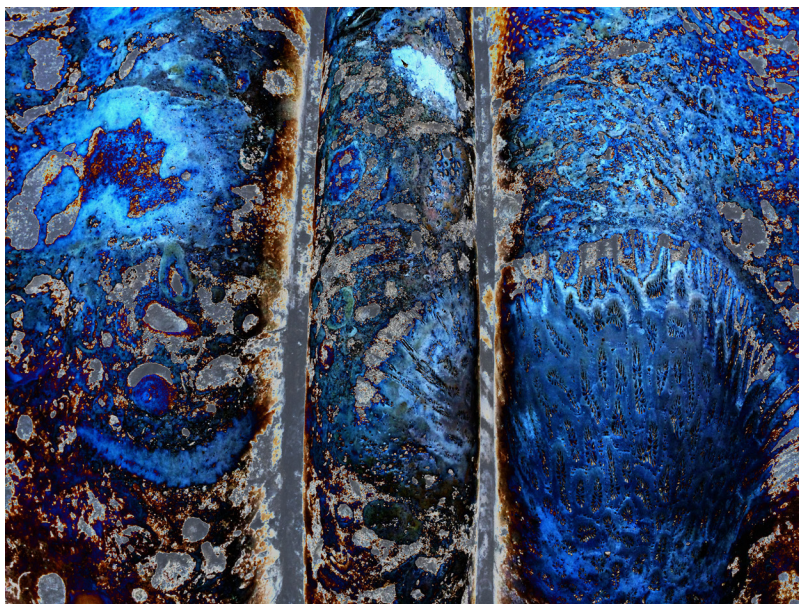
And can turn “Cathy,” who is only waiting tables
to pay off her student loan debts,
Into an angel of unsurpassable beauty, one who is to be revered
and given a 40% tip.

But every sip seems lesser than its predecessor,
And every clink is less seductive than the ones I heard before,

Till eventually my glass is empty, my jubilation is no more,
And Cathy has just dropped a tray, the drinks fall to the floor.

I turn my gaze from the glistening ground
the ice cubes skitter o’er,
And I hurry-scurry, running now, to reach the back of the store.

To find new respite, hidden away beyond the restroom door.



Mac Kaufman



Gillian Moore

REINDEER GAMES

Oliver Ash

He didn't get into college, but at least he got a red balloon.
Zippo his name, and clowning his game, a third generation
buffoon.

"I'm sorry!" He cried, "I really did try to make you all guffaw
and gaff!"

The Clown College gave him a small consolation, a balloon in
the shape of a giraffe.

ONLY THE END FOR ME

Maddy Frank

The cashier was droning on about some dog she had as a kid that was just the smartest dog you'd ever meet. I laughed with her, but my eyes were on the dog beside me. His new blue vest stood out against the pale colors around us and he looked more official than he had just a few days before. As I tried to slowly back away from the teenage worker, I felt a pull on the leash. Thurber was chewing on the underwear on the lowest shelf. "Damn, how long has he been doing that?" I thought to myself, now intently staring at the worker in the hopes that she wouldn't see the future guide dog drooling on the merchandise. I was focused so hard on this that I barely heard the clashing of fabric and plastic. A rack of bras had just hit the store's floor. Why on earth would I think that Aerie was a good place to take a five month old puppy in training? I could hear the voice of the presenter in my head and cringed: "and we'd like to congratulate Maddy for winning the Presidential Volunteer Service Award!" If Obama could see me now, I wouldn't be getting that medal. The young employee just giggled at the mess and motioned her hand in a way that suggested she would leave it for someone else to clean up.

After about seven more minutes of tortuous conversation involving all childhood pets, I took the other customers' glares, points, and my own mortification as a cue for me to finally make my exit. Though Thurber didn't want to leave his new friend, I managed to lead him out into the mall with a continuous supply of treats coming from my fanny pack. That's right; I was wearing a fanny pack. Being a puppy raiser involves a lot of things, but being fashionable is not one of them. In fact, I was definitely the least fashionable person in the mall; I was sweating, my hair was up in a sloppy bun and among other things, I was entirely covered in black Labrador hair.

Thurber was never all that good on outings, and neither was I. I got so caught up in the idea of taking a puppy into public stores that I forgot what a hassle it was. Puppies pee on everything, stick anything in their mouths, and anyone within a ten foot radius will be licked. It usually seemed easier to just scoop Thurber up into my arms and head home, but that's not what my job was. I had to expose Thurber to as much as possible to make sure he wouldn't chew on underwear with his blind future owner. As we walked out of the mall, I tried to keep this in my head, but a young girl with a small voice interrupted my thought.

"Mommy, look at the dog! He's in a store!"

"Yes," the mother replied, "but you have to leave him alone, he's working." I half chuckled at her statement; what had just happened in the lingerie shop definitely did not meet the definition of "work." Again, my own thoughts were interrupted by the girl coming over and petting the dog to my left despite her mother. Thurber was ecstatic. That was always the hardest rule to follow, telling people to wait until the dog had calmed down before greeting him or her, so I never followed it. Instead, I just sat back on my heels and explained to the girl, "This is Thurber and he is going to be very important one day and could you also not grab his ear like that?" Before her mom had dragged her away with the promise of ice cream, the same strategy I had used with my dog only a few minutes earlier, I handed the child one of Thurber's business cards. It read, "Thank you for helping me become a better guide dog!" I smiled at her before she walked off. She really had helped him become a better guide dog by teaching him not to bite or squirm when a child pulled at his face. In fact, I suppose everyone Thurber ever came across assisted him in some fashion; I was just one of those people.

Many people tell you that life is full of characters—crazy, interesting, unique characters. Guiding Eyes Training Classes, however, were just full of really nice people; their dogs took the role of the eccentrics more than any of the humans did. To be brutally honest, I only knew most of the people by their dog's name. That is, except for Bethany. Bethany is in her early twenties, she still lives with her parents, and she is the official photog-

rapher for our Guiding Eyes group. She is also the best trainer, in my opinion, that Guiding Eyes has. Eden was the first dog of hers that I had the honor of puppysitting. Eden was way better than Thurber.

“Oh, Eden has her issues.” Bethany said with a laugh, “She needs to work on her sits and stays mostly.” Eden did not have either of these problems. Eden was perfect. I loved her so much in fact, that I had her back at least two more times before she went off for her official training. I remember thinking how awful I must be doing with Thurber; He had a multitude of difficulties, every one of them more severe than having issues with “sit” or “stay.” Then, Edlyn came along, Bethany’s next dog that I puppy sat.

“Thank you so much for taking her. She really needs to work on her house manners, and also her distraction issues, and also her basic commands,” Bethany blurted out in a slightly more panicked tone than I was used to hearing from her. But Bethany was right. Edlyn was not the best trained dog I had worked with. She never quite listened, always had things in her mouth she wasn’t supposed to, and she woke up earlier than any puppy I’d ever had. How could someone raise one perfect dog, and one not-so-perfect one? Finally, after a few weeks with Edlyn, I realized that puppy raising involves more luck than one would think. Many traits, like being afraid of thunder, are genetic, so often it’s just luck of the draw when it comes to what kind of dog you get. This realization took the pressure off of me; maybe it wasn’t entirely my fault that Thurber never came when called. Maybe.

Our story ended a year later when I packed Thurber into the Guiding Eyes car and said goodbye. I loved him, but letting him go was easier than I had expected. He was training for an important job and to be honest, I didn’t think he would graduate. I was sure he would be rejected and returned to me in a month. He wasn’t. I looked back one more time; Thurber had already covered the window in drool. “That’s my boy,” I whispered as I turned around.

SEEKERS

Kiera Ebeling

Lips curling into expressions, laughs spilling into the still air.

Images that
are not there fill the pages and the words are forgotten.

The sounds
of the read words fill the air, covering the flips of the pages and
the knocks on the door. Pick
your adventure, I dare you. Each bound
euphoric bliss encases perpetrators. And fear them,
for the dullest of dangerous words can dig into minds
until only a mutter is breathed. But do not
let that deter; the greatest adventures are spurred by the things
absorbed. The greatest
friendships are held across pages, leaping over words and
countless dreams. So
cast aside all else and stop time. Join
the slews of romantic seekers.



G. Adams

THE STARING CONTEST

Natalie Newman

Hand sanitizer and cigarettes. A giant dispenser stood at my reach above the trash can I tossed my cigarette into after taking one last puff. Those were the rules, no smoking in hospitals. The air inside was as thin as a whisper, yet weighed heavily on my shoulders like a secret. I impatiently shifted my weight from one foot to the other while Janice asked the receptionist if she had been moved to a different room.

She hadn't.

The nurse led us down a narrow, lonely hallway; the only sound alive was the clicking of Janice's red stilettos. My thoughts echoed off the walls as I anticipated my worst fears surfacing to reality. What would she look like now? What would she do when she saw me? Would she forgive us? I kept walking.

The nurse left us at the entrance of the ICU, but our feet seemed to be paralyzed by the thought of what might lie behind those doors. Janice looked at me without turning her head and hissed, "Don't look scared. The doctors said that they are doing all they can. Nobody has to find out."

I knew all of this already, so why did I feel like vomiting? We both took a deep, uneasy breath and walked straight to the desk in the front of the nurse's station. The room looked even more like a graveyard with each step I took. Blood, sweat, and death lingered in the air beneath our noses. The nurse then taped a neon yellow bracelet stating my name, age, and reason of visitation to my wrist.

I pulled Janice aside. "If she gets better, she'll be wearing one of these things to visit us in jail. We shouldn't be here. Oh god what have we done, what have we done?"

Janice pulled me close to her, as if she were trying to hug me. "Listen to me carefully." Every word she spoke sent chills down my spine. "I did not let that girl live just so you could get

us caught. Did you forget that it was your smart idea to call the ambulance?”

“Janice what you—what we did to her...it’s unforgivable. No jury would ever sympathize with us. If she remembers—”

“She won’t.”

“Mr. Tario,” one of the nurses interrupted. “She’s still asleep, but you can follow me to go see her now. I’m sure she would be happy to wake up to her father and mother—”

“Stepmother.” Janice quickly corrected. “But of course, I like to think of her as my own. Larry and I just got hitched about a month and a half ago in a cute little chapel near Reno. We would’ve stayed longer, but we had to cut our honeymoon short to get back to this little one; isn’t that right, Larry?”

“Huh? Oh, uh, yeah. Reno, fun place. So uh, what exactly is gonna happen to her?” I felt Janice’s heel dig into my foot. “Ouch! Erm...I, uh, just mean to say when can we take her home? My wife and I would really rather help her recover in her own bedroom, you know? The sooner we can get out of here, the better.” At least that last sentence was true.

“Well, sir, I’m not her doctor, but just from the looks of her I would say she isn’t in any shape to go home just yet. That, um, fall she took?”

“Yes, what about it?” Janice’s words came out defensive and cold. I could feel my ears getting red as beads of sweat fell from my forehead and the nurse continued to rifle through the papers on her clipboard.

“Well, it just left your daughter in a pretty serious condition. A black eye, broken ribs, some internal bleeding. You’re lucky you got her here when you did.”

Luck, great. That was just what I needed.

We were almost to her room; Janice squeezed my hand to caution me for what was next, even though I’m pretty sure she didn’t even know herself. If it weren’t for that lousy dinner, maybe none of this would be happening.

The first time I saw her in there, I thought she was dead. Lying motionless on the mattress underneath the thin layering of a blanket, her shiny gold hair remained her only recognizable feature. Deep purple blotches the size of my fists were scattered across her arms and legs. Her pale, bitter skin made her look more like a corpse than a girl. A nurse noticed me staring and whispered that they were just bruises, nothing to worry about. I felt too guilty to say anything back.

A tube as thick as two number two pencils stuck uncomfortably out of her meek mouth. Her chest moved in an even rhythm, so I knew she was still with us.

Should I have been glad?

I faltered for a moment, and then gradually walked closer to her, taking half a step at a time. The closer I got, the more I smelled. Even through the heavy stench of Janice's gardenia perfume I could still smell the fear on her skin. Memory fragments flooded through my mind of yelling in the middle of the night and of wine glasses shattering against the hard wood floor.

My eyes drifted down to her hands. Bloody knuckles and cuts from broken bits of glass masked her delicate, twig-like fingers. She was a fighter all right, just like her mother; it was that same stubbornness that got her into trouble. If only she hadn't made Janice mad...

"So someone from Child Protective Services will be here shortly to ask you all a couple of routine questions," the nurse said while recording my daughter's blood pressure.

"What, why? She just had a bad fall; the stairs in our house are old and steep. It's not a big deal; I just don't see why this is necessary." Janice tried to laugh the whole thing off as if this were all one big joke.

I was still waiting for the punch line.

"We just want to be with her," I whispered.

As the nurse attempted to wake the frail, feeble looking figure on the bed, I watched my child roll over, moan terribly loudly and open her eyes. They darted from face to face trying to put together a puzzle that was missing several pieces. She stared at me, and all I could do was stare straight back.

THE NEIGHBORS IN 2B

Evan Wisner

They speak really loudly with their bright red faces and their white clenched fists. What are they holding so tightly?

Jill's a nice woman-or at least she's nice to me. She always smells like dough and apples. Her makeup is weird though, like she's a clown; with one eye far darker than the other, always winking at me, and one lip far bigger than the other. Says it's a cold sore. Biggest cold sore I've ever seen.

Hank talks loud and is always squinting his eyes, like he needs glasses. Why can't some people see too well? Why don't they get glasses so they don't go tripping everywhere? I see perfectly. I saw Jill's cast yesterday. She fell down the stairs again. Jill might need glasses too.



Meltem Ötünçtemur

WHAT THEY TOLD ME

Sam Smith

A man staggers up the grey stone stairs. He looks disheveled, wearing a red plaid flannel, the buttons done up, but they're off by one or two. His jeans are ratty and old, the hems letting their constituents fly away wildly. Maybe his significant other got tired of him, maybe he's been laid off, and maybe he's a drunk who's just hit rock bottom. Then again, it might be all three. Regardless, the man pushes open the heavy oak door, one that's without a doubt at least twelve times older than he is. He looks up as he wanders into the ornate building, marveling at the high, vaulted ceilings.

He strolls around the ambulatory, wandering through the enclosed passageway around the central room. He wishes he could feel the comfort that others receive by simply being within the confines of the large hall. He feels forsaken; a feeling that descends upon him like a riptide of isolation. The candles dance and flicker, almost struggling, as if they're being fought back by the darkness held within the great rooms.

Slivers of moonlight stream through the stained glass. The man enters the sanctuary, taken back by how much empty space exists above him within the room, an attribute accentuated by the lack of any other people.

The man shuffles over to the stairwell in the corner. Across the doorway is an old velvet rope, like one you'd find in a VIP section. He simply unhooks the rope and begins to climb the old, wooden stairs, the old boards creaking as he ascends. Tears stream down his face. His steps become hurried, frequently missing a step and stumbling. He reaches the hatch at the top and flings it open, bursting out underneath the bell and the steeple. The man reaches the ledge and freezes. He stares down, wind flicking his hair

A monk approaches from behind, surprising him. “There’s a saint buried on these grounds.” The man backs away from the edge apologetically. The monk replies “Oh, don’t worry. You on those rocks down there wouldn’t desecrate the grounds any more than he did being underneath them.”

Puzzled and taken aback by the monk’s rather harsh words, the man backs against one of the corner pillars and slides down into a sitting position, holding his face in his hands.

“Not all saints were good people. In our sense, saints are simply those in touch with the higher power. That certainly doesn’t mean they’re free of inner conflict now and again,” the monk says, smiling as he sits down across from him.

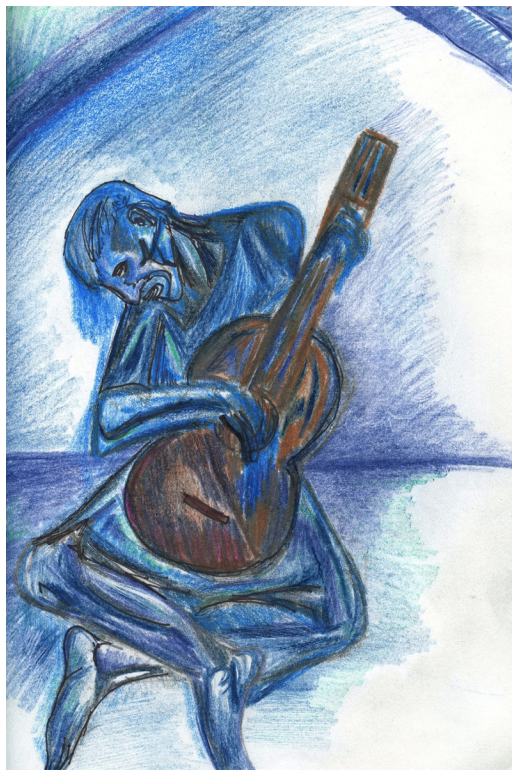
“Although, now that you mention it, this one had far more outer conflict. He was what you’d call a warrior saint, but that just means he was a Christian who was particularly successful in eliminating those with a different take on things. The one and only time he ever questioned his actions was long after; in fact, it was the night he died. One of his women, one he was particularly fond of, had just died in childbirth. That’s an understatement actually. She was his favorite. He thought her different from all of the rest.”

The Warrior Saint wailed and howled through the night, lamenting on how God had forsaken him. No one could calm him. The “Saint” wouldn’t acknowledge anyone for any reason except to demand more wine. As the people surrounding the city became more agitated and his servants became scared to serve him, they pleaded with the town’s priest to go speak to the wayward glorified soul. The priest finally agreed, and entered the saint’s home. The moaning and wailing continued for a moment, but the priest’s words seemed to have struck through as silence fell.”

“What did he tell him?” the man demands of the monk.

“The priest told the saint that if he truly believed God had forsaken him, then it didn’t matter what he did next, as his past had already decided his future. The priest set a dagger down on the floor, turned away and left.”

“They carried his corpse here and buried him in the foundation.” The man and the monk sit there in silence, the spectral illumination of the moonlight dancing around them, playing amongst the borders of the shadows.



Max Lawther

The man begins to sob.

The monk rises, with an expression of disappointment on his face and moves towards the hatch.

The man looks up to him.

The monk looks back at him. “Reflection on the past is important, but perseverating on what we’ve done and what has happened to us, letting those things cloud our visions of the future, it can be the end of us. If you feel you have been truly forsaken, then it doesn’t matter what you do next, as you’re past has decided your future. That’s what they told me, anyway.”

The hatch slams shut, leaving the man alone with the moonlight.

THE MIND READER

Thomas Messina

I walk out of “The Spirit House” and light a cigarette.
It’s cold and slightly windy on my walk to Duffy’s bar;
It had been a long day, 6 groups of suckers
All wanting their minds read.
Oh the wonders of special effects:
A little smoke in an upside down fish bowl, crazy lights,
People will believe anything nowadays.
I walk through the crowd
Un-noticed, un-disturbed, one with the metropolitan sea.
Slipping into the bar, whiskey on the rocks,
Swirling the ice cube around the glass while pondering.
A woman sits adjacent, recognizing my face.
“You know, I’ve heard about you. ‘The Mind Reader.’
I bet you’ve never read a mind like mine!”
The previous cocktails linger on her tongue,
Vermouth and bitters,
She shoots her arm toward me, palm turned up,
And gives a face of entitlement.
Like I had to read her mind.
Swirling the ice cube, I turn to her and read;
Astonishment replaces entitlement as I tell her her life story.
It’s easier to read people than minds—
Reading minds just pays better.



RED

Gillian Moore

So I guess I'm
drawing the same conclusions
out of different mouths now.

My walls are red.
I live in the desert with a
pitcher of ice and water.
The snakes are all tucked away
under blankets; they don't bite
while the sun is up.

The ice melted months ago
and the drip drip drips down the side
leave rings in the sand—
you could pick them up
and throw them or
maybe crown a king.
There are wet circles on the sheets.
I have been room temperature
for months now.

I am getting you to say things
that I have already heard before
in rooms where walls are white or blue
but never red. Sometimes even tile.
I have never heard the words
I love you said in a red room
with the ceiling light painted over
and neither have you,
 so you try it.
You try it on for style.
You tried me on for style
and it worked out—
you look good in red.

Last summer hides in the
cracks and the divots, comes off
in spicks and specks, little things—
things to be inhaled—
known carcinogens. They tell me
the little things will catch up,
that I don't get enough sun or milk
and maybe I don't, maybe
my body is already predetermined,
a Calvinist on television,
bones and ligaments warping
with the end in mind.

I haven't read a book in months
and you're reading every day.
I'm talking about really reading.
You have no trouble sleeping.
My shoulders are on fire;
they're tying themselves in knots
like they're fashion accessories
of some sort.

I couldn't eat everything on my plate
so I shoved it your way
and you fed it to the dog.
I don't have a dog
and I eat what I'm given
at your house. It's a metaphor.

We're both coming to the same conclusions
but from different directions, you with
better vision than I, you with more time
spent behind the wheel than I, you're
coming at it with a therapist and an army
and all I've got are all these books I haven't read
and all the underwear that live
in the crack between the bed and the wall.



Meng Yu

All I've got are these red walls.

They aren't very big
and you could kick a hole through them
in one go, no scratches or anything,
but I'm willing to share.

VOODOO DOLLS

Megan Murata

We're making voodoo dolls in art
and you can't convince me otherwise.

Why else would we mold
earthy flesh tone:
peach, paper, orange, bronze, gold, chocolate –
from firm brick into
odd eggs that contain no yolk
(Shh. Mine does.
A mix of petal and plain gray
and scoured by the dentistry tools
placed into my
steady rubber hands –
gown up!)

Each figure matching,
a picture. a name a human
passed or present
disfigured or distorted with a mouse
running a binary maze.

We're forming voodoo dolls in art.

It's a perfect likeness to
this single sample of humanity –
averaged and an outlier in some way
for our eyes, brains, hearts to catch like burs
at a mere passing
bought by brains that created worlds
bodies more advanced than a chameleon
and thought more terrible than Zeus's exploits.

Heroes are supposed to be infallible,
so why do these immortals
give reign to the desires that
tie them to you, to me
when my fingers twitch a supple arm
clad in shimmering gauze
that once hung over my window.

Why does that arm snap – what is “too far”?

You can’t convince me otherwise –
we’re creating voodoo dolls in art.

Remember,
I’m the one who saw a newspaper
and instead of writing about the archeology
I researched the cannibalism.
Was that only five years ago?

So don’t mind if
beneath the fairy silk
and artificially smoothed, unblemished dust
around the foil that giver her depth
and strong wire arms
stiff spine – rammed rod
there’s –
oh.

A heart from scarlet and a touch
indigo and black,
pink petal gray lungs
on my clean lilies
smears of maroon and cardinal.

(We’re making voodoo dolls –
don’t try and change my mind.)

See them grin
wide, pearls unseeing,
oil slicked and smooth
as if they'll give like real skin –
no,
just cold clay.

Until,
we reach and warmth spreads through
from pale hands, play scarred
and everything

moves

gliding, no balls and sockets or hinges
to move on belief powered cord.
(And you thought Chucky was bad?
He was just possessed –
these voodoo dolls do more.)

Want to see?
I'll change your mind.



Will Corbett

THERE IS A LAND

Isabella Wu

There is a land, unknown and undiscovered
Long lost, distant, beholden with gloom
With Dusk and Dukes, and Dragons too
It is

Olden, archaic, ancient, pristine
And under its canopied silk
Starlight dances still in dark-lit night
It is

Of mists and fog and no-man's-land
With tangible shadows
As creeping dawn illuminates
Stolen moments under the bridge
Its total destruction--
Desolation, unhinted at

Silent, silent
Grows the storm
While the will-o-the-wisps haunt gnarled hands
Reaching to the three moons: Cleio, Adnis, Jordan
They are whispering to
Ebony faces in the shadows—
“Where I am, I rest in peace
Where I am, I deeply sleep
Where I hide, you cannot see”
Spiraling messages that are not their own
Into the gleaming sky
Full of holes
Where light seeps through from other realms
Discovering with fingertips of moonbeams and sirens' breath
I think the fabric of this world is coming apart
Since a giant pricked leaks into the sky
Slowly, will the fabric of reality deflate like a sigh?

I heard, because I listen.
And we listen
Until we are drunk
On the exhaust fumes
And dust of tired souls
We Live,
and Breathe,
and See.
Because—
You are just as real as me.



Will Corbett

THE YEOMAN'S TALE

Nate Bonsib

Here begins the Yeoman's Tale:

There once resided in Riva a knight of noble birth, born to the esteemed House of Chamdar. Built with the stature of a mighty oak, his flaxen hair reflected the starlight back unto itself. He was the forefront of a great number of stories; his heroic deeds are uncoun ted. Yet despite his measure, he was a modest man. Those who held close counsel with his heart knew he was neither a braggart nor a fool. From each mission he returned with naught but his share of good fortune, leaving aside all false flattery and blandishment. His great strength and skill was renowned for more miles than he had ridden sunrise to set on a fair day, and great kings some distance past feared his wrath.

Yet, this Knight had lost a piece of his soul, sorely missed, by wicked treachery and sorcery beyond the foulest imaginable. He had for many miles searched, with naught but rumors and false accounts his allies. Forlorn, he resigned that his life was at an end. What a cruel twist of the Fates, for them to take so great a man and consign him to so decrepit an afterlife. But as he reached the tail of his journey, an old woman gave unto him sagely advice, spoken as so:

“Great knight, why do you stand so empty, a great vessel filled with naught but air?”

“Alas, tired elder! A piece of my soul has been plucked from me, as an apple from a tree. But I fear it more sorely missed than a single apple,” his fair visage blossoming with the cold tears of suffering.

“How unbecoming for such a great man to be brought so low, knelt before Fate to pout and weep. Child, I take pity, and I shall help you. Listen closely, Sir Knight, for these words spell your fate. On the fourth moon of this year, taken onto thyself

thy greatest mail and keenest blade. Embark for the setting sun, and continue in this way for three nights' time. Whenever you seek rest, there shall be a warm fire and satisfying lodgments. At this journey's end, you shall duel fate for the restoration of your soul. However, you shall give no gift to anyone at their word, no matter their station." Hardly had she finished that Garion leapt to his feet, his faith a wilted tree restored, and departed for his keep.

Three moons' time passed and Garion considered himself ready for his task. Notorious was he for his equipment's shining condition, throwing into shame many another fair knights with the smooth gleam of his long sword or the bright flash of gold interwoven into his mail. Garion had spent many late evening preparing for the fourth moon, and as it rose into the sky, he was set to depart. He sat astride Tiber, a roan warhorse named for the swift river his name commemorates. He was donned in a hauberk of the purest steel dipped into a vat of molten gold, as no cost was spared in his preparations. Strapped tight to his left gauntlet was an oaken shield, able to stop the fiercest bull dead from a mighty charge. Aside from this, he carried three separate swords. The first was long and thin, similar to the slender stalk of a rose, for this sword was blessed by Venus. The second was short and cruel, blacked with dried gore and dark stains. This weapon was blessed by Mars, with the promise of great bloodshed and suffering. The third sword Garion treasured most deeply, as it was shaped by his own hand, trusting no other man to craft so fabled a blade. It was as tall and strong as Garion himself, and so heavy as that sixty men could try for sixty years to lift it and none would succeed.

With all his affairs set in order, Garion rode into the dwindling twilight. He rode for three days, and on the last night, frozen to the core, he searched for shelter in the oppressive blanket of night. Just ahead of him, a fire shown through the tree, and Garion found the promised haven. Seated around the fire were three beautiful maidens, eyes shining like stars and, asking any well to do young knight, had voices that would shush a night-

ingale and faces so handsome Mother Nature herself would turn away ashamed. Upon seeing these women, Garion was stunned into a reverent silence, such was their beauty. The women turned towards him and spoke as one.

“Welcome, Sir Knight, to safety from the night and things within it. Come take part in our simple meal, open to all but for some small token.” Garion fell to his knees before the women, and choked out words straight from his heart.

“Dearest ladies, I am humbled by your spectacular beauty, for you must be of the noblest birth. I beg of you, cover your faces so I may face thee like a true man, pure at heart, lest your figure tempt my heart to some lust filled path.” The ladies did as they were bid, covering themselves with fine silk veils. Garion got to his feet and continued, “Ladies, I thank you, for you have shown pity on a love stricken fool as myself. I would gladly spend the night here, but for the lack of tokens, I cannot.”

“But knight, you forget your radiant mail, how it glows in the light of the moon, and your strong shield, that no weapon may break. Foresooth, pray leave us each a piece of your kit, and you shall not return to the night’s bitter chill.”

“Alas! You have taken me, have my mail and shield, they are yours! And the third can have my horse as well, for I shall return a victor, a man among men!” With this Garion fell fully into the maidens’ arms, and spent the long night not with a moment of sleep.

As the moon waned over the horizon, Garion took up his arms and set out for his challenger. He found Fate sitting unawares on a ruined stone mound in the queer time between night and day. Fate had the appearance of a man with no face, just endless skin wrapped around his scrawny figure. Seizing the opportunity, Garion swung his first sword, Venus’s blade, at his opponent. Hardly had the blade touched Fate then it turned into the one of the fair ladies, striking her instantly dead. Fate then reappeared in the same position, ignorant to its challenger. Thrown into a blind rage with the death of his lover, Garion fell upon fate with the fury of Mars, using his blade to cleave Fate’s head from

its shoulders. Again, Fate's form shifted to the second lady, and she died a gory death. Wounded beyond all sense, Garion lashed out with his third and final weapon, eyes as wild as a hunted buck. The sword pierced Fate through the heart, and the third lady was dead, a tear of betrayal in her dull eyes as her body slipped to the ground. Garion fell sobbing to the ground, all sense having been rend from him as he took the lives of doves with the gory blades and foul edges. Once again Fate reappeared, carrying the form of the old woman who had started this failed journey.

"You failed to recall the conditions of this journey, Sir Knight," The old women cackled, eyes glowing. "You gave up your equipment for the sake of cheap love and shelter, and thus have sacrificed your pride and honor." Garion started to protest, but it was as good as if he were mute. "For your punishment, you shall have no soul, and are hereby forced to wander this world a lowly knave, forever consigned to poverty. Love is the importance of seasons, but honor is the importance of a lifetime."



Vanessa Raffaele

DAY 3,650

Kaitlyn Walker

My mind sits in a troubled mess this day. Fair Verona is far behind me but my memories are never removed. It does not matter how far away I shall go, nor does it matter how far away I remove myself from the events that occurred in the last days I lived in the beautiful city, for my memories could not go far away too. Fresh are the events that brought about the death of my esteemed student Romeo and his beautiful wife Juliet ten years ago today. Of course, I couldn't bear to not marry them; their ripe young love only born out of an hour of their acquaintance. I should have thought, should have realized. My words ridicule me; they shame me into the deepest regret. I have lost a son, and a daughter. For I, their holy father, betraying them in their trust in me that they could be together. I am deeply troubled.

On this the eve of their death I sit in disconsolateness. I wonder what I could have done differently to save them. To take one's own life is as tragic as anything. I should have known that to be Romeo's intent. The way his mind only thinks for the present and not the future—I should have known. I should have known that Juliet would take the dagger to her heart once I turned my back. O, Mother Mary! The things I should have known.

There is no cure for the pain of losing people in life. After telling my tale to the Prince, I was revoked of fatherly stature and banished from the noble Roman Catholic Church. At that point I had two options, stay in Verona or leave the city to start anew. I chose the latter and banished myself from my city, and, with a heart full of lead, I left for Florence. Upon my arrival I was accepted as an apothecary for my knowledge of and skill with herbs. A meager living, but I did not mind. Grandeur is for the self indulgent, the unappreciative, the ungrateful, and those who have sinned. I am just a bitter man full of self disrespect and hatred of my own mind. I need not an extravagant living, rather, I need a living that can help to repent the sin of helping two lovers consecrate and ratify their kiss in holy matrimony.

My regrets are that I did not tell Romeo to think. I should have told him that what he wanted to do was completely irrational, that he needed to think. How could I have even known that their love was real love? The question now is, is love really real? Or maybe the question is can a person fall in love, and find true love in a matter of two hours? My thoughts are strong, my head is weak and I cannot but stay in this sense any longer. My eyes are weak; the tears simply streak, in silent rivers of pain and agony down my face.

I will rid mine hands of the blood tonight.

Tonight.

The pond is beautiful tonight. The light of the stars playfully dances on the shimmering, rippling water. The night is exquisite. I could never have asked for a night more angelic than this. The air so clear, the moon so brilliant, the water so tranquil, yes, this is where I shall rest tonight. A watery bed for me awaits, the lilies surrounding me as I take my first peaceful sleep since I hath left the fair, fair city. My tortured dreams shall torture me no more as I find peace and tranquility in the water's bliss. I shall repent my sins tonight.



Mac Kaufman

I heard they raised a statue of the young beauty in gold,
and that next to her stands her faithful and true love in all of his
golden glory.

Now the hood leaves my face, and the last dagger in this
tragedy is drawn. Tonight is the night where I repent my sins;
tonight is the night I join the holy lord in heaven. A new home
for this dagger will be found in the cavity of my chest that houses
my pain. The final punishment is mine tonight as I take this dag-
ger, and without a word, descend into the tranquil waters, where
I shall find my peace and end the tragedy of the lion hearted
Romeo, and his beautiful flower, Juliet.

Day 3,650.

THE FALL OF ICARUS

Claire Calkins

Her pieces were just as Donatello's,
still burning with unfulfilled life.
Paint caps left off of drying oil paints,
dust gathering in the crevices her fragile
fingers had once caressed.
Somehow death seemed like a distant dream
but now I sit here combing through stacks of art,
unfinished.



Gillian Moore

But the art spoke for her, telling of
Icarus falling just as her dreams had.
Wax figures drooping as if they were melting,
bearing Icarus' disheveled wings
with wire still poking from the wax exterior.
Its eyes bore into me whispering,
what now?
See that's the problem; I don't know.
She was just as Donatello, skilled in the art of
mystery.
Leaving behind odds and ends of a life
ended yet
unfinished.

WOODWORKING

Will Wells

A dark Spring night- the season plagued with storms.
Scythes of wind throw themselves at the barn doors, slashing away
the red paint.
Inside, shielded temporarily from the howling, from the cruelty,
an old man builds a box.
The world outside is screaming at him. *Open the doors. Let him in.*
He pulls his arm back, peeling away the skin of the hard wood.
Wood shavings flutter down, down, down. Curled and lifeless.
A drip of sweat catches the light of a wavering lantern.
The candle is gasping for breath.
His box is almost finished.
It's almost ready for him,
for him to hide away forever in.
To hide from the wind and the light. To hide from his dreams. To
hide from his fears.
A door creaks. The wind rushes in, its howling filling the nervous air.
His head whips upwards. *He's here. He's here to claim the prize.*
Grandfather?
A voice rings out. A young guardian angel.
No time to lose. So very little time.
The box is shoved beneath a table, hidden under a blanket.
A candle weaves its way through the dark. A small face is illuminated.
The craftsman looks at her. His masterpiece.
He hates that he has to hide. Hiding everything. Afraid of being
found.
Are you alright?
The wrinkles smooth. The eyebrows lower. Maybe... a little more
time.
Yes dear. Everything's fine.
The wind will come back another day.

THE RAIN IS NOT SIMPLY RAIN

Isabella Wu

The rain
is not simply rain.

It is a floating ocean
that has finally decided to come
for a touchdown on our green earth,
to meet the fish
and parched throats,
to make bubbles, multicolored ones,
in our sinks
before returning to
its buoyant phase
its rightful place
in our atmosphere.

You see the rain
is not simply rain.
It is our tears,
our sweat,
our pain
coming back down to greet our faces
minus the salt,

And it caresses our skin,
soaks our hair,
and runs down in tiny rivulets
all down the window
as if nature itself mourns for something lost,
forming puddles that last
until the sun burns them away...

Now you can see that
the rain
is not simply rain.

It is a part of us all;
It is why we die,
but also why we live.
It is a unique feature
Coloring the ridges and valleys of our planet
in multiple hues,
a special blessing
that but only pulses through us
and out,
through, and out—
forever.



Meng Yu

PASSAGE II

Meng Yu

Forget all of the pain, forget
the tears. There exists absolutely nothing.
Everything here is something you hate.
Let your darkness, terrible and stifling,
lift. Lighten the burden a little.
Yes, release it all, unleash it on to those
who betrayed you?

There is no light in this castle, though the walls
are made of glass.

If anything penetrates this barricade
it will bring the foundation down. So
protect this.

This shield is the only thing that
protects you.

In the sky, the night never lifts. Only
the moon reflects all of your past ambitions.
The stars are dying or
they are already dead?

Fall faster. Sink already
into that beautiful warm
oblivion.

The sirens are watching you from
the rocks high above, their
silver laughter still torturous.

More torturous still when the echoes
bounce around your body and beat at your head.
You are still enduring this?

You achieved everything. Alone,
stay here blind
and helpless. The world,
too far away, cannot save you. Nothing
can save you from the world.
No tears now, no tears
can resolve the scars you etched onto your heart.
Those roman numerals, they are imprinted
on your heart?

Another candle sinks
in its own tears, weeping away its life.
It is marking something else that has withered, that
ceases to exist.

The soundless world ticks itself forward, backwards
or to a stop?

No small efforts can bring your hands to a halt.
Still marching, still falling
forward in the dark.

This time,
it is more pitiful?

BRINE

Gillian Moore

Before there were men
there was a sun-warmed sea
that could've held them
by the millions, but
that sea dried up
leaving only the collapsed veins
of a tired earth.
So the men came with their pickaxes.

They brought the sea up from the ground
one rusty wheelbarrow-full at a time
and they kept it in little wooden bowls on the table.
They fed it to the animals.
Men took trees down with them
to prop up the town above, and
they went deeper.

The men bathed in salt water,
even on Sundays. It was an inevitability.
The dust came off their clothes,
fell from boots and sleeves but
what made it to the lungs
stayed. It's why their children
got tuberculosis but
they never did.

It wasn't flooding that the first few worried about
or the weight of Wieliczka above,
it was dehydration.
Fat tongues and bulging eyes—
that was a death that killed.

A few eras later and two levels up,
their eyes laugh in the low light.
They call him a penitent,
but they are no priests and
in her hundred foot cocoon,
Kinga sheds a salty tear for the man
with the bad shoulder.

So this man crawls, right?--
this man with the bad shoulder
crawls on his hands and knees,
leather palms all sticking to the ground,
searching out murderous gas pockets
armed only with a flame,
trying not to get his face blown off,
and thinking of the kids at home,
and how he's still never left the country,
not even on holiday,
and thinking of those degenerate dogs
two levels up who cut the straw
and sent him down, who
don't have kids at home
aged seven and aged four
to kiss on the foreheads
when they come in at night
smelling like sweat and rock salt.
Now he's thinking less and crawling more.
He's got no way of knowing
he still has a good twenty years before
men wearing ugly brown uniforms
and sharp, triangular accents
come in and force his family
to stand in one line, now two,
now his wife takes a right
and he doesn't see her again,

but it's okay--the Russians bust in
in time to save the seven-year-old.
She'll sell her story to a journalist
and live comfortably into her eighties.

Vodka doesn't burn, it slides.
A shot at the bottom is a pint at the top—
that's what the depth will do to you.
Miners are honest men.
They aren't drunk till they've
climbed the three hundred eighty steps
back up to their wives, kissed them,
said hello, and by then,
most of them already walked it off.
Lightweights don't do well hauling salt.

I am a lightweight.
Vodka doesn't slide, it burns,
and my lungs aren't accustomed
to breathing brine.
My insides are held up
not by timber of birch and oak
but by strange pillars of calcium
that taste more like chewing gum
than the moisture on your skin.
Marrow runs through my scaffolding
like sap, sticky, waiting to be tapped
and bottled up tight.

But pillars molder.
Even the spine.
I think we'll all just wait
in the damp earth sooner or later,
our most basic parts, the useful bits—
and when the water dries up
the men will come with their pickaxes.

LA VILLE LUMIÈRE

Adya Kumar

Amidst the buzzing multitude, a faint scent of isolation.
Underneath the great iron tower,
Among foreign souls,
I need to be absorbed.

I stand, consumed in La Ville Lumière.
It stretches across the corners of the earth,
Spilling over the horizon.
A wonder, only heightened with his
Gauloises breath and piercing stare, waiting for an answer.

Oh, yes, a glorious fantasy he is,
But I am a ship passing through the night,
A solitary vessel,
And this city is a creation of disappointment.

A queen once reigned, and terror arose.
A king lost his mind;
The streets were flooded with blood
and wine.

So I refuse to believe in his eyes,
My heart is cold and his veins are glass.
Trust cannot reside
In a city built from lies.

But I am trapped in the art
Embedded within the cracks of cobblestone sidewalks,
Addicted to power promised in the Arc de Triomphe,
And the tragic beauty of it all.

Leaning over the iron bar,
I indulge myself in the intoxicating aroma of baguettes.
And as I open the freshly baked crust,
I feel the heat that escapes it gently graze my face,
To reassure myself

I still have my senses
Despite everything that was taken from me.

“Are you leaving?” he whispers.
Half-heartedly, I tilt my head.
Summer turns to fall and the wind on my pale cheeks
Gives light to the thunder in my eyes,
“It’s too late.”



Mac Kaufman

VOICES FROM ACROSS

Nina Stornelli

They sing across the water. Our people keep to our villages, in the west and never in the east. The river is wide, but we can still hear them, the strains of melody carried across the smooth surface of the water in the dead of night. They wait, far across on the other side. They wait, because they know that we all will follow their music someday. They do not come to us; we, inevitably, will cross the river to them, carried by the ferryman of melody, pulled by the currents and tides. They speak to us softly, their voices almost inaudible under the stones. In stone they surround us, worn smooth by the river, placed in the walls, standing tall as monument in the ground. Their voices whisper in the stone, in our ears. They are not here, but their voices murmur closer than we thought, than we imagined. Sometimes, we find only a note, left written messily and folded neat. A note, a paper scrap where a person once was, bringing with it a yawning void of uncertainty. We remember, then as always, how to close our eyes to this. Our eyelids are tied shut with thread, our tongues weighed down with gold and silver. We do not see, we do not remember, and our loss becomes the distant memory of an ache. Across the water is their land, their city of dead languages. There rest the dead tongues and the tongues of the dead. The words murmur and say nothing at all. We tie these cloth masks over our eyes, believing that we will become invisible. At least we will see nothing, nothing at last. We will not see that we live only to die.



Will Corbett

LULLABY FOR THE LOST

Aquil Sheikh

Slowly

A reflection of dark land in the ocean above.

A running river

cutting through an inbred mountain.

A mountain that can give the gift of rebirth—

An unbroken moment:

A village on fire.

A lost memory

In a field of sunflowers,

The sun strong,

They all start to wither and die.

Cliffside,
In the Misty blue air of a silver morning
Past the sapphire sun
everything is orange and dry.
Impaled by wood
burning like before—
dying drying eyes,
Alive and Dead,
but a body seemingly alive.
Soul in between:

A raging inferno of a man
plunged downward with the waterfall
into the running river through the inbred mountain.



Will Riedlinger

CAMBRIA

Gillian Moore

“Hello, fellow Toyota driver.”

Her voice has gravel stuck to the soles of its feet. The window is rolled down on the passenger side, so I walk over. I’ll bite.

Back up. It’s nine hours from San Diego to the Golden Gate Bridge if you go in a straight shoot and don’t hit traffic in LA. We’re making it a three day trip back down, maybe four. We’re headed down the coast, taking the Highway One and hugging every curve the geography throws us. The car smells like sweat and dog. There’s no dog here but the scent lingers anyway. We’re running out of gas and money and playlists but at least we have enough bottled water to last a month out in the Mojave, if that were where we ended up.

Cambria, California. Moonstone Beach. It’s a wisp of a town, wouldn’t be there without the One—barely is even with it. We’re full of meat and potatoes and we just spent half an hour looking for a free public restroom in town that isn’t blue, plastic, and located outside the Hess station. And we’re giddy. Something about treating the famished body to one good meal after thirty hours of deprivation; it feels good.

The sign said VISTA POINT AHEAD. We’re pulled over and the sun’s sinking out on the water. It’s not the blinding sort of sunset, but it’s the kind where all the things that don’t matter become silhouettes, falling into the backdrop, and all the things that do take on a sort of religious glow—that photo glow where even the worst makeup job gets romanticized.

Like all roadside vista points, there’s not much to see. We’re parked next to the only other car there, a big red Toyota minivan. Our red Prius looks like its city slicker cousin.

Here's something, while I'm walking over to the van. I love strangers. I do. It's no wonder my mother's always afraid; she probably should be. But I'm careful most of the time. Strangers are okay as long as you're a stranger too.

"What color hair is that? Is that a red?"

Red. Purple. I've been calling it a plum.

The woman in the passenger seat could be anyone's distant aunt. She's gotta be in her forties, maybe early, maybe mid, and the way she pulls her hair back takes all the wrinkles with it, except the ones around her eyes. They don't go away, they just become two-dimensional. She sounds like she's butts of the cigarettes she's been smoking. I love it. I keep waiting for her to clear her throat but it never happens.

The guy behind the wheel looks younger, for whatever that's worth. He's scrawny, toothy—long hair and big knuckles. A burned out hippie with a vendetta for his hometown back in Ohio. He smokes, too, but not right now. They both smile with stained teeth.

We talk. My girlfriend gets out of the car at some point and she talks too. We all talk. I'm looking at their lips, their hands, their dogs, the thermoses in their cup-holders, trying to figure out which one of them is the messiah or if maybe it's both of them. Every stranger has that potential. Anyone you don't know could be Santa Clause or the messiah or something like that; you never know.

"Wanna see what you get when you cross a St. Bernard with a pit bull?"

Of course. He's on her lap, half his body out the window. I don't know if I'm talking to them or the dog.

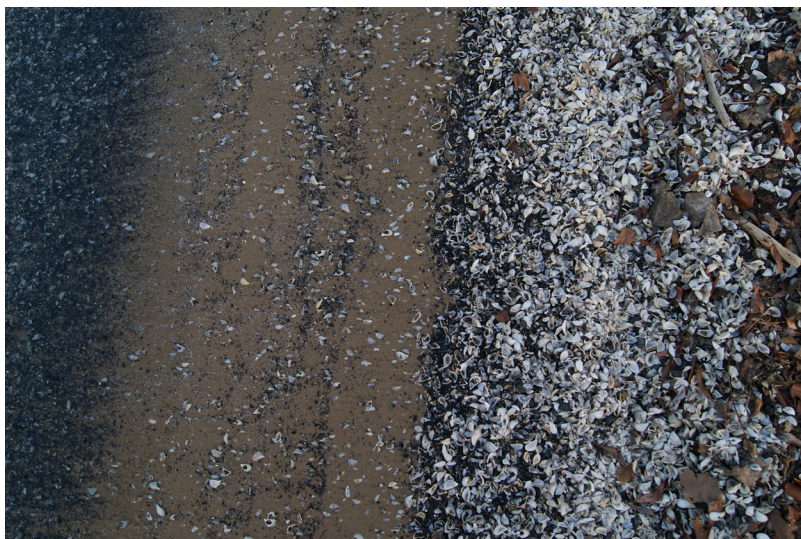
"I call him my polar bear. He's just a big softie."

Definitely Santa Clause, even if her boyfriend's got a look like a modern Christ. All that hair.

They told us everything, even if we didn't ask. Nothing was off the table. We told them we were planning on camping that night, they told us where to get free firewood. The good stuff. The kind that burns all night and keeps you warm, even with the wind coming in off the water. When they figured out that camping meant sleeping in the car, they told us where to park. They told us where they parked. ("Up a bit, back by San Simean where the elephant seals are. We sleep across from the Motel 8.")

They told us if we were still around in the morning we'd cook up breakfast together. We told them that was a deal.

I'll find them sooner or later.



Zach Burdett

HALFWAY UP A MOUNTAIN IN AUGUST

Megan Murata

Silence drapes over the Cyprus and evergreen branches,
While I walk beneath their dressed limbs
And *semi-semi-semi-semi*¹ reverberates
Beneath my sandaled toes, which creep along
The old worn path my ancestors made.

The *torii*² stand proud along the path,
Scarlet bright against the foliage.
One of the tall guardians, smooth pockmarks littering its figure,
Has a dead emerald insect on its snout.

At the head of the path, the top of the stairs, is the shrine itself –
A merging of deities and worship –
As a messenger fox³ protects the path and travelers
While other patrons pray to the Children's God⁴.

1 The onomatopoeia of cicada chirps. Also word play, as “semi” can also mean cicada. (pronounced “seh-me”)

2 The bright red arches typically seen at Shinto temples, particularly those dedicated to Inari

3 Shrines to Inari have at least a pair of these, who are said to take the messages of those praying to the god

4 Jizou-sama, one of whose domains is of children and childhood

Through the awkward youthful branches,
Kyōto looms in the near distance;
The light sound of trains almost inaudible
Over the cicadas' praying.
Who honors the elders of the spear –
King of the Sky⁵ and Queen of the Dark⁶?
In a world filled with chemicals and explanations
Incomplete though some might be.

So maybe it is odd, to feel so awed
By a massive, elder Cyprus tree with a flimsy thick cord
Bound 'round its trunk with three white flashes⁷,
Lightning suspended in time along with
The people who visit behind me,
Eternal in their worship.
Leaving me a ghost – out of time and still...
The shadow leaves swallow my sigh.

Was this how Aizu⁸ felt
When Tokugawa Yoshinobu⁹
Bowed to the future of his country,
His followers and the bloodshed that
Followed them for his sake?

5 Izanagi no Mikoto, one of the two creation gods, literally
“man who invites”

6 Izanami no Mikoto, the other creation god, who was badly
burned during the birth of her last son, the fire god, and died, leaving
to Yomi no Kuni, or the Underworld. It is debatable whether or not
she is actually a queen there.

7 A common sight at Shinto temples, this denotes a particu-
larly holy tree

8 An old domain, governed by the Matsudaira family, and loyal
to and supportive of the Shogunate.

9 The last Shogun.

Beyond the tree line, Kyōto is burning.
Passion, fervor, idealism is not a fire
Over which *nabemono*¹⁰ can be well made.
Not even *chan-chan-ko*¹¹ would be good.

Because such a fire is a forge within
The minds and bodies of youth
So Kyōto burns as bodies clash
And ‘Shishi¹² and ‘Gumi¹³ fall
In a long embittered dance, opposing ideals,
Cheaped by technology, and the survivors say,
“There is no honor in war.”

So we have no war, but a revolution
And the *semi-semi-semi-semi* chirp on.

Turn the seasons (90, then again), bringing
The scattered refugees not-home to the new Aizu
Where *sakura*¹⁴ do not bloom so bright or well
As they did in Fukushima¹⁵ – old Aizu
With fields green and prosperous not
This snow covered barren seascape,
That castle of the Matsudaira¹⁶
Torn apart by lead balls and human hands.

10 Japanese hotpot.

11 Essentially dog food, or the leftovers from nabemono that might be given to a dog.

12 Ishin-shishi, the “patriots.” People who supported the return of the emperor to power usually through gratuitous violence.

13 “Gumi” literally translates to “group,” although here it is a reference to the Shinsengumi, one group of skilled, masterless swordsmen, who were recruited by the Aizu to help protect Kyōto, and clashed often with the Ishin-shishi and other pro-imperial groups.

14 Flowering cherry blossoms.

15 Approximately modern day Aizu, after the renaming and redistribution of the domains, which exist now as districts and counties.

16 The clan that ruled Aizu and supported the Shogun.

And the fox messengers (maybe *kitsune*¹⁷)
Who have such an appetite for
*Inari-zushi*¹⁸, take the message through time
But alas arrive too late.
Aizu has fallen.

Saigō¹⁹ was right, perhaps
To rage against an era without the *bush*²⁰
That instead ushered in the new world
That began not with the four black ships²¹ on the horizon,
But with train tracks which now
Lead to the brilliant Eastern Capitol,
Though Kyōto holds the heart
In shrines and temples far older than the
Mere 200 of my own.
And in memory time stretches
Melts in the heat to reform in the mind molds –
Eager and patient, historians and architects.
When the ashes fall, new
Stone and logs are hoisted.

17 Foxes that are known to play tricks on people in folklore by shape shifting.

18 Sushi rice in a fried tofu pouch.

19 Saigō Takamori led the Satsuma Rebellion in 1868-1869 and is regarded by many as the last samurai (not that movie, he's not Tom Cruise).

20 More or less equivalent to samurai (from “bushido” – lit. the path of the bushi/samurai).

21 Commodore Mathew Perry arrived in 1853 with four ships to begin “opening” isolationist Japan to the world.

This shrine is but a small one compared to
The elaborate complex on Hiei-zan²²,
So small that I have no memory of the name,
As I stand before the sign –
So proud, clean wood and black lacquer ink,
In calligraphy, I have so little knowledge.



Meltem Ötünçtemur

22 One of the five major mountains that surround Kyōto, there exists an incredibly large and still used temple complex that once belonged to a group of warrior monks terrorized Kyōto for 500 years.

ANCHORS

Michel Lin

With one final gasp, Elizabeth heaved herself onto the ledge of the rock. She lay on her stomach for a second, cheek pressed to the sun-warmed stone, before feeling self-conscious about her butt hanging off the edge and lifting herself to sit upright. She shook out the dust from her skirt. Wiping her sweaty face with the back of her hand, she looked up to look across the artificial lake.

Partly concealed by the trees of the park and an amber hazy smog, the horizon was lined with the buildings of Tianjin. It was high noon, so the park was in a languid, sleepy state. Having spent most of her life in America, she often found it impossible to sleep in the middle of the day. It granted a small gift of witnessing the city in its dormant state.

The park was filled with wooden corridors carefully painted with folk stories and values of the old to transport the park-goer back in time, to the glory days; among the flower beds were rock gardens that made it seem all the more ancient. There was one outcropping of rock that climbed high among the trees, with plenty of footholds and handholds to climb. Then, in a bold juxtaposition, a girl sat atop this timeless crag with her white earbuds streaming from her mp3 player, her pear-shaped body hugged by a bright green jacket, and her pleated neon skirt sprouted cotton-encased legs that dangled over the ledge of the rock. The wind, strengthened by altitude, cooled her sweaty brow and tousled her black hair, bleached at the tips. She was a girl of bright colors and a heart so completely shattered that she couldn't even feel it anymore.

Trying to gain a sense of the child-like carefreeness she had before, she swung her legs like pendulums. The rushing air felt nice against her stockings. *Mei*, she thought to herself. The

name that she had at the adoption center was Mei. For these past four weeks, she felt so in-tune with Mei. She loved the way the name sounded on people's lips—his lips especially. But now, at the moment, with the recent events...she was definitely feeling more like an Elizabeth.

* * *

The cabin lights flickered to life and seeped through Elizabeth's closed eyelids, causing her to turn over and whimper imperceptibly. A string of Chinese words was said over the loud-speaker as everyone around her started unbuckling their seatbelts, stretching cramped limbs, gathering their possessions. Then, in English: "Good morning, passengers. We have just landed and are now entering the terminal. It is now 10: 32 AM. Welcome to Tianjin."

Elizabeth covered her face with the complimentary thin blue blanket that she had received, trying to calm her ragged breathing. She was officially in China, an ocean away from her parents. On her own for four weeks. Perhaps her pleas to go to this art camp had been a terrible, terrible mistake. As she sat there, she was overwhelmed not with the fear of being put in danger or getting lost or most of the usual immediate concerns. She was overwhelmed by the fear that this trip would not be worth it.

* * *

With the camp counselor who had greeted her at International Arrivals, Elizabeth walked toward the University, carrying her over-stuffed backpack and a duffel-bag-with-wheels covered in Sharpie doodles. She still felt that nauseating anxiety bubbling in her stomach and threatening to rise up her throat—but as she looked at the stalagmites of the city and the rushing stream of traffic around her, excitement mixed in with the apprehension. Because of her lifelong need to connect with her birth country, and her parents' gracious accommodation for it, she had vacationed China once before, but that had been to the popular tourist spots. But this was the raw, real experience.

Elizabeth received her lanyard and campus map from the Sign-in Center, when she looked up and inadvertently met eyes with a person of her age. The girl had a short bob of ink-black hair that closely followed the point of her chin, and she was buying a soda from the vending machine in the room when she noticed Elizabeth. To Elizabeth's relief, the girl smiled, approached her, and introduced herself as Fang.

"Hi! My name is Elizabeth." She mentally recoiled at how awful her the English sounded within the flow of the Chinese. "Elizabeth Mei Benson," she added as an afterthought.

Fang's eyebrows rose excitedly. "You're American?" she asked in accented, but good, English.

"Yes, I am. But I can speak fluently."

"Well, Elizabeth, I've went to this camp for a couple years now, so I can show you around if you need it."

Fang led her through the dorms and then the entire university, pointing out shortcuts and introducing Elizabeth to new friends. Elizabeth, Fang, and the other campers mingled in the courtyard until dinnertime, eating snacks and chatting excitedly about the upcoming four weeks. It was probably the most perfect day of Elizabeth's life.

And by evening, as she met more and more people, Elizabeth found herself saying, "My name is Mei," without hesitation.

* * *

But there was one person that Fang had not introduced Mei to. It was not merely a forgetful omission. He had mingled at the edge of their friend group, and Mei had waited and expected Fang to swing her over to him and animatedly introduce them to each other. But Fang deliberately avoided this by looking the other way, starting a new conversation whenever he neared. Mei couldn't figure out why. Glancing at him from the corner of her eye during Drawing and Sketching, her first class of the day, Mei decided that despite his stoic air, he didn't seem mean. He had a very close-cut, no-nonsense haircut, and during class, his bored and distant expression seemed immutable. But, when he finished drawing a piece, his mouth shifted slightly and his eyes warmed in appraisal—

His gaze shifted from his sketchbook to Mei, and he turned his head almost accusingly in her direction.

Elizabeth, knowing she was caught, desperately improvised. “Hi! I’m Mei,” she said, as if she meant to greet him all along.

“Hey, I’m Shen.”

“You know, I couldn’t help but notice that you’re really good at drawing! Like, certainly good enough for the Advanced Drawing class. I’m not very great at drawing myself. I mean, I can draw *things*, but only if I have a reference, and even then it takes a super long time and the proportions look weird...”

Shen listened to this girl try to ramble herself out of an embarrassing situation, and he thought to himself, *This class shouldn’t be boring this year*. Strangely, Shen responded best to social and outgoing people, despite himself.

“I’ve always enrolled in this class. Yeah, some of the material is recycled from year to year, but I like it enough to take it again. Drawing is drawing,” he stated.

Mei was simply relieved that he replied. “That makes sense,” she said. “You know, it’s funny, my friend Fang has been in this camp for a few years too, but she hasn’t introduced me to you yet.”

His mouth twisted upwards strangely. “That’s not surprising.”

Mei laughed lightly. “I bet you don’t know Fang very well!”

He smiled, genuinely this time, and Mei felt nice knowing that she had caused it, even if she wasn’t sure why.

* * *

A few nights later, Mei slept over in Fang’s dorm. They tossed candy into each other’s mouths and discussed camp so far—with Fang talking about her sculpture classes and Mei talking about her color theory and fashion ones. Eventually, their conversation wandered and slowed as the night darkened.

"I saw you and Shen talking the other day. How do you know him?" Fang asked casually when there was a gap in conversation.

"From Drawing and Sketching. We sit a few seats away from each other. The teacher might move us, though, because we talk so much!"

"You wouldn't want to get on Professor Lin's bad side," Fang said facetiously.

"Definitely not," Mei laughed. "We should start passing notes or something. It's strange, I certainly didn't expect him to be a talkative guy when I first met him, but he's actually fun to talk to. I guess he just has an icy layer he has to melt out of first." She looked over at Fang. "Do you know Shen?"

"Oh, yeah," Fang said. "We live in the same city. Neighboring schools."

"That's cool!"

"Yeah." There was a pause. "We used to date."

"Oh." Something in Mei sank. "When—how long were you guys together?"

"Since eighth grade. But before our most recent break-up, we were together for like two months. We break up a lot," Fang explained.

"Aw, I'm sorry about that." *An on-off couple*, Mei thought with relief, but instantly feeling guilty for it.

Fang continued talking about their break-up, which had happened in early April, how Shen was always too stoic and detached for her liking. "You wouldn't believe what a person of habit he is. He's literally so predictable, it's almost annoying."

Mei was nodding off, but she tried to disguise it as a listening-nod. It was early in the night, but she suspected that jet lag was catching up with her. Fang kept talking about Shen, but eventually she got up to turn off the lights and climbed into her bed, out of Mei's sight.

I probably like Shen, Mei thought as she settled into her sleeping bag on the floor. She wondered if Fang would mind. But Fang had demonstrated herself as such an easy-going, friendly individual, Mei seriously doubted it. Still, since Fang seemed so bitter about her break-up with Shen, Mei had better ask.

“Hey Fang,” Mei said. Her drowsiness slurred her words slightly, but it was not strong enough to inhibit the sudden nervousness she felt. “Uh, I’ve never had a boyfriend before...in the past I’ve sometimes came close but I would mess something up. I think I would like to break that trend. But obviously, not because I want a relationship under my belt, but because I really like him.” She swallowed. “Y’know what I mean Fang?”

No answer. “Fang?” Mei lifted her torso slightly and saw that Fang’s dark outline on the bed was still. *She must be asleep*, Mei thought, before knocking out almost instantly herself.

But Fang was wide awake.

* * *

On Thursday, Mei and Shen started spending time together outside of Drawing and Sketching. Of course, as massive nerds, they quickly developed a little game: Shen would draw something in his sketchbook and Mei would color inside the outline. Sometimes, Mei would get impatient and her colored-pencil would pursue the paper only seconds after Shen’s pen drew the line, and their hands would bump together. Sometimes, she watched the delicate movements of his wrist across the blank expanse, and Shen would give a soft nudge to return her back to earth.

* * *

“I feel like I’ve spent a lifetime here,” Mei said, as they sat among flowers. They were eating cold noodles, eyeing the park around them, particularly the strange arrangement of rocks in the distance. Mei wanted to climb them, but Shen said that it was too hot. So she stared at the city clustered in the horizon that contradicted the tranquil sanctuary of the park.

"It hasn't even been a week," Shen remarked.

"I *know*. But maybe that just proves that it *means* something."

"What do you mean?"

"I feel like I'm connected to this place."

"Really? I thought you said that you were born in Shanghai."

"Yes but, you said so yourself: Tianjin used to be an important place. Comparable to even Beijing. I could almost swear that this skyline—this city that I'm looking at right now—I saw it before. Maybe my birth parents visited here. They definitely could have."

Shen looked at the direction her finger was pointing and could count a dozen buildings that were ten years or younger. He opened his mouth to voice this, before seeing the expression on Elizabeth's face. He decided to keep it to himself.

* * *

On Wednesday, Shen jolted when he noticed that Mei was filling in his meticulous sketch of her profile with gold skin and pink-tinted hair. When he asked what on earth she was doing, she replied that the colors were how she felt at the moment. Her drawing-hand bumped into his, as usual. But then he let go of his pen and held her hand, and he understood the colors.

* * *

"For the millionth time, Mei," Fang said. "I'm fine that you and Shen are together."

Mei sighed in relief. "I'm sorry. It's just, I know you seemed bitter about him earlier, and I don't want to lose a good friend like you because of that."

"Really, Mei, it's alright."

Mei, feeling quite awkward, started to chat about how he didn't *exactly* ask her out—there was no declaration of "Mei Benson will you be my girlfriend?"—but perhaps they didn't need anything like that—they held hands regularly and pretty much the entire camp fawned over them. She didn't really care, though: she only wished dearly that camp lasted longer, but at the moment, she was just happy, and she knew Shen felt that way too.

Fang was glad that Mei was a talker. It gave her just the right amount of information she needed.

* * *

On Friday, Mei read aloud a postcard from her mothers that mentioned her pet cat. “I had a pet bird once,” Shen said when Mei inquired. “But then it died. My parents got me a dog when I was a little older—but then it ran away. I haven’t asked for another pet since.”

The comment about the pets piqued Mei’s interest. It was the first time Shen had mentioned something that bothered him. She realized that he knew quite a bit about her most significant insecurity, or she at least provided enough vignettes about it: the remarks of Americans back home, the remarks of Asian people back home, the Chinese lessons she willingly toiled through, so on and so forth. Shen hadn’t discussed anything like that, though she sensed an insecurity was there—a crack waiting to be found.

One day, while flipping through his cheaper, less-used sketchbooks, Mei discovered lines and lines of characters alongside sketches. Mei was ecstatic when he explained that he took occasional stabs at poetry—*personal* poetry—and he read a few to her. She spent a lot of that time fake-smiling. The distinguishing factor of his poems was its use of tacky metaphors, definitely. Several of them *did* reference how his family moved around a lot as a child. There was also one about a girl who was “close, yet so far away.” Shen was sheepish when Mei correctly guessed that the terrible cliché was about Fang.

“This poem is really old.”

“Don’t be embarrassed. You were really lucky to have had a girlfriend like her. She’s one of the friendliest people I’ve ever met.”

He sighed. “The reason that Fang and I had such a rocky relationship is because I was so ‘straight-laced,’ and she likes attention. A bad combination, I guess. She also likes being number-one. Not that that’s a bad thing. But a lot of her good qualities can also be her worst ones.”

“What do you mean?” Mei asked, but, like his poetry, his meaning wasn’t very explicit at all.

* * *

Fang was uncertain about her success as she waited for Shen in the university’s courtyard. Mostly because Shen’s actions in this summer fling with Mei was entirely unprecedented—very unlike the usually logical and careful Shen that she had memorized. He usually would never do something so rash. He always kept such a large distance between his emotions and The Logical Thing to Do. Didn’t *she* know that well.

On the other hand, if Shen’s affection for Mei was merely an anomaly, if her Shen could still be salvaged, then everything that Fang was planning to say to him would merely be echoes of thoughts already in his head.

He walked into the courtyard a few minutes later.

“Shen,” she said simply.

His eyes darted around cautiously before settling on her, coldly. It had been three months since they talked one-on-one, face-to-face. “What do you want, Fang?”

“So accusing already?”

“You know how things are,” he fumed—Fang realized that she’d have to alter her tactic. “Me and Mei—”

“I’m sorry,” she interrupted.

Now he drew back in surprise. Fang thought that no other exchange could capture how messed up these last three weeks have been—what else would drive *Fang* to *apology*, and *Shen* to *emotion*?

“About what?” he asked.

“Sit down, Shen. I just want to talk.”

Making his skepticism clear with the angle of his mouth, he grudgingly sat beside her on the bench.

“I just want to let you know,” Fang began, staring right at him, “that the last time we were together, I didn’t appreciate it—you—enough. I complained about the smallest stuff and started a lot of fights. I didn’t treat you the way you deserved to. The way that I *wanted* to.”

His arms were crossed tightly over his chest. "And why are you saying this to me now? It's too late, don't you think?" he grunted.

"It would always be too late, Shen. I should've apologized right away. I was--I was embarrassed. I like having what the last word. That's what I thought I needed--to have the last word. But I've realized that what I really need is for you to forgive me."

The hardness in his eyes softened.

"I'm glad you came around," he said. "To be honest, I don't like it when we fight either. It's just not right for us to be enemies. Hell, we've known each other since we were kids. I think we're always meant to be at least friends--"

Once realizing what his words suggested, he stopped abruptly.

Fang resisted every temptation to smirk. She had her claws in him. She almost felt bad for him. Almost.

Unfortunately, unbeknownst to Fang, if the roles had been reversed, she would have relapsed just as easily.

* * *

What Fang understood about Shen (that Mei did not) was his organized method of feeling. When he *felt*, he immediately recognized the emotion, dissected it, analyzed the parts spread before him, and neatly stored them away. His emotions were separated from his rational thought. At many points in their relationship, this habit annoyed Fang to no end, and it took her many attempts to realize that she had no power to change it. But Mei—Mei had been so open, so charming, that his emotions smeared and jumbled. Beautifully so.

That evening, Fang did not lecture him, did not black-mail, did not discredit Mei. In fact, Fang had never forced Shen to do anything in his life. She had always led him to his own conclusions. She insinuated. She merely asked him a series of questions:

"Why did you start going out with Mei?" (He replied, with shame, "I don't know...I just felt like it. I didn't really think about it.")

"What are you going to do when she goes back to America?"

"Will you miss her? Do you think it will last long-distance?"

Then, "Has she talked to you about this?"

"Why not? Doesn't she care?"

And finally, "Well, what would be best for you?"

* * *

Fang scooped up Shen's thoughts and scrubbed them clean, gutting them and sorting them into compartments and jars. With the rubble cleared, Shen could see the inevitabilities and pitfalls of his emotions. And as a result, he could once again see *The Logical Thing to Do*.

He looked at the neatened emotions of his life and saw the stark contrast with it and the colorful jumble that Mei had induced. He admitted to himself, not without some self-resentment, that he preferred the files and folders.

* * *

It happened that quickly. On Sunday, Shen walked Mei to her dorm and they hugged goodnight, but the next morning, the first day of the fourth week, he was oddly quiet.

"What's wrong?" asked Mei.

"Well," he said flatly, "I don't really want to date you anymore."

She did not suffer from much grief. In fact, she felt a sort of numbness, as if the knife had been thrust in so quickly that she didn't even recognize the sting at first. The overwhelming emotions, however, were confusion and shock. Over the next few days, the confusion lifted and cleared slightly, when she noticed that Fang had stopped talking to her (as did all the friends that Mei met through her)—when she saw Fang and Shen hanging out after dinner—when she saw his arm draped around Fang's shoulders during *Movie Night*. But that still didn't answer her burning question: Why did he do it?

The only time Elizabeth cried was when she sat down to do her Final Portfolio project and, for the first time in those four weeks, could not think of a single color to use.

* * *

Second-to-last day before the end of camp. During Professor Lin's daily warm-up prompt, Elizabeth was absorbed in her drawing of Tianjin's Ferris wheel, when suddenly she was aware of a tanned hand laying a piece of paper folded in quarters on her desk. She glanced up and almost yelped when she saw Shen before her. "Elizabeth" was all he said, and he stood there solemnly. When their eyes met, Elizabeth felt her innards set aflame.

With tremendous coolness, however, she returned her attention to her sketchbook. She let the overhead fan flutter the edge of the tempting paper. Shen lingered for a moment, shocked at her lack of reaction. She couldn't blame him. She could scarcely believe her own self-control. Under normal circumstances, she would have been reduced to a babbling, incoherent mess. She liked this much more, especially as Shen finally left, surrendering, and completed his pretense of visiting the pencil sharpener. God, how satisfying. But she also had a distinct feeling of not being herself.

Now, high above Tianjin on the tower of rocks, Elizabeth removed Shen's paper from her purse. It was good, thick paper, from his medium-sized, second-most expensive sketchbook. How depressing—she had memorized his sketchbooks. She released a breath, simply holding it between her fingers. She hadn't decided what she would do with it. She could toss it into the wind, refusing to do what he wants. Or she could read it. She could rip it up or set it on fire or drown it in the park's lake. Or—she could read it.

Eventually, her fingers acted without thinking, quickly unfolding it.

It was a sketch of a mountain. It was just in black-and-white pen but, as always, the texture produced by the deliberate strokes of his pen created an image that humbled its materials. The jagged rock was swathed in thin mist pierced by sunlight. Some rough brush crawled along the face of it, as well as some flowers with tiny, delicate petals. Three vertical lines of scrawled Mandarin floated in the blank white sky. Mei consulted her dictionary and squinted at it for a minute before translating:

*"I admired the fresh flower of the highlands
but its roots were too weak for the wind.
I cling onto the strong anchor of rock, lest I blow away as well."*

He was not very good at poetry.

With each re-reading, the grooves in Elizabeth's forehead deepened. She understood Shen perfectly now. Fang had told her that he was a habitual person who stuck around for over three years of a terrible but constant relationship. He had told her that he couldn't handle the fleeting nature of pets or his transitory childhood. All that, and the poem, summed up to one confession: Shen was terrified of the ephemeral and the temporary, so he entrusted himself only to the stable and permanent things in life. He had miscalculated Elizabeth's permanence, or perhaps momentarily forgot about it—but, eventually, Fang reminded him...

Elizabeth loathed his obsession with "anchors." If he wasn't so enamored of them, he would not have so desperately and crudely cut Elizabeth off. She was aware that their relationship was doomed, too—and so what? Her curiosity did not permit her to shy away from this opportunity of happiness. Her bravery did not permit her to.

Then Elizabeth realized that she was being quite hypocritical for someone who flew across the ocean just to have a sense of connection with something she would never—ever—quite reach.



Addy Schuetz

Elizabeth rummaged through her pouch of pens, colored pencils, and markers. She eventually found her desired utensil—a white-out marker with thick ink. And she attacked the rock with it:

Dear – (she didn't feel like writing out his name): Things started out so wonderfully, it's a shame that it ended. I wish you were more considerate and less scared. I do hope that you'll learn what things are not worth sacrificing yourself for and what are. I think I might have come here for the wrong reason, but I'm happy because it was worthwhile learning and because it was worthwhile loving you. 08.6.25

Something in the back of her mind asked her what the point of this was. She mentally retorted that she didn't need a point. She knew that the message would rub off. She knew that the stones on which her feelings were inscribed would eventually be dust. Seemed fitting.

Elizabeth Mei capped her pen and searched for a foothold in the crags so that she could climb down and start packing for home.

SILVER AND GOLD

Megan Murata

When I was young and more naïve,
I saw a monster in the mirror.
just a glimpse from down the hall when I ran.

Slowly my britches were exchanged
for cocktail dresses by my nursemaid
whose face still terrifies with its likeness to an African mask.

I've donned some alike, sleek virtuous delicate silk and
hard unyielding umber wood,
the only sight of escape in a world of masquerade.

The labyrinthine society
is the only path I know.
A constrictor and a tiny, silk grey mouse.

Now, chained with links of gold
I wish that reflection I saw
were mine.

NOSTALGIA

Maddy Frank

How can you feel nostalgia for a thought?

A mere thought

Not a situation

Or a memory

Or a person

But the thought of that place under the sun, in the sand, with the mountains behind you and tequila that you've never tasted on your tongue

For the bench with him, examining the tattoos on your wrist that you never got

The hotel room, in a city you've never been to, with friends you've only imagined

Those days when you call in sick from work just because you can

But you don't have a job

And you're scared of needles

And you don't have the money to travel

But the thoughts have resided so heavily in your mind that they're with you

In the morning

The thoughts often fade

But awaken at night

When the stars come out

As if to say

"We've come to get you"

And you close your eyes

And breathe in the bitter wind

And try to unlock the memories that live in the cloud of nostalgia



Vanessa Raffaele

But you can't find the key
And you can't taste the tequila
And you can't hold his hand
And you aren't sick
But right now you feel like you are
So you let your mind wander deeper into the mist in your brain
And you create new adventures
New nostalgias

SPACE HEAVEN

Raffaele Vitale

Da-Da-Da-Da
Hmmm hmm hmmm
Organized with care.
Tuba gets it popin
Atmospheric, Da Da Da

Da

Jumping in space, isolated in a universal galaxy but happy to be
in space,

Our ship takes off.

Sort of an empty 2001 space odyssey type of computer ball
flashes for 1.5 seconds while I get a look out of space from a
dark room other than our cruisers window.

O now we see Gary Busey? He kicks in our window.

I hit self-destruct.

(2nd half of the song, or what feels like it, as I get a sudden mood
change in a flash)



Charlie Constantino

Now I'm in heaven
Clouds happiness, all my
friends are here. Jeses loves us, we are all dancing to "What a
Fool Believes" by Michael McDonald.

But sometimes in life there's a purgatory.
I am a symphony boss
I create peace, make you feel calm
Control your mind if I really wanted.

COLLECTOR (OF WORDS)

Isabella Wu

I (a.k.a. anonymous)
am a collector of words—

I revel in the way they fall from the tongue
(that is, Golden)

Some stumbling
 others dancing (pirouettes; like whispers sung in the night)
 still others leaping (to their deaths...?)

I love
The way meaning is imbued
in every syllabic utterance
 (& in the way you tilt your head 25° to the left)—

This subtle motion
 Tickling (tricking) my mind
 with some fleeting
 flickering
 image (Loki)

Gambling about up in the lacuna where my cranium
 should have been (somewhere near the region of the hip-
pocampus...

 or was that the
 hypothalamus?)
 (I think I was born this way)

instead
 there are filaments
 diaphanous
 and dangerous (how switchblades

and
 chrome handguns are
dangerous)

Full of capability—
that is Full of meaning
and import

This sensation
Quivering still for a moment upon my palate
(tastes of salt like Someone's tears)
before it is lost to the Void
never again to be seen
(by (human) eyes)



Addy Schuetz