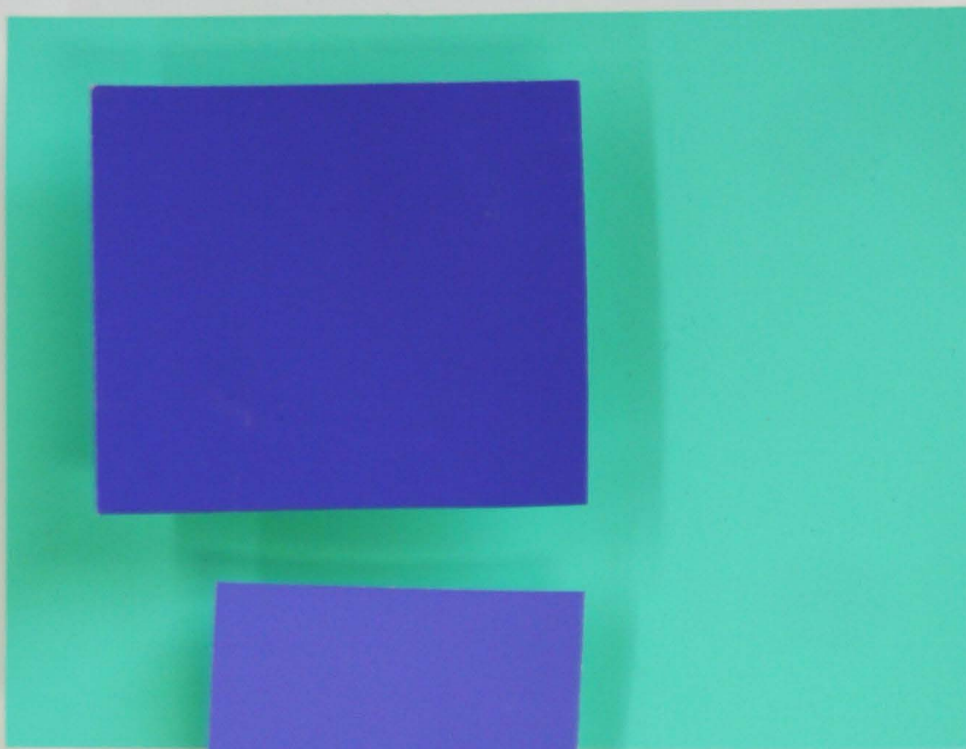


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Postcard Alan Tu

[click here for audio](#)



Greetings from
a place where
white houses with blue domes
sit on a hill
overlooking the sea

Oh, that blue
darker than the sky
lighter than the sea
yet just as powerful
and beautiful

But the sky was gray
the sea was steel
and the domes a dull blue
Put me on a postcard,
it said.



Christopher Fernandez

“Boardwalk at 阿里山”

Samantha Huang

The fog was always there
hugging the mountain, settling in
rolling around bento boxes,
tumbling down the paved path of shops,
curving down the hill from the ancient train
shrouded in mystery.

The boardwalk ran alongside the roads, a sidewalk
exploring the woods, veering off
to stay among the trees.

It had existed before the roads, a journey
longer than the rotted sakura trees, cleaned out and
bandaged, linked to the boardwalk supports, their
roots firmly settled in the boards



Spencer Jones

long ago.

The journey began at the train station, a traveler
anticipating a story sweeter and more charming than the
dulled red train,
people bouncing in back-and-forth swaying, the locomotive
wheezing. If the train was made to connect civilization to a
destination, why was the train so old,
looking older than the shops, the
stories in each hostel, created to greet the
era of travelers?

The train driver thought about this as he stepped out onto
sharp gravel, not yet worn smooth
by the spilling out of tourists from the train.
He could see nothing beyond the
impenetrability of the trees that stretched
into the fog, with the leaves of plants
that foretold the number of typhoons each year.

A creak of the slim door
coming from the passenger car,
a sound that would become almost too familiar,
like the heavy tiredness of boredom
borne from the daily trips of days to come,
caused the driver to look up from the tracks,
finding a native visitor waiting to explore.
They nodded to each other, and the driver
leaned back against the train, waiting.
There was only one thought, one hope:
Is there a story worth discovering?

The single traveler continued his way up the mountain,
boards unfurling before him, the forest
corridor where the sun's rays broke open the canopy.
He walked out over the edge of the ridge, which fell
over and down beneath him, rolling down to the
birthplace of the eldest trees, where supports
sprouted out of the ground, reaching up to the boards,
weaving the traveler's path below.

At the top of a flatter hill, he settled down for the night, the forest

hugging him on three sides as he stared out
over the top of the ridge,
cicadas deafening in the cheerful
darkness of rustling leaves and cool temperatures,
rare gifts on the island.

He couldn't sleep, awed
by the hidden world,
which awaited his arrival.
Small white flowers waved in short bounds in front of him,
settled among the grass on the other side of the county
border, but the moon had taught them
not to care. Both flower and traveler soaked in
the clear, full light of the moon,
beauty blooming
as the spirit of the boardwalk awakened.

The return was pleasant,
his eyes fixed on the first sunrise,
hope blazing in his eyes,
squinting at a green streak shimmering in the sky.
He followed the tracks down, smiling
when he saw the driver stretched out,
having fallen asleep peacefully
under the quiet white light of the moon.

He awoke with the delicate call of timid birds,
new moments to enjoy in a world
where time didn't matter.
"I have a journey to share," the traveler told him,
a story etched in the wood patterns
of a boardwalk, deep in color and emotion,
where the shadows of the trees came to rest.

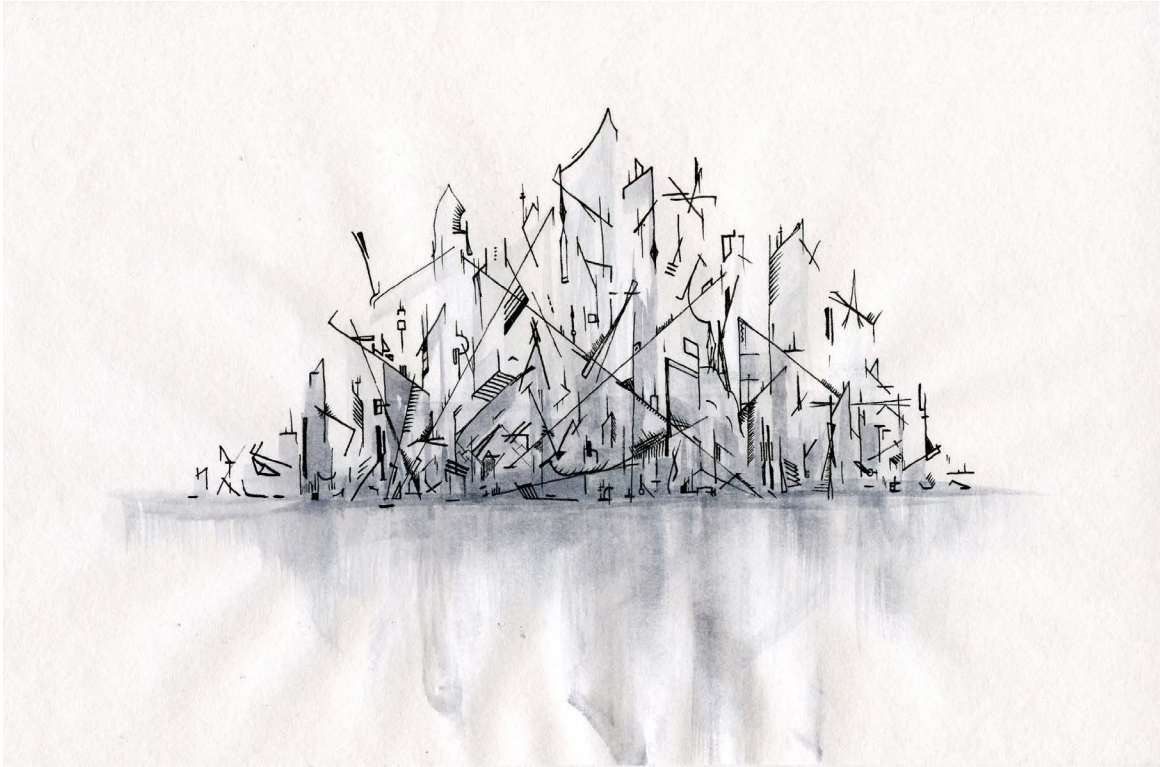
Remembering is an Avocado

Rebecca Flisnik

White is the color I see when trying to remember. Not green from playing in grassy fields. Not blue like swimming at the local pool. Not even the purple of our kitchen, where my dad and I have made countless recipes, none of which I can recall. Just white. Hollow recollections of what was floating in my head. How come remembering who I was, is so difficult? I thirst for what used to be, but that thirst is only quenched with amnesia and a headache. All I am able to accomplish is plastering gibberish babble onto a page, where an epiphany would strike me silly. It didn't. When was there impact in my past? What part of the past could I relive? There is no chronology of events, nothing to remind me. The white of this page, from which no progress has been made, stares me dead in the eyes. The blank space grows and surrounds my head, encapsulating what thoughts I did have. Whirring around and around, it circles like a merry go round without noise and scenery. Only white spinning. My frustrating brain struggle is like the desperation of trying to grow an avocado.

I had always wanted to grow an avocado from the pit we had eaten off of. How old was I? Not sure, but my age could be classified as a time with curiosity in every matter. Many times, over and over again, I would eagerly puncture the pit with brittle toothpicks. Maybe some unknown slime would ooze out of the solid mass, revealing that it was perhaps a dinosaur egg, or something with human senses. Back when anything could be a reality, it was effortless to convince myself of these things. The dinosaur egg sat dangling over the cup of clammy water in its infinite brown shade. Getting home from school each day was a whirlwind of excitement. Nothing hindered me from running to the majestic avocado pit in its sedentary position in the now dirty water. One day I assured myself the shade of mahogany had lightened on the base of the pit. However it didn't take long to realize that it was only the effects of the liquid diluting that made my imagination spark.

Seasons changed from vibrant to warm colors. Then warm colors to grays and browns, and with dulling of the shades around me, interest in the dinosaur egg slowly crumbled. My mind didn't hold much curiosity for what the brown thing would evolve into while sitting in the translucent SOLO cup. Soon all I saw sitting on our kitchen's window sill was just an avocado pit



Ryan Gross

sinking into less than magical waters. These were the same waters that would have catalyzed my wildest dreams into an actuality. It probably wasn't going to grow, I didn't really expect it to anymore. Wonder inside me was near lost, eventually diminished. What was the point in curiosity? Usually it proves to be faulty anyway.

I came home one day as usual to notice there was only my mom's jewelry on the sill above the sink. Simply a sterling ring she took off while washing the dishes, placed serene against white glazed wood. A balloon inside me deflated, falling to my feet with a soft thud. Whatever voice I heard in my imagination abruptly went silent and ceased to speak. Muteness was uncomfortable and lonely. There were no more glints of awe when I stared at that sill. There would never be a stegosaurus erupting from the eerie waters of the SOLO cup. There would also never even be a Kelly green vine drifting to the bottom of that withered plastic. No avocado that I grew would ever sit in a bowl of guacamole, that I could boast, saying I grew it. Never would I be able to taste that satisfaction. I don't know why, but aware of the disappointment, I repeated this process too many times. Each time I repeated it, that balloon deflated a bit more, leaving no air behind.

Not remembering is that feeling. You can only hope and wish, even make up a past for yourself for only so long. I could say that I was reunited with a long lost friend, whom I never believed I would get to see again. Perhaps even say that I got to meet with my grandfather, who I always think about even though I never had the opportunity to see him in person. Maybe I could write my history, telling the story of how I hiked to the top of some unknown mountain range, and felt as close to God's green grassed kingdom as I will ever be. In a way, I feel like I have accomplished all of those things, but a blank space pulls me back to the white of this paper, as I continue to write about the past I don't remember having.

Rock Garden

Evan Wisner

Mr. Gradgrind, why were you such a vocal proponent of teaching ‘Facts! Facts! Only Facts!’?”

A Priori

I have walked through the schools of Paris, Germany, and those of our fair England, and I have witnessed children grow into larger children still. This world we live in is becoming a fanciful playground. Fancy! What treats are stolen by their grubby little hands! Knick knacks cover their walls and the shelves of the market. Books are filled with color and devoid of knowledge. These children are dreamers. And that's what nearly all of them do: dream and dream on more still. They are the parents who do this to their children; filling their mouths with treats and their minds with fancy.



Niko Kazacos

A Posteriori

In University I saw people who had no grasp on their lives. They dreamed of great things that they'd likely never achieve, and how those great things they'd do would be remembered in the annals of time. They were selfish and so was I, once upon a time.

Master Erwin Whistlesnitch III was my sociology professor at University and explained to our class how no moral disparity truly exists and that all people are equally capable of all sins; most of the children sat quietly, and feigned intelligent agreement with their nods, while a few of the more vocal among them spoke out of their selflessness and pity for others.

I knew them as liars from that moment. Fancying themselves good people? Ha! Humans are corrupt, painting their walls with flowers and horses, existing in their little worlds. There's an ideology that guides people: some think and some do. But no one wants to be a doer; why do things when you can get credit for thinking them up? So when our world is ushered into an age of self-interest instead of communal production, people drinking and people dreaming, wishing and washing their walls with a pure white paint that suffocates, they are as sheep in a pasture. They count each other and sleep, hardly ever awake, and when the hungry wolf comes he devours them all.

I saw fundamental weakness and, being he who creates the future, sought to root it out from whence it came. I taught only facts and only production. I was a great teacher of it and I could see that as I turned out more and more sensible people of fact. My own children were taught to the greatest extent what it meant to never wonder and relish only in fact. So well taught were my children that they became adults instead of just large children.

But they never smiled at their success in life. Not even once did they take any joy in their facts. I saw that I was wrong the moment I saw Tom look at me with those stone cold eyes. Those I had molded in their nascent stages of development became bleak men and women in bleak houses doing just as little as those who spent their days dreaming. I was wrong; I sent children into the meat processor and out came little men with plaster faces and black ties- men that did nothing but sit at desks, stamp papers, and think only of themselves.

I didn't treat the sickness, I didn't cure the sickness; I tended to society's disease and only made things worse. I saw the beauty of other people as weakness and, in weeding it out, stole from them that which would make things good in the world. It was not an absence of doers, it was an absence of those who dreamed for others. My students didn't learn to cherish life's beauty but to categorize and summarize it in twenty words or less. I failed them, but worse, I failed my children. I sowed seeds and watered them with salt and when I came to reap I garnered only stones.

Knicky Knacks

Calum Hall

[click for here for audio](#)



Knicky knack

Knicky knack

These knick knacks cover everything from the floors to the walls

I got this vase in Peru for a good deal

It compliments me and every soiree, what a knicky knack that I have

Do not break the knick knacks or you see the cracks on the wall

Please do not spill your red wine on the new carpet or I will cry

Please look at the knick knacks

Listen to the silly stories about the happenstances and coincidences of their purchase

Only look at the knick knacks

If you don't

You see the break in my smile every time I see your husband smiling at my wife

So I cover the walls in knicky knacks the floor in knicky knooks

All to distract me from realizing who and what I am

Please don't break the knick knacks

They're all I have

Untruths

Varun Koppikar

Untruths Varun Koppikar

I came in, my face on a high
beam,
teeth gleaming at friends
and family alike
and they ask what I do
and what I did.
And I answer that:
I drew and painted,
wrote and read,
sang and played.
Happy as they are,
I don't think they cared
all that much,
for they do not ask for elaboration,
or indeed even seem to care
or pay attention
when I do answer them.

And honestly,
all I really want to do
is send off a simple 'to heck with
you'.

And all of that,
for all of this,
because when I drew
I drew on my skin
with shiny,
sharp metal, blood
dropping from my veins
down my arm

plopping in the darkness
and quiet of the night.
While my painting is
the bathroom floor
with blood and paper
littering it, and dropping
right off the counter
as I scramble to hide it all.

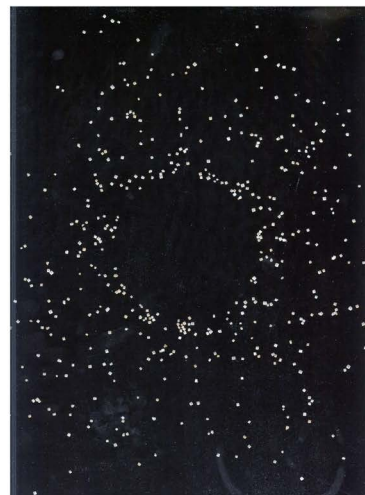
With that,
my reading is symptoms
and diagnosis and escape
from this world full
of an imbalance of hate
to love,
and abuse to distrust
of humans with worth as any other.

To go along
my writing is hateful
and wavy with no direction;
complete discord as seen
in my head with
less than lack
of decisive ability.

And it only gets worse,
because with my singing,
it is just screaming along
in the cold loneliness of my room
along with a song
that tells me I am worth something
when people say the same
but show the opposite.
Where I play,
I play with flames:
warm and orange and blue
and red and yellow and green,

tongues curling and flailing
towards and away from my skin
and my fingers and I
bask in the glory
and the warmth and
love and heat
I get from something
that cannot feel,
doesn't overestimate me
and my capability
and simply exists
alongside me.

And the worst part is,
my words to all of them
are not lies,
but they are most certainly
not totally true;
untruths I would call them
if I had the rights to call
anything, or anyone
anything at all.
Because I am not
a normal human,
and I am not allowed
to want.



Will Riedlinger

Chrysanthemum

Cozette Roloson

It's not my fault that I ended up here, really!

A coincidence, that's all it was.

One great big misunderstanding.

Just a little while ago I was at the florist's, you can check!

I got a bouquet of chrysanthemums.

Why? I was on my way to the cemetery.

No! It's not like that.

Today... today is the anniversary of my brother's death.

No, it's alright, he died many years ago.

A car accident.

No, I don't know the victim.

No, I've never been here before.

My fingerprints? Sure.

-

Oh, hello again. Can I go now?

The cemetery closes soon and I would hate to miss it.

What? You found my fingerprints in the apartment?

But I've never been here before... how could that be?

No, I'm sure I've never been here before.

And I've never met him before either.

But... wait... he does seem familiar.

I know! He was the one who hit my brother and killed him!

No! I didn't want to kill him even if I did hate him.

Besides, I've never been here, how could my fingerprints have been here?

What's that? A camera in the corner?

Is there any footage?

A tape? Ok, I guess we'll have to wait for it, huh?

I wonder if the cemetery will let me in afterhours.

-

The tape's developed? What's on it?

He planted my fingerprints? Why?

What a wretched man!

Wait, he killed himself with poison afterward?

He was trying to frame me.

Does that mean I'm free to go see my brother now?

-

What a nice grave-keeper.

A sweet man, really, letting me talk to you even though it's so late.

Well, that awful man who killed you is dead now.

Maybe when you get your hands on him in the afterlife,

It will be your turn to send him to Hell.

Selfish

Mardasia Ashford

Have you ever just sat and thought? In the quiet narrating your life, describing in shallow words. It was then I realized, then when I sat with all the mistakes and unsaid. It was three words, three little words I should have said, easier to think about and dream about, but still culpable. I have this bad habit of ignoring what's splayed, crouched at my feet. A bad habit of looking down rather than onward. I forgot to watch my steps and I tripped a slow mournful dance of death blended faithfully with the fear of "I love you".

The thought of someone close to me dying, made me sick to my stomach in the vilest ways possible. Because before I showed up to the hospital, I had thrown up twice. I can't understand why I didn't feel remorseful, but more so nervous. Nervous that I'd be left to support the people around me whilst they tremble in their somber states. A heavy overbearing feeling is pushed onto my shoulders, I hate feeling like this; selfish. But there was nothing I could do about it seeing that I had been raised as a selfish privileged little girl. Probably because I hadn't experienced losing someone close to me, never. My older sister called me, frantically, to share the news. My brother's friend hadn't taken his medicine in the past three days and it had worn out; leaving his imagination to run across its most wildest and demented field of dreams.

He stabbed Ty in the back and called the police on himself. Suggesting that maybe jail was more comfortable than everyone made it seem. Ty was five minutes away from the hospital when his lung collapsed, filled with blood, and he was pronounced dead. When he finally made it they 'revived him' and repaired his lung with many hope filled attempts, but his life was still hanging from a thin layer of irony and stupidity so I had to see him before maybe.. It was too late.

I probably looked beyond crazy, with a large family sized box of Lucky Charms in my hand. Baggy black sweatpants and a rainbow crop top I stole from my sister. "Hey." I wave awkwardly, upon entering his room he looks up and smiles back, before flinching.

"Mars." He nods and holds in his laughs as he takes sight of the box. That's all we've ever bonded over really, cereal.

If he wanted to ask a question about me, eating cereal with me was the time to do it. "Dude if you die I swear to god I'm going to punch you so hard and sell all of your Jordans." I threaten him, attempting to laugh.

"I'm not going to die." He reaches for the box and I hand it to him. What now? In total, we've lived together for a few months and nothing more.

I didn't know the guy, actually, I can't even remember his middle name... We were different, different dads, different mind sets, and different dreams. All of the memorable moments we've had were awkward. As if reading my thoughts he hands over the box and laughs, shifting to his side. "We've had some pretty messed up memories together." He laughs harder before coughing slightly.

Please don't die. Wait until I leave. There it is again, me being selfish.

"Yeah." I agree not wanting to reminisce.

"Remember when I thought you were g-" I cut him off. He laughs; glancing at my choice of clothing. So what?

"Yeah." I repeat myself. Something I don't like to do often, the way I view it. The words that fall from my mouth hold importance as they slip from my lips. I was selfish, I am, and I'm okay with that.

"No remember that time you thought my girlfriends water bottle had water in it?" He laughs. I hate every girl he picks up, whether he picks her up from the road side or on the red carpet, he can't chose them well.

"But it wasn't, it was vodka and it burned so I spit it up back in her face." I finish the story and we're both laughing.

"Or remember I had you convince that if you set me on fire it would be fun." He laughs and I shake my head. It wasn't funny.

Hours later my phone gets a notification and I check it.

"I'm about to go." I tell him trying to remember how to get back to the main entrance where my dad is picking me up. Please don't say you love me, don't say it just because of the binding DNA running through our veins.

"Alright little sis." He says, "Love you." he finishes as I reach the door. I look back at him and nod.

Ty had a history of being in dangerous situations. Once he was walking down the street, coming home from school and a car swerved and almost hit him. Another time, he was walking from a friend's house and hears a total of three shots. Not until he got home, and I noticed a big red stain on his left arm, did he realize, he had been hit. And now this. Ty never lived a moralistic life, but more of a go with the flow personality on his shoulders. He was kind, thoughtful, and selfless. But, being careless with those qualities will get someone killed and eventually my brother would endure a fate he could have avoided simply by thinking.

Why say I love you back? If I was just going to lose him anyway.

Ephemera

Alan Tu

"Time is a sort of river of passing events, and strong is its current; no sooner is a thing brought to sight than it is swept by and another takes its place, and this too will be swept away." – Marcus Aurelius

A stark white classroom. Twenty-four students, four rows of six. The screen awakens, and the lights dim. Some students shuffle in their seats. A computer-generated voice speaks. "Please turn to page four in the packet. Today we will learn about pre-Tacit human biology."

C.C. walked slowly, as if he were going somewhere and never wanted to get there. His eyes were focused downward. His mind was a potpourri of notions and emotions. The day that was never supposed to come arrived without a goodbye from the past or a salutation from the future. For sixteen years he had kept his silence; soon those handcuffs would crumble. C.C. turned around and looked back at the school. It had left its marks, but it could leave no more. He was never returning to that place. He did not cry.

"Students, this is the end of your last day of learning." Adopting a melancholy tone, the voice said, "It has been a pleasure. I am confident that each one of you will go on to do great things in the world. Remember, choose your words carefully. Don't speak until you have something to say."

A homeless man was preaching with great fervor and despair. C.C. watched as the man's form began to blur. Embarrassed, he turned his head away and doubled his pace. When he reached home, his mother was on the front porch. He waved and gave her a hug. On a notepad she wrote, "ALMOST THERE!" Holding it up, she smiled. C.C. tried to smile back but he was afraid. He was afraid of making a mistake and losing everything. He looked at his mother again. Was it a real smile?

That night, C.C. dreamed:

A man comes up to me in the street and urges me to go with him. I want to resist, but I can't. I follow him until I am thoroughly lost. He opens an inconspicuous door and goes down stairs leading to a basement. At the bottom

there is another door. He pulls it open, and motions for me to go in first. It's a room filled with hundreds of computers and screens. It strikes me as a surveillance agency's headquarters, though I have never seen one. On the screens are people, most of whom have reached a degree of transparency. I hear whispers coming from all directions. I walk up to a screen and watch as a young woman has a casual conversation with a friend. I watch as both of their figures dissipate after only a few exchanges. It was merely a conversation about a new clothing store downtown. I look at another screen and see a similar talk, this time about a baseball game. I watch them, puzzled. I wonder how truly valuable a human soul is.

All of them were smiling?

C.C. woke earlier than usual. He had beaten dawn, even though he was the only one in the race. He donned shorts and a jacket, and went out the door. He headed toward the park. He had been there only once, on a school field trip. Back then he had wondered why birds could chirp all they wanted while he himself could not make a sound.



Spencer Jones

The park was an open expanse sparsely dotted with trees, which gave it a wide, spacious feel. There were no exact boundaries, so C.C. chose a path and walked. He passed by two benches before he decided to sit down. He looked around. A few early risers were jogging. C.C. closed his eyes. When he did, he began to listen.

Birds, everywhere, in the trees, chirping their loud concertos. Instinctively, C.C. pondered his own limits. But it slowly began to dawn on him – he could talk too. He had dictionaries of words to choose from. If he had no person to speak to, he had nature to speak to.

He thought about the life ahead of him. What good would it be if he could not speak? Why would he submit to decades of silence and agony when he could trade it for a minute of pure joy? He stood up.

A breeze carrying a faint chill sailed across his face. He smelled the fresh, faintly scented air. He looked up at the dazzling blue sky.

“I have a dream,” C.C. bellowed. His very first words were as sweet as spring, and seemed to carry as much weight as they did when Martin Luther King had said them.

The chirping lessened. To C.C., the birds were listening, forming an audience. He felt compelled to continue.

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

C.C. felt better than he ever had. He felt his voice soaring above the trees and touching every corner of the world. He went on.

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

(The wind blew.)

Falling

Andy Burke

Falling, I notice a raven and an Englishman. The Raven cocks its head towards me, revealing a third eye above its beak, darting around independently. The Englishman falls with me, arms and legs out, staring down to our destination. He looks up at me and give a grin with an excited expression on his face; then he looks back down. The Raven dives down to join us. Aren't you supposed to wake up when you fall? This has become a habit of mine, having a lucid dream then jumping off somewhere really high just to see if Inception is right. It's worked for me previously, something about this time must be different. I look down into an endless abyss, hoping to catch that sense of falling to shoot me back into reality. It doesn't come. All I see is a thick mist while I sort of float fall with this Englishman and the bird. Flailing?... no Faulting?... no. This is stupid I look up and my body suddenly finds purchase.

My landing wasn't painful, it was sort of bouncy, like a trampoline. I feel the steady rolling of waves under me. I'm lying on a raft, the Englishman is over me pushing our raft along with a stick. On top of his stick is the raven, looking around frantically. The man is wearing a tattered dress suit and top hat, which has multiple holes at the corners. He turns and gives that grin once more. He has a ragged beard and ruffled hair. The crow caws. I sit up. Our raft hits land as I get to my feet. The sky is black, and the sand we've hit is black. Everything is pitch black, but yet I can see. The Englishman turns towards me, the land at his back. He puts out his hand, full of calluses, and looks at me expectantly, with that grin on his face. A few seconds pass, what does this guy want? His crow caws. He gestures forward with his hand. His look gets stern, then angry. His crow caws. Money? I take out my wallet and his grin returns... no money, only my card. "Do you take debit?" His look grows angry once more and his crow gives a final caw as it leaps from his stick, piercing me in the chest. I am knocked into the water below, well I guess everyone in the new world is going to Hell. I sink as the black water numbs my limbs, I can't move anything. The darkness envelops me as I try desperately to move.

Suddenly, blinding light breaks the grasp of the darkness and I am in a conference room. I look around, the walls are all windows and I am standing

in front of a table with well-dressed people listening to my presentation. I'm equipped with graphs and statistics to show this unknown company's growth. At the head of the table is a grinning Englishman in a tattered suit and top hat, a cane in hand with a raven atop it. "Um..." my face grows red. I have nothing for these people as they judge me. The crow caws, breaking the silence. The Englishman's grin shifted as he became angry with me again. He gestures with his cane forward, and the crow leaps off again, piercing my chest. I break through the glass behind me, falling from the skyscraper we were in.

Falling, I notice a raven and an Englishman.

(Continued on page 37)



Norah Al-qahatani

The “Late” Prince Hamlet

Dylan Parker

Killing may be morally murky, but it is physically straightforward: insert sword into victim’s sternum, remove sword, repeat as necessary. So why does Hamlet delay?

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe deflects blame to the ghost of Old Hamlet, who plants “an oak-tree...in a costly vase that should have nurtured only lovely flowers” (Robertson 11). In other words, Hamlet is weak. Pondering when he should be plotting, Hamlet is hopelessly unable to exact revenge in Goethe’s estimation—except when Hamlet summarily dispenses with Claudius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Polonius. Goethe’s theory thus demands an impossibly fluid interpretation to explain how Hamlet’schutzpah miraculously displaces his ineptitude.

To other critics, insanity explains Hamlet’s “momentary lurches into ‘enterprises of great pith and moment’ ” (Cohen 75). Ignoring that Hamlet’s “lurches” seem more premeditated and permanent than pithy, this theory explains Hamlet’s flightiness, indecision, and all but one of his erroneous proclamations: “As I perchance hereafter shall think meet to put an antic disposition on” (Ham. 1.5.171-72). Shakespeare, who cloaks metaphors with allusions obscured by paradox, explicitly tells his audience that Hamlet is not insane. We should trust him. And if, as critics concur, “to understand why Hamlet delays is to understand much of what Shakespeare had in mind to convey to his audience,” then the message of Shakespeare’s masterpiece is that insane people act unreasonably (Cohen 1-2). As this is trivial, we must again ask ourselves what or whom we should blame for the delay?

The Man.

Shakespeare blunders, according to Gustav Rumelin, deferring vengeance to lengthen an otherwise pithy play in which Hamlet accompanies Horatio on the midnight guard, meets his father’s ghost, and kills Claudius. But repeatedly in moments of emotional turmoil, Hamlet decries how he “[peaks] like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of [his] cause” (Ham. 2.2.493-94). As Shakespeare takes great lengths to publicize the delay, it is no logistical necessity—unless The Bard is a blithering imbecile who commits critical

errors and highlights them whenever possible.

I doubt this. By Rumelin's brand of illogic, I could similarly explain the length of *War and Peace* by claiming that Tolstoy merely failed to distill his epic to the following: there was war, and then there was peace. So why does Hamlet delay?

"Conscience does make cowards of us all" (3.1.82). Innate cowardice does not paralyze Hamlet; his capacity to act decisively when there is no question of morality dispels that possibility. For instance, detecting an opportunity for escape, Hamlet boards a pirate ship—a bold but not surprising act, as there is no moral ambiguity to confuse the situation. So rather than cowardice, it is Hamlet's determination to combat iniquity that cripples him, for justice confounds Hamlet. It could take the form of vengeance, as the English code of honor prescribed, or of more juridical fairness, as Francis Bacon and other Renaissance philosophers proposed. Struggling with these antipodal perspectives, Hamlet delays revenge until he finds an alternative: to flout extrinsic authorities (such as the code of honor, the church, and political philosophy), follow his intrinsic notions of morality, and define his communal conception of justice.

To Hamlet, killing Claudius with dubious evidence would doubly betray his father, since he would slaughter an innocent man and facilitate the escape of Old Hamlet's true murderer. So Hamlet must defer revenge until he can convince himself and others that Claudius is guilty.

Why others? Because justice served in secret is not justice. For all Hamlet knows, Claudius, perhaps politically neglected or dejected, could have believed he was acting justly as he poisoned Old Hamlet. Therefore, Hamlet seeks allies against Claudius and in so doing demonstrates his superior intellectual existence. Whereas intellectual plebs inherently trust themselves, Hamlet recognizes that his suspicions may be "as foul as Vulcan's stithy" (Ham. 3.2.79-80). Equipped with this unique understanding, he tasks himself with the burden of proof and even devises a court-like proceeding to convict Claudius. He and Horatio will each observe the King's reaction to *The Mousetrap* and, much like a jury, "will both [their] judgments join in censure of his seeming" (3.2.83-84).

Their verdict: guilty. Yet still Hamlet waits. Instead of storming Claudius' chamber, he speaks with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for the remainder

of the scene and delays another two acts before exacting revenge. But this postponement is pensive and prudent, for Hamlet has noticed that Denmark is “an unweeded garden that grows to seed” (1.2.135-37). The weed—Claudius—has corrupted the entire country by usurping the throne from both Hamlets, feeding such fools as Polonius and Osric, and feasting drunkenly rather than governing soberly. Even Horatio recognizes that this scourge threatens all Denmark, as he foresees that Hamlet’s encounter with the ghost “bodes some strange eruption to our state” (1.1.71).

The weed grows in the garden of not just Hamlet, but all Denmark. Justice, therefore, demands that Hamlet exterminate both the initial weed and its seeds, which will plague Denmark if allowed to sprout. But if Hamlet merely kills Claudius, the Electors may choose an equally reprehensible next king. If Hamlet, however, proves his mettle by publicly revealing Claudius’ corruption, the Electors will heed his counsel; Hamlet will choose the next king, a just king.

But alas! In Act V the Ambassador reports that “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead” (Ham. 5.2.347). How can a Hamlet so obsessed with justice condemn his old friends to death, even though they embody the corruption of Claudius’ kingdom? How can Hamlet stab Polonius, a similarly bloviating leech who nonetheless receives no Claudius-style trial?

Perhaps literary critics have no answer, but psychologist Philip Zimbardo does. In his Stanford Prison Experiment, he assigned twenty students roles as either prison guards or inmates. Led by one student, the self-professed “John Wayne,” the guards behaved “sadistically, delighting in what could be called the ‘ultimate aphrodisiac of power’ ” (Zimbardo et al. 16). What’s more, they tormented their peers all due to a pair of aviators. Guards reported that their sunglasses acted as reflective walls, shielding their eyes and consciences from their victims.

Masked, Stanford students could lambast, abuse, and torture.

Masked, Hamlet can kill.

In Polonius’ death, a curtain covers the old fool—disguising murder. An ocean similarly veils the doom of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, allowing Hamlet to “be cruel [to his victims] only to be kind” to Denmark (Ham. 3.177). His kindness kills.

How would Hamlet's contemporaries receive this bloodshed? Although perhaps shuddering at the murder of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, they would less likely object to the death of Claudius. Considering retaliation noble, denizens of Elizabethan England would expect Hamlet to exact revenge. It would be exceptional to espouse Hamlet's brand of justice, which protects the collective conscience and necessitates a public unveiling of Claudius' guilt.

But Shakespeare is exceptional. In *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*, he "focuses on the fountain from which justice flows: the human soul, the birthplace of conscience" (Willson 2). To Shakespeare, neither laws nor customs foster justice. Rather, it is the individual, armed with subjective perceptions of morality, who prosecutes the guilty.

Protestant reformers in Elizabethan England hummed a similar tune. Praising individual conceptions of righteousness and divinity, they denounced the authority of the Catholic Church to define morality and exact punishment. Perhaps inspired by these emerging doctrines, Shakespeare shows in *Hamlet* how individuals, not institutions, administer justice for the collective good. Rejecting the code of honor, Hamlet assumes this responsibility and executes powers previously reserved to popes and priests. For instance, he determines Claudius' fate both on Earth and in the afterlife by sparing a praying Claudius, waiting to damn him to hell. Damnation is the realm of God and his earthly representatives, the Church would decry. But Hamlet continues to render decisions on others' fates: he commands "heaven make thee free of it," pardoning the dying Laertes and thereby granting his soul an existence in heaven (*Ham.* 5.3.308). He even decides the future of Denmark, directing that Fortinbras shall be king.

Such edicts persist. By the end of the play, Hamlet has rid Denmark of a corrupt monarch (Claudius) and the seals of his corrupt system (Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Polonius).

But "O cursed spite, that ever [Hamlet] was born to set it right!" (1.5.188-89). Hamlet's campaign kills his mother, Gertrude, and his girlfriend, Ophelia. Most tragically, it hijacks his mind, locking Hamlet in a futile struggle for understanding. "Justice" comes at an immense cost.

Shakespeare, therefore, does not "offer to solve the mysteries of life or

mind” (Durant 100). Instead of coddling his audience with answers, he tortures them with questions. Should Hamlet merely follow the code of honor and blindly avenge his father? Is his justice worth its tremendous cost? Is it justice when polluted with injustice? Is such justice right?

“There is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (Ham. 2.2.249-50).

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XXI.

Kiera Ebeling

That's where he will catch you.

in the dirt

that turned out to be mud.

in the sand

that turned out to be quick.

with a slight of hand

and

an impish grin, he

will catch

you._____



Spencer Jones

Paroxysm

Jenna Gagnier

As I neared the end of my journey the wind suddenly calmed. Once I realized that I hadn't noticed it stop, I was filled with a satisfying fear. A little more than anticipation, still less than terror. It was such an abrupt ending. Accompanied by the sort of shock that one cannot help but react to in a delayed manner. Time seemed suspended. So much hangs in the air here. I am again struck by a feeling so forceful, and though too abstract to explain, impossibly simple. Were there any other man, woman, or child in sight on the purpling moors, I am quite certain each would be similarly swept up in the enchantment, reaching out for ages on all sides. The day, which had been uncommonly clear, nearly cloudless, is now being replaced by the deep, blue-violet hue that follows the setting sun. Further hills becoming increasingly distant as they darken and fade into the sky. The pure and glowing blue is interrupted by a dense corner of clouds which begin just above the last of the visible rolling landscape. Nature's wrath shows no considerable forbearance toward the night's inhabitants.

With no well-travelled path to guide over the sinking and rising terrain I am left to my feeble, diligent attempts at recovering familiarity without very much help from my eyes. This last measure in darkness has dwarfed my perception of what was accomplished below the glowing warmth of day. In my mind, above all other thoughts, I find a silent, pulse-like throbbing of subconsciously selected words driving my body's pace. I am reminded of evenings with father behind chilling windows. His silence had allowed Anne and proud Charlotte to be lulled into quiet rest by the night. I must not have been even eight years old then. I did not fully understand the dampened sounds of pacing, sobbing, and coughing across the house.

I still regard this as a peaceful moment, I was not thinking of mother's death, just a few years before, and I had not yet emotionally understood the loss of Maria, nor the fading of Elizabeth. Touched by the day's last light, father and I sat in soft solemnity. I heard the shift of his aching chair as he adjusted in his seat, announcing that he was about to speak. Then, only moving his head, he turned to me. "Emily Jane, do you know what time it is?" Scared to sour the night's spell, I simply shook my head to mean no. He responded, telling me he was not looking for an answer from a clock, then turned to again face the night. His face like that of a sculpted angel in the churchyard; not stone cold as if he were disappointed. The almost physical blow I received as a result of his disappointment has always clearly mirrored what he thinks he can hide. In disappointment he is defeated, and I too, momentarily, give up hope when he feels this way. But no, his face is as much alive and malleable

as if he were filling the room with his ringing laughter. Just as I sleepily sighed I heard him inhale as a preface to speech. "It is the gloaming hour, Emily." He turns back to meet my anxiously over dedicated gaze. His jaw remains on a single plane until he lowers his full visage to see me, as I see him, now almost fully illuminated by moonlight. Turning once more to access my girlish comprehension, he elaborated. Just as I sleepily sighed, he told me this time was when the day's light fades to moon. I looked into his eyes with my own widened, and nodded, eventually off to sleep. I think of him now as I sit on the cool stones before the structure.

Weary in body and of clear mind, eyes closed, I allow myself to be drawn to rest upon the mossy tangle at my head. I imagine the happenings of the world inside. It is too dark for dancing or parties. I feel that for some time those within these walls had been tormented. Anger and violence of course, and betrayal, whirring spells of madness. He must've had a kindly start. Such a home is too lovely to have always been so dark. As I consider all of these thoughts I drift into a dream state and from my place at a large window I watch the scene. There is a carriage approaching in the dark, its wheels causing the muddy stones of the road to dance round like soap bubbles as the rain mixes in with crashing drops that rival in size those of the most terrible storm I've ever seen. Other than the rain, the night was oddly pleasurable. Not a clear night of a thousand stars, but none of the eerie hauntings one would expect from the towering stone structure appear.

The blackened walls glisten soaked in rain and limited moonlight. The carriage stops around the side of the house in the newly lit yellowy glow of the stables. Not leisurely, but without haste, a heavily cloaked figure with some odd cargo enters the house. Its occupants are all glad of his return and with varying degrees of excitement. A beaming, young girl runs to her father, (she has not seen him in what she thought was nearly a month, it had been three days) and in tradition pulls on the tails of his coat anticipating some treasure from the city. As he turns away from the chair at the fire, a strange surprise is revealed. A brother who has been leaning with arms crossed and lips pressed in a scowl lifts himself with overstated leisure, a display of his ambivalence, only to get a better look and express his judgement (which had been determined prior to the new vantage point). He opens his mouth to speak but has not yet decided what he is saying; fortunately, he is interrupted. "He must be taken in as a gift of God", the father, Earnshaw insisted, addressing his wife. The benign villain, Hindley, is not as quick on his feet as fancies himself to be. After another pause he prepares for an impetuous interjection, and with zeal he mutters, "e'en though it's as dark as a gift of the devil." Neither parent gives him any notice. Without a shift in gaze, dear Miss Cathy shoos him, "Hindley!" with a few gentle swats of her hand in her brother's direction.

I feel a rumble beneath me, through my eyelids I am met with a bright flash. Jolting up,

reality returns to me, and in haste I run into the eerie house. Before passing the threshold, in another flash I see an inscription above the door. Made illegible by weathering and now darkness. Ascending cold, damp steps I approach a truly grand hall. 'Cavernous.' Unprotected from the gaps funneling cold rain water in through the ceiling, another dark set of stairs is enticing.

I have been feeling so lost as of late. The warmth of summer faded out slowly, so much so that had it not been recorded I could not tell the time of year. I have discovered I am so attuned to the cycle of the weather. So much loss. I have not felt grounded in so long. Walking across the moors today, I do not find the solace I was seeking when I set out this morning. It seems that as my mood has darkened the cold has finally come. Late October always holds a surprise. As I recall, the last October was colder than these days, but much more clear. I have not felt satisfied within the family; I long to receive a grant of significance from these familiar rolling plains. I look to the abysmal, grey sky. It is as though it is swallowing the country-side. I notice the smallest of snowflakes being tossed about by the wind and catching in my hair. I am met with another chill. Feeling as if I am suddenly accompanied by a foreign, yet familiar presence. In the wind I think I hear a call.

Every time I return to my writing from the day before, I find it hard to engage, and to further the story. I think that I may have too many ideas. Every few pages I see myself losing interest in what I've done. Thinking that it is juvenile, or nonsensical. My ideas for writing are abundant with potential. The house, the moors, Cathy and her family... they are already seeming real to me. I am beginning to doubt the arrival of this gypsy boy. Miss Cathy is a strong-willed child, bold but naive. She must believe so very much in love. But how can she, living in such a place. As beautiful as the moors may be, even the most rosy wanderer can attest to their haunting and mysterious air. There is one word I have heard before, from our dear housekeeper Tabitha taught it to me. She has always been using strange words, she stills calls Anne, Charlotte, and me her "childers". For as long as I can remember, she has been taking us for walks all around the moors. She would tell us wild stories, she even talked of fairies. Aunt Branwell never liked her very much at all.

"Wuthering", that was the word. It so perfectly captures the intent of the stormy countryside. Tabby told us, in her own way, that it was meant to depict the tumultuous atmosphere. These wuthering northern winds have left behind reminders of their fury. Even the most mature tree, for as far as I can see in daylight, has been swept up by these winds. All of the trees are like this, bending in an exaggeration of the blows that have outdone them. They threaten not only their return, but more evidence of power left behind to pass on to posterity. These trees are the human skull at a man's bedside.

I walked up the stairs and down a dark hallway. My path is made slightly visible by, only

sporadically, judging from my first instinct, a window. I can only hope it is a window. My second judgement, in fear, exclaims it is a ghost of the place. Some eerie specter, come to drive out anyone audacious enough to enter its lair. I can only wish it is a window, still walking with courageous steps. My mind seems not to be able to remind my feet that I am only brave if I do not die, or meet some other perilous taste of demise. I can still turn back. Each anxious, yet steady, step forward becomes slower. This suspension of life may be a consequence of my sedated plod. Thoughts racing, perception gone, I see a set of panels in frame of the wall ahead of me. My skin crawls and quivers each time a flash illuminates the panels' silhouette. Words run faster, each step hesitates. I can only pray that it is not a spirit of the misanthropic who represents and guards this place. His civilities muttered or bellowed out behind tightly clenched teeth.

Only a window, I remind myself. Only a room. I am afraid this death march will never end. Nearing the once distant light, I am more afraid that it will. Only a window, I repeat. In an eleventh hour attempt to clamber for security, only a room. Tightly shut eyes and shameful, frantic fear strike the panels open. The courageous feet rush in. Vulnerable eyes provoke a sigh at the still darkness. Drifting into exhausted relief, I take solace in the absence.

A boom and a flare strike the room into brief light. A hand is revealed at the window! Only for a moment. The panels must have shut behind me! My view is clouded by terror. Another flash. The hand has grown! It seems to beckon me through the rain-covered window! The light strikes closer than before. The last of the window glass shatters. The hand smashes inside. Oh I must be dead now!

This bed is damp and cold. I roll over the uneven surface to face the light. I must've been struck down by murky weariness. Finding my bearings, I am confronted by clear, blinding, unabashed light. It is the midday sun, both drifting and blazing in. I stand up, rising from a nightmare, awakened into a sparkling dream. Or perhaps I am dead. Guiding myself to the window, with a loose grazing of the side of the bed beside it, I notice something peculiar. A candle upon the sill, over the bed. It has been melted into a part of the frame. Magically untouched by the night's storm. Though as I begin to recall it in lucidity, I wonder whether there was anything real to remember. Beside the candle, is a small stack of terribly ragged books. Passing my fingers over them I truly wake up, I light up! I am wildly enlivened all at once. I feel a rush of hope! Hope, and joy! Struck by my imagination, I race down the hall. Descending the stairs, ascending the second set. In large, leaping bounds I reach the path and set out giddily. I don a determined pace, as I eagerly make my way home, my head filled with ideas and plans.

“Mr. Heathcliff?” said he”, I mumble aloud, evading rocks on my way in a meticulous

manner. Barely audible, even to myself, I continue. "A pair of shocking black eyes appeared at the door. I am fascinated by them, stunning, alienating. They could reach to the depths of the most imposing man (if he is not already in my presence) and take, for himself, all that is inside. Not for the value or quantity of whatever that unlucky man may have, but out of the bitterness burning in place of a heart. A speculation anyway. He must habitually force his grudges and grievances upon all who approach his home. They are to him deceitful, ignominious invaders. Trespassing into his realm, this blustery fellow had certainly found a suitable home for himself. I surmise his soul is haunted by a great lost love."

"Cathy!" I realize with a spark. Thinking how very wuthery a love between the two could be, quite destructive too. The rest of the way up to the parsonage I walk to the rhythm of "Cathy and Heathcliff, Heathcliff and Cathy" so much more stirs in my mind. Upon entering the house and escaping the questions of the dinner table, I return to my quarters for privacy. Sitting down, I begin to write.

On Being a Writer

Alexa Chew

Under the dark night sky, a lone warrior dashed through the woods. He glanced behind him every so often, checking for any pursuers. Suddenly, he skidded to a halt. He then found himself face-to-face with...

A beast of the wild, ready to pounce on him and devour him? A young girl, eager to become his apprentice? Perhaps a future love interest in the form of a brooding prince?

The possibilities swirl around in my head and I have no idea what to choose. The sudden introduction of a monster will force the protagonist to use his fighting skills, which is definitely something that will need to be shown over the course of this story, considering that it is supposed to be an action-based one. Introducing the girl earlier in the story will allow for more opportunities for her to be characterized, which is what she will need as one of the main characters. As for the prince, his appearance can serve as foreshadowing of both important characters and future plotlines.

One thing about writing your own stories is that you can put your characters in any sort of situation, no matter how unrealistic or unpredictable they may be. And while that in itself is quite fun, I do believe that we need to be careful of what we put in our stories. Stories, while they serve as a great form of entertainment, also teach readers about the world around them; despite being fictitious, stories often contain an element of truth, as every action is representative of something an author witnessed, and every situation is based off of something that an author has seen.

I write stories to fill the void left by other stories. If all the stories I read all lack a well-developed queer character who acts properly, then I'll write a story with a gay protagonist, and be sure to make him a decent human being. Likewise, if these stories treat the female characters as a prize by only making them relevant to the story as love interests, I'll make the deuteragonist a girl, and refrain from making her fawn over the main character. I'll also make her feminine, as there is generally a lack of female characters who are both capable of defending themselves and enjoy dressing up and putting

flowers in their hair. By doing this, I hope to show that things don't always have to follow the preconceived convention and that people can all be different.

Thus, this warrior will travel the land. He'll meet helpers along the way, and gain both friends and enemies. He'll keep villages safe, protecting the weak and the poor. His apprentice will travel farther, and bring kingdoms to ruin and to glory. She'll clash with traitors and knights alike, trying to find a meaning to this madness she has caused. As for the young prince who was caught in the conflict, he'll have to try to collect the pieces of his old life, figure out how to survive in this new world, and restore order back to his life.

Two Torn Souls

Elissa Goorman

Lights- in the trees, on the lampposts
are bright
but the diner is dim.
Neon orange flickers faintly
struggling against silver flakes
which survive the gaiety
unlike some...

The jukebox blares
but the music is wrong,
fighting a losing battle
against the heavy air.
The tune peters out
the last quarter
giving way to hollow silence.

Jeff peers through the murky window,
frost lacing itself
amidst streaks of grime.
He envisions the cutouts-
trees, bells, candy canes-
tender scents hovering in the heat,
and doubt crawls into his mind.
He left his family and escaped
that life of wealth and waste
without a trace of remorse.
Yet now
his decision haunts him.

Kristin sighs behind the counter,
snatching up the final order of the night.
Her worn brown flats
whisper on the drab linoleum
as she paces to the scarlet vinyl booth,
setting the piping cocoa
in front of the waiting man.

An orphan at three,
Kristin grew up in Stowe,
raised by her grandmother,
now always working
alone on the late shift.
She knows not
the stories of those
who frequent these booths,
but feels their grief-
an emotion she knows well.

Jeff can't help
but let the memories fall into place
as he sips the steaming cocoa.
His mother's smile
flashes across his mind,
elated with the act of giving
presents to all...
Then her eyes,
sharp with fury at the sight
of her drunk husband stumbling
towards the stuffed stockings...
Then her face,
tortured
as her son looked back
for the last time.

Kristin grabs the empty mug,
slapping the bill on the table.
She walks away swiftly
yet risks a glance back
to watch the serene
stillness of the man
as he stares out the window
into the darkness,
with no reaction
to her hastiness.

It seems too often
that there are
shattered souls

on the eve before
a holy day.



Katherine Vollmer

Michel Liu

They say that silence is fragile,
thin glass that shatters with a sharp tap of a fingernail.
But I know that silence is not a lapse in noise.
It is the truth that lays
bare and dry when the current of words recedes to a meek trickle.
It is the natural default that our world began in, so it will engulf the world
when it
Ends.
Humans (in denial) hardly notice this
Except when we are in large flocks, and
Somehow, the conversations lull as if rehearsed, and suddenly everyone
can hear it:
Nothing.
Everyone chuckles out of awkwardness
Or maybe out of nervousness.

They discovered that cells stretch like
a veil across a petri dish,
Never accumulating too thickly or crawling up and out of the sides.
And when some of the tissue is punctuated and removed,
The cells seamlessly fill in the gap, until they
Once again rest comfortably in the dish,
a single fleshy entity.
They say that silence is fragile
a snowflake that dissolves on your skin.
But, darling, we prove that silence is the strongest force of all,
And ours (a special kind) is tainted with cancer:
The units pile up on one another, smother the dish, pour out of the walls,
multiply prematurely, voicelessly cry out for sustenance.
Never mind, though—never mind.
I know you don't care much for biology, anyway.

“Untitled”

Emma Corby

I woke from the half sleep I'd been trying to busy myself with. 3:38 a.m. I reached to rub my eyes with my trembling hands, and noticed with the movement that my back was drenched in sweat. My arms froze in the air before I could touch my face and rerouted themselves to the small of my back. My fingertips swiped across my skin, pulling away with them full droplets of sweat. It was like I'd run through a sprinkler, which covered my overheated body in a chilled mist, except the mist had built up and completely soaked me.

I went to roll onto my other side, too delirious to realize I was at the edge of my mattress already, on top of the blankets. For the briefest of moments I was falling, just like I had been in my dream, although I couldn't remember what my dream had been about. The hardwood floor shook the thoughts from my head and the breath from my lungs. I groaned. The floor creaked from beneath me, as if it felt just as much pain as I did. Although my shoulder was crammed between the floor and my body, I couldn't do anything but lie still. I listened to the darkness; it called out to me from the unseen depths. With each call I was inflicted with dreariness, which pushed my eyes closed. I could feel my eyebrows knitted in a constant wince. I drew in a small breath, and held it briefly before exhaling.

I started to flirt with sleep as I lay, unmoving across the cold floor. After it had attacked me, the floor seemed to embrace me. I filled a mold to my body in that floor. And suddenly the wooden panels weren't as cold or as hard as they had been. It was as if I had put forth the effort to pull myself back up to bed. Just the mere thought of moving exhausted me. My eyelids were no longer lightly closed, but had become weighted, and now comforted my previously restless eyes. My body pushed against the floor, feeling heavier as I fell into the depths of my dreams once again.

I felt a muffled thud from beneath me. Startled, my eyes flickered open while the rest of me remained still. Sunlight poured in through the small, rectangular window at the top of the wall. I couldn't bring myself to move my limbs; I felt like I was glued down. I would've much rather resumed sleeping

than anything else. Slowly, I breathed in air through my nose, as my mother used to tell me to do, and I let out the air just as slowly. I began to question if I had heard anything at all. As if my thoughts had been heard, there was a knock at my bedroom door. It wasn't an urgent knock; it was just four raps, all spaced evenly apart and placed firmly on the door. With energy I must've gotten from the adrenaline that both the thud and the knock gave me, I jumped and twisted into my bed from the floor. Just as I maneuvered my body to fit with the pillows and blankets, the knock repeated itself, this time with less hesitation between raps.

"Come in," I mumbled. I could sense the stillness from behind the door. Whoever it was, they might not have heard me. I waited a few more seconds, then cleared my throat. "I said you can come in," I repeated, this time louder.

The door moved ever so slightly, maybe an inch or two, before it stopped and I heard footsteps leading away from my bedroom. It didn't occur to me at the time that my roommate was on a business trip, and I was supposed to be the only one in our apartment. My feet swung to the edge of my bed, dangled for a brief moment, and met the floor once again. My vision fogged over from the sudden movement, but I took long, quick strides to the door anyway. Opening it, I listened to the sounds of my heartbeat that seemed to be coming from the back of my head. It was like the thud from earlier was repeating itself over and over. I held my breath and strained my neck, trying to hear more than just the beating of my heart. The silence, however, was overruled by my sheer presence. The air around me stirred, like water does after being disturbed. Stepping out into the hallway, I leaned against the wall for support. I started to think I was imagining everything, and slid my back down the wall until I was sitting, hugging my knees, on the rugged ground. Coming to the conclusion that I was still the only one home, I placed my head on my knees just for a second. My head ached from my thunderous heartbeats. Once again my eyes closed and welcomed the idea of sleep...

I didn't feel the wrists close around my ankles; perhaps because the only things I felt were the fingers that pinched my nose, and the hand that sternly held the chloroform-infused cotton against my mouth. I knew by the air accompanied by the taste of the chemical that I shouldn't have given in to the pressure of sleep. And yet as these thoughts churned in my mind, I could no longer grasp why my mind wandered the way it did. The aching in my head

that had been so aggressive earlier lifted, leaving me feeling empty and nauseous. The sudden lightness in my head made me want nothing but to disappear into my dreams, which I couldn't remember.

"You said this stuff was supposed to wear off hours ago!" He spat out the words as if they were meant to physically hurt someone. My mind floated around the thick, deep voice. It was almost familiar, but the aching in my head had returned, and made it hard to focus on anything except the constant pounding. The surface beneath me was not as comforting as the hardwood floor had been, or the rugged ground outside my bedroom. It didn't warm to my body temperature, and the feeling of being above the ground contributed to my uneasiness.

"It was, you must've just screwed something up!" This was a woman's voice, and her tone was so sour, I cringed. Her gasp was enough to tell me I'd made a mistake. She whispered something I didn't catch, but the footsteps across tile floor were enough to draw my eyes open. Squinting, I saw nothing through my eyelashes but white light. I wondered how long my eyes had been closed for.

"Finally." It was the man speaking again. "Do you know how unsatisfying it is to talk to an unconscious human being?" I couldn't tell if he was speaking to me, although I figured he was. The light was still so bright, causing my eyes to tear up. I closed them again.

"Paul, do not let it happen again!" The taps of high heeled shoes came scurrying toward me, and didn't slow until they completely stopped. My hand balled into a fist, and I rubbed my knuckles with my thumb. I breathed in slowly through my nose, and released the air even slower.

"Why can't we just do it while he's out? I don't feel like waiting." There was a rustling in what sounded like a plastic bag, like the ones I got at the grocery store to carry my food out in. I got the feeling they were using it for different purposes, though. There was an eerie silence that filled the room, as if it belonged there.

"Fine." With that, the man exhaled loudly. I felt his breath on my face.

"Alright, thank you." The smell of beef jerky in his words spread across my face. I recognized that voice, and that scent. My eyes fluttered open, despite

the incredibly bright lights, and focused on his face through the tears forming in denial. His eyes met mine, and I blinked out the tears to make sure I did indeed recognize this face. When I opened my eyes again, the face had only become more known to me. The back of my throat tasted acidic.

"I thought you were on a business trip," I grumbled out through a thick voice that I didn't know as my own. My head was still uncomfortably light. His eyes looked to the woman who must've been standing behind whatever I lay on, before settling back on mine. One side of his mouth turned slightly upward, and I noticed the beads of sweat resting at his hairline. But when I met his eyes again, they weren't as I'd always known them. They seemed to look not at me, but through me. I was nothing but a window.

"This is my business trip."

Melancholy

Anika Weiss

“Sir!” A high pitch voice cut through the morning air. Before I could even turn around, it sounded again. “Mr. Tuke, Sir!”

I stopped my walking, turning around to see Jacob running toward me along the path of the garden. The young boy stumbled slightly as his foot caught a tree root, but quickly regained his balance.

“Be careful,” I warned him gently. Seconds later he came to a stop in front of me. With his brown hair disheveled and little chest heaving, he shot me a respectful smile.

“How can I help you, Jacob?”

“Oh!” He said, remembering he was on a mission. “My father wanted to tell you that he found something.”

“Found what?”

“He didn’t say, sir,” The boy tugged on his jacket’s sleeves distractedly.

“Very well,” I nodded at the child. “Please tell your father that I’ll be at the asylum this morning. He can meet me there if he’d like to.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Thank you, Jacob,” I grinned at his enthusiasm. He took my words as a dismissal. He beamed proudly before turning away and running back in the direction he came. I watched him as he disappeared into the thickness of the overgrown garden. I quietly sighed to myself before continuing my daily walk.

It was my second month here. Two months since Hannah died and one month since they put me in charge. It was an honour, truly, but that hadn’t made the situation any easier. Johnson must’ve had something important if

he sent his son to tell me rather than waiting until I stop by as I always did in the afternoons.

I approached the end of the garden's path, which spat out onto the road. I wasn't sure if I could really call it that though. It was more like a flat stretch of dirt that was rarely used for its purpose. No one came down there after we shut it down. If anyone did, it was either a Quaker, here to pay respect, or Stratford, the head of the asylum at the time of her death.

"It was a suicide," He'd say. "We had nothing to do with it."

But he never showed us her body. How were we supposed to believe Hannah's death was committed by her own hand? We had no evidence of it. We did, however have growing evidence that the asylum was responsible for her death.

I made my way along the road at a quick pace, wanting to be the first to arrive that day. With the sun having just risen, the air was slightly bitter as my breath clouded it. It reminded me of the smoke my father used to make when he sat in his chair with his cigar. He gave me my first when I was eleven. I didn't enjoy it much. It burned, but my father's pride was more important to me than my cough, so I sat and smoked with him anyway.

The asylum loomed and grew in size as I came closer to it. It was a nice building honestly. If you didn't know what it was then you might even say it's beautiful. But, being an asylum, people usually avoided the place at all costs. When I was at the tailor last week, we got into a conversation of what we all do. When I mentioned what I was trying to do, each man had the same reaction that they always do. Some sort of horror and shock typically takes over their faces.

"Aren't you afraid they'll kill you?" They asked. "You can trust 'em."

I always tried my best to explain it to people, but they just didn't get it. Just because they're labeled insane doesn't mean that they're secretly planning to murder you. Sorry, but you're just not that special.

The main gate, the entrance, of the wall was cracked open slightly, just enough for a grown man to slip through, which is exactly what I did. The smell of rotting vines and blooming flowers took over as I climbed the path-

way to the main entrance of the empty insane asylum.

Some would probably find the complete silence in the air to be eerie, but I found it strangely relaxing. Of course the door to the building would be locked, since the place had been shut down for a month now, so I didn't even try opening it. Instead, I stepped off of the path and pushed through the light brush to reach a window ledge. As I had done many times before, I hoisted myself up, settling on the brick ledge and harshly pulling open the window.

Of course the windows all had bars around them a couple months ago, but Johnson and I came and took a few of them off for this exact purpose. I swung my legs into the building and gently fell to the ground inside, landing on my feet. The collision between my shoes and the tile echoed through the long hallway I was in. The only light was what the morning sun cast in through the foggy windows. Dust danced in the air as if in slow motion before I began walking, sending it into a frenzy.

My footsteps seemed to echo through the entire three-story building as I walked past cell after cell. Each one was identical. A small cot pressed against the wall with a small bucket sitting in the corner. I made my way to a cell that looked exactly like the others, but it wasn't the same as the others, because it was her cell. As I arrived at the small room, I looked through the bars to the cot she slept on.

Sometimes I couldn't help but wonder if this was where she passed. It most likely was. I knew she barely left her tight room. Small figures were lightly scratched into the brick of the wall that the cot was pressed against. Most of it was too difficult to see clearly, but I managed to make sense of sections of the drawings. There were small numbers and her name carved into the rock. Little animals floated around the words, Hannah Mills, in a random pattern.

"Tuke," A voice startled me from the state I was in. My neck nearly snapped as I looked to see who it was. Down the hallway Johnson jogged toward me. I wasn't sure how I hadn't noticed his entrance.

"Are you alright?" I asked my friend, seeing his distraught expression. As he came to a stop in front of me I noticed the small journal he held tightly in his right hand. He followed my gaze and suddenly beamed like a child, re-

minding me of his son.

"I'm more than alright," He held the book out for me to take, which I did with curiosity. I flung open the cover, revealing messy writing that stretched page after page.

"What is this?" I looked up at my friend.

"I found it yesterday. Remember I said I was going to get in there?"

He gestured to Hannah's cell as I nodded, urging him to continue.

"Right, well I took the keys from the guard's office and went through them all. I tried at least ten of them before I found the right one, but I got in," Johnson said, giving me a look like that explained everything.

"What does that have to do with this?" I asked lifting the journal.

"It's hers, Tuke. It's Hannah's," He said.

"I don't... I don't understand. How did you—"

"I found it wedged between her cot and the wall," He cut me off. "It's her journal. It talks about the things they did. She wrote about almost everything."

"How could she even write?"

"Her parents gave it to her before they sent her here. I think she brought it with her."

I nodded my head as I feverishly reopened the book and flipped through the pages. I looked back up at my friend who looked almost as relieved as I did.

"Johnson, this is incredible," I said in disbelief.

"I know it is, sir," He said. He then looked behind him, as if to check and make sure no one was around. "But I think we should get going before they get here."

"We should," I agreed and we both went back down the hallway to the window I had originally climbed through. Once we were safely out of the brush and through the gate, I tucked the journal securely into my coat.

"How much of it have you read?" I asked my colleague.

"Only about half of it," He answered, distractedly kicking a stone down the road with the tip of his boot. Not much else was said after that. We agreed that I would stop by his house that afternoon and we could discuss the situation to come up with a plan against Stratford.

Once we went our separate ways, I made it back to my home fairly quickly. I was careful not to be loud as I opened the door, well aware that our baby was easily woken up. I saw my wife sitting with one of my old shirts in her lap as she stitched it perfectly in each place that the fabric was distressed.

She looked up and sported a small smile when I walked in, which I returned. Our son, Henry, was sound asleep in his crib as I suspected. I settled down on the opposite side of the room as my wife before I began reading.

2/24

I'm not sure if I was born like this or simply developed it over time. If the latter, then why did it come to me? I haven't struggled with many of the things I could have, so why is it with me? Somehow it became a friend of mine. It comforts me as it tears me up. They think that I'm insane. Not caring enough to get out of bed or eat classified me as mental. Yesterday was my first here. The York Asylum.

There are too many people here and it's never quiet. Despite my constant exhaustion I didn't sleep last night. Each time I began drifting off, a furious yelling, laughter, or sob would echo through the hall and knock me awake again.

The woman in the room next to me hasn't stopped speaking to herself since I arrived. I don't know if she ever has stopped. She can sleep through the madness, but that ability may contribute to why she is here in the first place.

2/25

Today was my first surprise bath. Florence had warned me about them. She's been here for months, but she doesn't know how many. She's in the cell next to me, on the side that my babbling cellmate isn't on. Florence has told me all about the things they do to fix us but I don't see how they're being helpful.

2/28

They say we're crazy, but of course we look crazy if we're chained to walls, crammed in cells, starving, and filthy. Anyone would look insane this way.

3/1

When they sent me here, they told me that others would visit but they haven't come. Florence says that no outsiders ever come, unless they're there to become an insider. The woman next to Florence, two over from me, spends the nights singing to herself. Florence says that she never did that when she first came. She says that this place made the woman crazier than she ever truly was. At this point, I can't see how I can disagree with that.

"William," My wife's soft and quiet voice stopped my reading as I looked up at her attentively. "What is that?"

"It's Hannah Mill's journal," I responded. My wife's eyes widened slightly at my words before she furrowed her eyebrows and glanced at the book in my hands like it wasn't really there.

"Is Mr. Stratford aware of it?" She asked.

"No," I shook my head, thinking of the asylum's owner. "I think this is it. This is our chance to prove it."

My wife face lit up as she said, "Her parents will be grateful."

"I will be too," I said. She nodded in understanding before returning to her

stitching. I looked back at the messy writing.

3/2

The woman next to me, the one that talks to herself, she's not here anymore. Her babbling ended last night. I was happy about it because I figured I could finally sleep, but this morning, I woke up to commotion. Florence was yelling something at the men in the white coats, but I couldn't follow it. They took the now silent woman from her cell, carrying her limp body with Florence's angry yells in the background. I hadn't gotten a good look at her until then. The dead woman was fatally thin and pale, like she hadn't eaten in months. Her lips were blue.

3/3

Florence says that it happens a lot. She says that she sees starving ladies being carried out all the time.

I took a deep breath, trying to shake the darkness that clouded over me when I read her writing. I flung the book shut, making my wife look up.

"I think I've got it," I stood and quickly pecked her forehead before heading to the door. "We've got it."

I closed the door of my house and ran west, to Johnson's home. I passed by the Beckons' house and saw the twin boys playing in the yard.

"G' morning, sir," The scrawnier of the two said politely.

"Morning," I nodded at them but didn't bother slowing down on my journey. As I reached Johnson's small house I rapidly knocked on the door. About thirty seconds later, he opened his door. As soon as he saw me curiosity took over his face.

"I'll tell you on the way. C'mon they should be there by now," I said before he could ask any questions. He promptly followed me back to the road we had walked earlier that morning.

"What'd you find?" He asked excitedly, once again, reminding me of his son.

"She wrote about patients dying all the time. Starving, freezing, whatever it was, it wasn't suicide."

"They were treated like rubbish," Johnson stated.

"And we have proof of it," I nodded.

"This is brilliant," He said and then frowned. "Well not the death part, but the proof."

We arrived at the asylum minutes later. This time around we didn't need to slip through anything, seeing as the gate was wide open. As expected, Stratford's horse was tied up in the garden, along with a familiar horse that belonged the exact man I wanted to see.

We went up the steps and through the main door of the building, which was open, just like the gate. I navigated the halls with ease. I glanced at Johnson, who gave me a knowing look as we approached Stratford's office. His door was also open, but we paused outside of it and knocked. No matter how strongly I disliked him, I was sure to be polite with him.

"Mr. Tuke," I heard as Swanson came into view. "How are you?"

"I'm fine," I shook his hand and noticed Stratford sitting at his desk behind the man that I was talking to. "I was actually wondering if we could have a minute of your time?"

"Of course, come in," Swanson said, stepping back so Johnson and I could enter the room.

"What can I help you with?" The officer asked.

"Johnson found something that we thought you'd like to see," I said, handing the man Hannah's journal. "It belonged to Ms. Mills. She wrote in it while she was here. In it, she discusses the substantial amount of deaths that occurred on a regular basis, sir."

I directed Swanson to the correct page as Stratford stood up and stomped his way over to us so he could read it too.

"This is a lie sir!" Stratford said childishly as Swanson silently handed the book back to me. "We didn't supply any sort of journal to our patients here. It's not possible that she wrote that."

"She brought it here herself," Johnson said patiently. Stratford stepped forward with a red face. He opened his mouth to say something, probably something stupid, but was cut off by Swanson who held up his hand, demanding silence.

"I made my decision last night," The officer said. "The York Asylum is officially shut down."

"You can't—

"Tuke, I would like you to take over this place if you are still willing," Swanson cut off Stratford

"I'm more than willing, sir. Thank you," I said shaking his hand.

"Stratford, your services are no longer needed. I suggest you find another job because you're no longer welcomed here," Swanson told the furious man.

Epilogue

Within the next few years, William Tuke reformed mental illness treatment centers into ethical, safer, and more efficient places. He opened the York Retreat in the same building that used to be the York Asylum. The Retreat is still running today and was the first institution to revolutionize our knowledge of mental health and treatment.

Calendula

Trenton Roloson

His fingers wrapped into the comforting softness of the bear's yield.
Nervous scratches peeled its skin back
And left patches where his hands lie, hairless.
Mounted upon His glorious throne was this pelt
And mounted in the court of His Majesty was this glorious throne.
Fitted with pelt, ivory, and only the finest of linens;
The throne was his scepter.
Into which he carved his namesake,
His legacy to imbue the conscience of His people.

The court was halved by a blood-red, velvet tapestried carpet
which descended directly from the throne.
Symmetry dominated the hall,
With depictions of His father and fathers before him.
How He longed to tear those paintings down!
The eyes of His ancestry would never blink.
When He was awake He felt the sharpness
Of their eyes upon his nape.
When He was asleep He was deafened
By the afflictions of their prowess.
The greed of his forefathers
dripped from their hands like the wounds of Christ.

More than anything, his Majesty desired
To make his title a misnomer.
His scepter he held
With trembling hands and uncertainty
that would tear down his own village.
A King of Ashes

Captive Princess

Nina Stornelli

[click here for audio](#)



Dear Diary, I thought myself so clever when I slipped into this castle. Now I realize that I – once a scullery girl, now a princess – am a fool. I am a fool who thought this trap to be an opportunity. I am a fool who gladly accepted the weight of this tiara on my brow.

Dear Diary, all I wanted was knowledge. I wished to know the inner workings of this kingdom, drawn backstage to the hidden ropes and pulleys like a sailor to a siren. There in the dim light, I found questions and answers I could never forget, ghosts and corpses left to decay deep underground, red-brown stains that would never wash from the hem of my dress. No amount of rosewater could mask the evidence of what I've seen and done and brought upon myself.

Diary, I'm surprised they let me have these moments alone with the pen and paper I keep hidden in my bodice. They know, I'm sure. They know what I've done and what I'm doing. There is nothing for me to gain in pretending that I can hide even these words from their watchful, mocking eyes.

Pitiful Diary, I hate my manservant. He reminds me the most of my captivity, gloved hands steering me by the shoulders as if I have places to be, his interrogations disguised as simple questions. If he hadn't stripped my finger of its most impolite ring, its poisoned tip would have found its mark beneath his gloves long ago.

Diary – no, Castle, it occurs to me that I ought to abandon pretense and address my thoughts to you. It is your golden halls that form my beautiful birdcage, your illustrious monarchs that bid me to strut and sing for them and their audience like the obedient pet that I am. You have reduced me to this, trapped and unraveling at the seams.

Dear Castle, I wish they had killed me sooner. I could have disappeared in the ill-lit rooms like all those before me, and I would have preferred that quick, messy end to my drawn out, neat finale. But I, like them, am a performer, and so every day I walk to my place center stage and await my cue.

O Castle I hate, your silken straightjackets and silvered shackles slow my steps. You must see that I'm frayed, stretched unnaturally and precariously past my limit, holding on by barest threads before I snap – and take whatever I can with me.

Castle, I can see now that the walls' brilliant light is that of hellfire. Soon, when my skin is set aflame, I can have satisfaction in knowing that everyone here will follow suit.

Infernal Castle, I know you'll kill me. I don't care what is in store for me, if my tea carries the aroma of bitter almonds, if I find myself drowned like a runt kitten, if you let me leave just long enough to be beset by bandits. I've been dreaming of my demise. The thought of my heart's

tempo slowing past adagio is better than any lullaby.

My Castle, you will remember my story as a comedy. How could I be a tragedy? Even I can see the humor now, and we shall laugh together as the last of my breath leaves me. The audience will take our cue, filling the air with mirth and derision as the curtain closes on a fool who saw too much, on a girl who was finally granted an escape from her own castle.

Sick

Mordasia Ashford

Aqua Nives' Pov

"Were you planning on going to the teen gathering in the Maritime Center today?" My mom asks and I turn over in my bed to face her.

"No, I wasn't, but I guess I will now." I breathe and stand up to slip on my pajama pants.

Bella Carlton's POV

"Honey lie down, where are you going?" My aunt wonders frantically and I put my hair in a high ponytail.

"Me?" I ask and look around the room laughing at my overly stupid question. "To go make friends in the Maritime Center I guess."

Eric's POV

Where is my hearing aid?

Luna Anderson's POV

"Luna Mae Anderson. I swear to god if you don't get your lazy ass out of this bed in five seconds get dressed and leave this room, we are going to fight." My step dad screams and I look at him, swallowing my last bit of hospital flan I stand up, grab hold of my oxygen tank on wheels and leave the room; slamming the door in my wake.

William Lion's POV

"Nice day today, huh?" A hot brunette smiles and I return it, only to be polite of course.

"Yes, very beautiful, this is my stop." I respond as the elevator doors open and I slap my hand across the elevator buttons before running away laugh-

ing.

3rd Person POV

"Alright everybody, once it's your turn I want you to say your name, your condition, your favorite food, and color, and favorite activity. Alright Bella, start us off." Dr. Payne speaks smiling.

"Hello I'm Bella Carlton. I have stage 4 Leukemia, this chair is really uncomfortable, I have no matches for my bone marrow, my favorite food is... macaroni and cheese, I like the color eggplant, and I love to read." Bella says leaning back in the chair.

"Hi, I'm Neil Hamilton. I have a few brain tumors, enough to share." He chuckles. "I also tend to be bipolar and I have OCD. This chair smells like sweat. My doctor instructed me to stop dying my hair but it's not fair because honestly it's going to start falling out anyways. I like parm ham and mash, I don't have a favorite color and I like to play my guitar."

"I'm Luna Anderson, get ready for this long ass list of problems. I'm suicidal, a self-made masochist, and I'm going blind in my left eye. This chair is in fact really uncomfortable, and my pancakes were cold when they arrived at my room this morning. I hate colors I like black. My favorite food is flan, and I love to write poetry." Luna concludes, one hand on her oxygen tank.

"I'm William Lion's, I have stage one brain cancer and I'm a self-made diabetic." He jokes and winks at Luna. "I actually like these chairs so buzz off you three. My favorite color is green, my favorite food is junk, and I like pressing all the buttons on the elevator before I get off so people get stuck." He laughs sitting crisscross apple sauce in his chair.

"I'm Aqua Nives, I have uncontrollable seizures due to a heart disease. I also have short term memory loss. I don't exactly like the color of these dull orange chairs but I guess, my favorite color is blue, I love brownies so hard. And I like to sing." Aqua says shyly looking around the room.

A curly haired boy creases his eyebrows as he reads a paper. Everyone looks at him expectantly and then he realizes it's his turn. "Oh. I'm Eric, I can't hear for crap because I left my hearing aid back in my room. I was diagnosed as a true schizophrenic when I was 16 and tried to murder my math

teacher. I like orange, sausages, and I love singing."

"I want you to get to know each other by stopping at each other's rooms and spending time together." Dr. Payne instructs.

Game On.

Luna's POV

"Knock knock", a voice sounds and I glance up from my notebook.

"How did I know that somehow out of all the six people in our support group, you would be the first to actually come to my room?" I laugh and pat the space next to me. "How are you?"

"Besides the large tumor messing up my brain? I'm fantastic baby, I've never been better." He jokes and grabs my note book. "Can I read this?" He asks and I nod.

"I don't care." I shrug twisting the ring on my finger around.

'Lose yourself inside of me like I lose myself in your eyes.

Take pride of what we've done in the light of day, and the dark of night.

Produce crazy ideas that I'd peruse because you're mine.

You said you love me? Well baby boy fall in line.

Tell me how nasty coffee tastes when your lips pull away, and I won't curse you out because you're fine, as hell.

Hickeys yet to be discovered, only time will tell.

Push me, hurt me, scream, be aggressive. I love it when you yell.

Point that gun at me one more time, just once more before you kiss me.

I've been gone a real long time baby boy, did you miss me?

It's over now you have no more use for me.

I want one more go, it's you or your brothers, go ahead baby boy chose for me.

I'm bored now, you're not amusing me.

These razors can't wait.

My period's late.

Hurry up baby boy you're losing me.

Baby boy why won't you hug me?

You must've known I would have done anything for somebody to love me.'

William reads aloud and then blinks multiple times.

"I know it's not done yet but-" I explain.

"No it's great, it's so deep, and I love it." He gushes and I smile.

"Thanks I normally don't let people read it but I think we're going to be good friends." I brag and he nudges my shoulder.

"You want to go mess with people on elevators?" He asks excitedly and I snort.

"Yeah? What kinda question was that?" I jump up excitedly and put on my slippers. "Let's go." I whisper and grab his arm yanking him out of my room.

We slip onto an elevator and smile nonstop at a lady and her husband. "Hello." I frown and she returns it with a confused smile. William stands in the corner facing away from us and doesn't say a word.

"You're one of them!" I scream and starts to growl loudly.

"I must find more suitable host bodies." William announces lowly. They turn towards us wide eyed before getting off on the next stop.

“Oh my god, yes!” I laugh clapping my hands. “That was golden.”

“Alright let’s go to the food court, they have some great flan.” He smiles and I look at him, he remembered.

“Dip your fries in the milkshake.” I tell him and he looks at me like I’m more crooked than anyone he’s ever met. “I swear it’s good.” I assure him

He does it and then smiles. “I guess.” He frowns before doing it again until all his fries are gone and so are some of mine.

“Hey, where did you get those scrubs?” He asks and then looks at all the other patients in hospital gowns.

“I asked for them because I did not favor my tush hanging out of the back of plastic when my step-dad had to do laundry.” I shake my head and he nods understanding.

“You want some?” He asks before holding out his steak sandwich.

“I’m a vegetarian.” I scoff and hold my hand over my mouth. “Just kidding.” I laugh and take a large bite of it, melted cheese sticking to my chin.

“You’re very beautiful.” He smiles as I try and lick the cheese on my chin.

“Says the Greek god himself.” I return the compliment.

“It’s sad to say that in a few weeks, I might not even remember spending any time with you.” He says, concluding everything that never was.

“Whoa. That’s a big load to drop on a first date, don’t you think?” I sigh stirring my milkshake up, now ruined by bits and pieces of French fries.

“First date?” He smiles and I roll my eyes noting that that’s the only thing he pulled from what I just said. “I’m serious.”

“Baby boy, don’t you worry, the thought of being neglected and let down turns me on.” I whisper as I watch my nurse walk towards us. I know I wasn’t supposed to leave my room. “Bye.” I bat my eyelashes and lean across the table to place a kiss on his soft, warm cheek.

Bella's POV

There was a soft knock on my door and then the curly haired boy from yesterday's Support Group entered, surprising my mom.

"Bella?" Eric asks and I nod, he steps into the room and closes the door slowly behind him.

"Eric?" I copy and he nods smiling.

"I came to hang out, maybe we could walk around the hospital and get to know each other." He suggests and I know my mom would object so I quickly cut her off and answer for myself, like never.

"Anything is better than being cooped up in this room, sure." I smile, thankful he came by. I stand up and slip on some pants under my gown. "Let me just ring the nurse and tell her I need a volunteer to push me." I gesture to my wheelchair and he shakes his head.

"I'll push you, after all I am the one who came by." He smiles politely I thank him with my eyes and sit in my chair.

"Should I tag along?" My mom suggests and I glare at her, hell freaking no. "I actually have paper work to do so I'll be here when you get back." She recovers instantly and I am thankful for that.

"Away we go Ms. Carlton." Eric jokes and wheels me out of my luxurious five star room. I'm a little wary of spending some time alone with him. He did confess that he tried to kill someone. What if he goes all Fifty Shades of Grey on me and tries to beat my ass for not answering a question?

We get on the elevator with a nurse and the girl from the Support Group, Luna was it?

"Hello, Luna." Eric smiles and she nods his way.

"Hi." I wave and she waves back, a frown on her face.

"You know why you aren't supposed to leave the room." The nurse whispers,

well not really.

“Shut up.”

“You need to consider my job and your um, condition.” The nurse says very awkwardly.

“I wouldn’t try to kill myself on a daily basis if you stopped hovering over me, Jesus Christ.” Luna mutters, very well played.

“I don’t understand you, Luna.” The nurse sighs, rude.

“Nobody does, that’s the problem.” She spits and steps off of the elevator, her nurse trailing behind her like a lost puppy.

“That was awkward.” Eric breathes and I nod my head.

“Very. Intense too, very intense, maybe we should have invited her to come with us.” I look up at him and he looks like he’s contemplating whether or not I make sense.

“Next time?” He questions.

Next time. “I like the sound of that.”

“You like to read?” Eric asks and I nod my head watching the number of floors on the elevator change.

“I’ve lived a thousand lives Eric.” I say in a deep, wise sounding voice.

“Fiction or non-fiction?” He gives me an option and I look up at him smirking.

“Well fiction of course, realistic fiction. I can’t keep up with Eric Potter, no matter how much I’ve tried.” I laugh. “What do you prefer?”

“I’m a fan of mystery and realistic fiction, it’s amazing really. There was one book, I’m sure it’s a movie now. The wife plotted her own death and left clues and what not so the detectives were lead to believe the husband had murdered her. So while her husband was put on death row for torture, rape, abuse both physical and emotional, and murder. Well... she was in the Ba-

hamas, lying on the beach.” Eric speaks in amazement.

“Sounds like a fantastic book.” My eyes light up in excitement.

“It is, I’ll have to lend it to you.” He suggests and I nod.

“Where are we going?” I ask, this part of the hospital in very unfamiliar.

“Well, first my room to get some picture books. Then to the children’s center to read to them.” He says proudly.

“You read to children in your free time?” I ask, suddenly impressed, suddenly amazed.

“I’d rather make them feel great about their selves by reading to them, then spend my time locked in that room.” He admits and I listen intently.

“Eric!” I nurse bellows and we both turn to see where the noise is coming from. “I stopped at your room to tell you that the children have brought their own picture books.” She says, taking deep breaths.

“Thank you Margret.” Eric nods and starts to wheel me away. We stop at a room decorated in butterflies, flowers, wild tigers and race cars. The sun is painted in the center of the ceiling followed by the unique order of our Solar System.

“It’s beautiful in here.” I note and Eric agrees with me silently.

About twelve kids stop what they’re doing, look at us and immediately sit down. They must have a lot of respect for Eric.

“Good afternoon.” Eric speaks and they all look up at him.

“Good afternoon Eric.” They mirror and the sound fills my heart.

“How rude.” Eric jokes. “You’re not going to say hi to my friend?” He pouts tilting his head to the side. His long hair flops and they all erupt in giggles.

“Hey.” I wave and they all look at me funny.

“Hello Eric’s friend.” They say in unison.

“I’m Bella.”

“Good afternoon Bella.” They smile and I blush.

“The authority you have amazes me, you must be a powerful man.” I say only so he can hear me.

“So they say.” He smirks and I straighten my posture.

“Eric! I want your friend to read my book.” A girl with very thin pigtails runs up and I smile in delight. She quickly looks down at me before whispering. “Please.”

“Yes Mr. Styles, may I please read her book aloud to an awaiting audience?” I ask.

“No.” Eric snarls looking down at the both of us, uh oh... Mood change? “Just kidding.” He chuckles and she places the book in my lap. Everyone gets silent and I look down at the book.

“Five little monkeys! I love this book.” I yell out but then quickly recover. I start the book at the room is pin drop silent when I start and finish.

“What do you say?” Eric asks when I hand the girl back her book. The whole class erupts in ‘thank you’ as she scurries away.

Eric and I read about five more books before the children’s center closes. As he wheels me back to my room I smile up at him and he raises his eyebrow.

“What’s the happy face for?” He wonders and I bite my lip.

“You’re a very generous man Harold. I had fun.” I admit and he smirks in success.

“What’re you going to do when you go back to your room?” He questions and I shrug.

“I’m probably going to start a new T.V show. Pretty Little Liars, yeah I’ve been

wanting to start that for some time now.” I nod and he keeps a straight face.

“Mind if I join?” He asks and I look up at him as we approach my room.

“Night snack?” I joke and he nods eagerly. “Alright, I’ll tell the nurse to bring up two slices of carrot cake.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

-

Aqua Nives’ POV

“Sorry.” I mutter as I reach for the last brownie on the cafeteria shelf, touching someone else’s hand.

“Aqua? Right?” I look up and notice Neil from the support group a few days ago.

“Yeah, hey Neil.” I wave awkwardly.

“Here you can have this.” He hands me the last brownie and then grabs a slice of chocolate cake.

“Gross, chocolate cake?” I fake gag and he laughs.

“So you like brownies but not chocolate cake?” He asks, a quizzical look on his face.

“Yeah, I got it like that.” I joke, I don’t know why but I have a special hatred for chocolate cake.

“So what did you plan on doing today?” He asks, sitting with me at a table.

“Nothing really, I suppose we could hang out.” I shrug. “You could totally play the guitar for me.” I smile, instantly getting giddy inside.

“I would love to.” He mirrors my facial expression as he whiffs down his lunch.

“Okay. I’m all for it.” I nod and walk up to my room.

-

Dr. Payne leaves the room to search for some papers.

"We should run away." Aqua speaks up and Luna nods, essentially agreeing with her.

"My mom has a van." Neil speaks up and everyone looks around with satisfied faces.

"Why are we running away?" Eric speaks up and Bella scoffs.

"Because who wants to die in this hell hole?" She responds and they all agree to be ready to run in exactly two days.

-

Luna's POV

I don't think he loved her. He couldn't have or he would have known, he would have seen her arms loosen in a sleep she would never rouse from. Eric didn't love her because he still sits in annoying blatant ignorance, brushing through her thinning hair, smiling lightly. Everyone else in the car knows based on the alarmed looks and pained expressions, how doesn't he?

I'm not about to tell him. I can't, he doesn't need to know he's been stroking his hands on a girl who's been dead for thirty minutes. None of us will tell him, because he's dangerous without medication, all he needs is one trigger to send him spiraling down to depths of depression or worse rising to the extreme anger that dents cars and breaks noses. We are all just time bombs without medication I guess, but some will die silently like Bella and some won't, but hey at least we're together.

"I think we should stop." William announces; a solemn facial expression graces across his face as he grips the steering wheel.

"Sounds good." Aqua croaks in her mid-sleep. It's not fair that she can't cry, and scream and go insane because it might risk all of our lives and imprisonment in that damned hospital.

"William, can you actually stop right here?" I ask, and he looks at me before pulling over to the side of the road covered in sunflower and corn fields.

I slide the van door open, grab my oxygen tank and stumble out into the field. Aqua one step behind me. I collapse into the flowers and throw up everything I've eaten in the past twenty four hours. Tears sting the corners of my eyes and blur my vision as I hold Aqua tightly in my arms.

"No." She screams and I nod rubbing her hair. "No! This isn't fair." She cries into my chest.

"Shhh." I coo into her baseball cap. "It's going to be okay." I lie, I'm always lying. I'm just so used to people leaving that it doesn't affect me like it should.

"We're going to die." She says looking up at me and I nod tightening my hold on her. "We're going to die." She repeats letting it sink into her thoughts.

"I am so sorry." I kiss her forehead. "I am so so sorry." I whisper again as the tension of death wisps past us in the air. This time I'm not lying, because I'm sorry she had to ever deal with this.

"We've got to bury her here in South Carolina." A deep voice speaks up and I look up, so he's known this whole time.

"Why? Why here?" I sniff.

"Because it starts with an S." He shrugs giving me minimal information as if I have insight in his head, his thoughts, and his deranged freaking mind.

"Okay. Where?" I ask and I look down at Aqua's sleeping body in my arms, she's next.

"Here will do. In the sunflowers." He nods to himself before going back to the van. I slide Aqua off of me and stand up. I wonder what would happen if I pulled the mask off of my face. Would I die instantly?

I pull the tubes out of my nose and breathe. Fresh air, sunflowers, dirt.

"What the hell are you doing?" Neil screams grabbing me tightly before put-

ting the tubes back into my nose and crying. "Why would you do that?" He cries out and I look at him.

"We're all gonna die anyways." I shrug and step over him.

-

Eric's POV

I can't believe she's gone, my last hope, my light. We cover her body in sunflowers and stare at her for a while. She's so beautiful. Even with her thinning hair, and black tinted finger nails. Random bruises all over her body, and the small scar running from her neck to her ear.

"She's so beautiful." Luna speaks up and I nod.

"The most beautiful person I've ever seen." Aqua whispers, raindrops hitting my face slowly and then all at once pouring down.

"My oxygen is almost low." Luna whispers into William' ear. She needs to learn how to whisper because I heard her.

"You can't whisper for crap." William laughs nudging her.

"I can go without it." She tries to convince him and Neil shakes his head.

"No. You didn't see it, you took that oxygen tank off and you almost fainted." Neil strongly disagrees.

"Did not." She rolls her eyes.

"Did too." He chuckles and I laugh, if this is the only humor we're going to receive in our last days. I'm okay with that, in fact I'll rebel in it.

Only because we're, Sick.

-

William' POV

"Is he gone?" I ask and Eric nods with a frown on his face, constantly poking Neil's cheek. Freaking weirdo. "Jesus please stop that."

"Sorry." He says and shifts his head sideways refusing to look at Neil any longer.

"How!?" Aqua cries out, and I roll my eyes.

"He just sat there and died I guess." Luna says and puts her hand on Neil's neck feeling for a pulse.

"Stop touching me, arse." Neil mumbles waking up.

"Neil!" Aqua cries out hugging him. "We thought you were dead." She pouts and I sigh, I'm tired of her voice, I'm tired of driving and I want to sleep.

"I was trying to." He admits and we all look at him wide eyed as Luna laughs.

"Aye, team fearless." She jokes and they high five each other laughing.

"What the hell?" Eric mumbles, joining in on their laughter and I shake my head. I let out a chuckle or few and Aqua starts full on crying.

"You guys are sick." She screams kicking the dashboard.

"Yeah, that's the point." Eric counters with a sloppy smile on his face.

"Sorry." Luna is the first to apologize and we all look at Neil who's laughs have turned into small coughs to nothing.

"Dude, I wanna die like him." I raise my hand swerving on the road a bit. "Little creep went out laughing." I shake my head looking at the sign reading 'Welcome to Idaho state'

"OH MY GOD!" Aqua screams and I look at her like she's lost her mind.

"Whoa, please calm down." Eric says rubbing his temples huffing.

"Luna." She calls out and Luna leans over the seat pulling her over it with a little help from Eric.

"It is okay." Luna says slowly and she buries her was into Luna's chest.

"Eric where are we going to bury him?" Aqua asks, through a hoarse voice.

"Umm.. well we're in Idaho.. I guess you can choose." Eric shrugs.

"Let's bury him in a cemetery." She shrugs and William snorts before coughing and looking back towards the road.

"Okay, which one?" Eric asks and Aqua glares at him.

"I wasn't born in Idaho Jesus can I have time to think?" She screams and Eric clenches his fists before turning and looking out of the window.

"Just keep driving and when we find one BAM." She says waving her hands.

-

Aqua's POV

"He's heavy." Luna complains carefully setting Neils arms down. "I feel like he's still warm, last time we though he was dead. But he wasn't." She starts.

I bend down and kiss him. "This isn't going to wake him up? Who are you? Prince Charming?" Eric says running his hands through his hair.

"Sick! I found a can of spray paint in the trunk." William runs towards us with a bright smile on his face.

"Dude! give it here." Luna reaches for the can an William passes it off. "Not to brag but I'm quite the artist when it comes to doing highly illegal things." She bends down and starts spraying.

"Crap." Eric breathes looking at the 10 ft long black angel wings sprayed onto the bright green grass of the cemetery.

"So.." Luna smiles.

"It's brilliant." William smiles at her and she looks away.

“So we aren’t going to bury him?” I ask.

“We can.” Luna says. “We can cover him in dirt or something.”

“No.” I say. “Let people discover him as the angel he is.”

And at that we all get into the van and drive away. I watch as his dead body fades away into the distance, holy crap, we’re Slick.

-

William’s POV

“Didja fill up the tank?” Luna asks pulling a new shirt over her head.

“Uh uhh-yeah.” I nod, biting into my cheese stick.

“Ohh. Give me some.” She leans over giving me a full display of her cleavage and bites my cheese stick. “Cheese is disgusting, and I never know why I think my mind will change every time I taste it.” She gags

I climb in between her legs and kiss her, cheese fresh on both of our lips. We’re such weirdos.

“You guys are gross.” Aqua interrupts us and I sit up letting Luna steady her breathing. I glare at her and she smiles knowingly, she’s been nothing but a burden to all of us. “No please, don’t stop on my count. I’ll go find Eric.” She says and my eyes widen.

“No! He’ll come when he’s ready. Don’t anger him.” Luna says.

“Eric needs to deal with his anger just like we do.” She sasses Luna and Luna grips my hand.

“Aq-” I start but she’s off before we know it.

“What’s that?” I ask Luna pointing to the little stick in her pocket.

“What? This, nothing.” She smiles shoving it further into her pocket and I

shrug.

“Okay.”

Eric climbs into the van sitting in the back with anger sketched across his face. “Where’s Aqua?” I ask. The look on his face tells me everything so I climb into the front seat and pull off when I hear a loud scream and people running past us.

-

Luna’s POV

I can’t believe I’m pregnant.

“You okay?” William asks and I nod gripping the steering wheel a little tighter.

“Eric. You mind driving? I think Luna is sick.” William says acting as if I can’t hear him.

“Sure thing.” Eric nods sitting up.

“I said I’m fine!” I tell him.

“You’re not. Pull over.” He demands and I scoff.

“You guys chill.” Eric says and I look William dead in the eyes before pulling over.

“What?” I ask folding my arms like a teenager caught in the act. I am a teenager, I’m a teenager that’s going to die soon, and I’m pregnant.

“What’s wrong with you?” William asks, and Eric holds up something but I can’t see what it is.

“This is what’s wrong with her.” Eric chuckles holding the pregnancy test in his hand. “You knocked her up and we’re all gonna die.”

“.. You’re pregnant?” He smiles.

“Yes.” I nod and cry into his shoulder.

“We’re gonna get through this.” William lies and I nod, no sense in arguing with him.

“When’s the last time we..” He starts not finishing his sentence because Eric is listening to our conversation.

“Like a few months ago.”

“Lies.” Eric speaks up. “Last Friday.”

“Yeah but I’m a month along so that means it happened about a few months ago.” I sass him and he chuckles.

“Who’s is it?” William asks and I gawk at him.

“I didn’t mean it like that, but you know..”

Oh. “It’s yours. He always used two condoms.” I let him know and he sighs in relief.

“Alrighty.” He laughs. “We’re having a baby!!!” He shakes his head.

“Is there something I’m missing? Who is he?” Eric buds in.

“Nobody important,” William says in a clipped tone and surprisingly Eric doesn’t question it.

“I’m okay, I’m fine, it’s okay,” I say, my heads trembling on the wheel. Red and blue flashing lights interrupt our sentimental moment.

“Crap!” I scream banging my hands on the wheel. I tense up and try to look innocent.

The speeding police car rushes past us in a whirl of lights. “That was all types of close.” I laugh, speaking too soon the police car turns around, more follow cornering the car. William jumps out refusing to put his hands over

his head and they shoot him. Eric looks at me and watches as one single tear falls down my face before I pull off. I press the gas pedal all the way down before hitting a police car and flipping over the van.

Eric's POV

"And that's how it ends?" Dr. Payne asks and Eric nods opening his eyes.

"That's how it always ends. I- there isn't an adjective in the world to describe how I feel when I wake up from this dream." Eric cries, harshly wiping the tears from his now tomato red face.

"It's okay Eric, you're just a bit sick."

"Where are all of these made up characters coming from? I don't understand." I speak, tugging at the ends of my hair.

"Past emotions Eric, and your schizophrenia." Dr. Payne writes one more thing down before handing me a prescription of meds and leaving the room.

black moth superrainbow

Aquil Sheik

air is thick and saturated,

yet very fluid:

curling and swirling:

completely dynamic,

always in motion

like a river that propels the liquid spear that drives us all

carried by it,

propagating through the open air,

washed away by its waves

it is dark and the air is moist.

descending from the balcony:

flying torches hot and electric

swarming through the heavy air

torches that bend it and saturate it with color:

black mothes on fire, sweeping and turning through the air,

engulfed in a tantalizing display of colors,

freely flowing in arcs of current

like bats they swarm in formation,

turning, and flying fast, in circles

as if by some creed they fly to form a vortex

drawing in all near them

carried in by the air

into the vortex of mothes

touching me,

they bite and fly;

burning and melting me.

feeling like candle wax;

liquid and solid, all at that same time:

melting.

but i do not feel pain...

i accept this and let it happen without struggle

the farther into the eye of the vortex

the more i perish

the more of me that melts
the more of myself that dissolves into the thick air
eyes closed...
all I can see is a soft white light, bright,
but not biting...
even though all that there is around me is darkness,
intruded by smoky patches of color that invade the space
melting into a dandelion gum...
that dissolves into the thick air,
into the strange essence of that microtunal magic rain...
modal, strange, colorful, chaotic... and cathartic...
in a space expands and distorts,

Minimalist Love

Kaitlyn Walker

[click here for audio](#)



Ambient lighting from a
Flashlight at

11:34pm
(My clock is fast)

Torn apart bed
Illuminated

By the blue light
And the column of a glass of
Tap Water (aqueous)

Melted chocolate thoughts of
Earlier in the
Day when
We

Bunched up the sheets
And the
Lopsided
Down
Comforter that's
White. Minimalist.

Dream rivers in my
Starry brainscape
[Buzzing from the atmospheric high of (capitalist) caffeine from
Luke warm roughly sweetened
Coffee]

With their reminiscent midnight musings of
Our Love that's minimalist.
But it's only 11:34pm.
(My clock is fast)

Yellow is NOT a Happy Color

Noor Lima-Boudakian

These thoughts feel like
 steel wool
 against skin
this army of shadows I'm fighting
 sometimes take solid form and
 attack
when nobody's looking
 (or maybe they just turn their heads)
 regret is (im)possible
 I would(n't) take it all back
yellow turns muddy
 but blue will always come back to smiles
 this human experience is
all foggy mirrors
 when the mist and the
 fire surround me
 and there's no air to
 breathe

Burning

Varun Koppikar

[click here for audio](#)



As much as one might hate it
there's some truth;
burning bridges creates distance.
And as much as you'll dislike
how much you've grown apart,
people do from time to time,
time and time again.

While life is distracting
and your feelings ignite
and you sit and stroke the hearth,
the bed,
with time you've spent
learning and growing,
adopting behavior, imitating each other,
life will take over and blow you apart.

You'll growl and you'll fight,
your hands will ball and your nails will dig,
emotions will boil and temper,
and you'll push them away
feeling you'll be protected that way.

But one thing's good to remember,
when you burn those bridges,
you've got to learn to swim.

Stone Hunter

Meena Potter

I visited the cave after making several trips around it. I was very cautious of the dark and this cave was no exception. I had to figure out whether there was anything in there. After several hours of patiently waiting, I concluded that there was not, and entered.

I love caves, even if I have to face the treacherous blackness of them. If you bring a flashlight, you can see the shimmer of different stones that reflect the light, illuminating the cave with different colors. It is a magnificent sight to see, so naturally I like to visit just for the sights.

But that day, I was here for the sounds.

I swallowed nervously as the darkness enveloped me in a cold grip. I had just discovered that my flashlight was dead; I would have to wait three weeks before I could visit the market for new batteries because it was only open then. I knew I should be able to master my fear before then. I had been working on it for a long time.

Stones don't only look pretty, but they can sound pretty if you hit the right spot. My father trained me how to make the sounds by testing the rocks we have at home.

"Son," he said, "Everything makes a sound. These rocks, if you tap it in the correct place, will make a nice sound. But Cave Stones are best. You will be a brave stone-hunter, like me."

And I wanted to. I knew I had a knack for stone-hunting. But I was terrified of the dark.

My footsteps echoed on the cave floor.

Being a stone-hunter and sound-maker means to have to have keen ears. I heard every sound in that cave and noted them in my brain.

I noted that there was water there. Drip. Drip...

As I went farther and farther into the cave, I felt my panic rising, hearing only water. I think I'm all done for today. Did you know that Chinese torture is dripping water onto a victim's forehead? I know too much. It scares me.

Turning around, I started to walk quickly forward. Bang!

My head hit a wall. "No," I said aloud. "That can't be right." Feeling my way across, I realized that there were two tunnels. Which one had I taken? Gritting my teeth in frustration, I remembered my mother's words.

"One can get lost in the caves," she had said, her lilting Eskimo voice as soothing as a stream," as one can get lost on the tundra, all right. Mark your path to remember the way home."

And I had forgotten.

I kicked a stone angrily, furious at my mistake. "Well," I muttered. "I better get over my fear now." I turned the other way and started to walk. Then I stopped.

For I had just heard a rustle of bird wings.

I peered around, my eyes straining in the dark. "Hello?" I ventured. "Is someone there?"

Then I caught a gleam of eyes.

How can eyes reflect light when there isn't any? I wondered. I stepped closer to them and they snapped shut.

Stone-eyes.

"Please come out," I coaxed gently. "I won't hurt you."

I hear the snap of a match being lit.

Light!

There was an oil lantern on the ground. A shaking hand disposing of the

match.

And I saw her. Sitting, waiting. Watching me with her eyes made of luminous stones.

I fell down out of sheer happiness. Light, and possibly a companion that could tell me how to get out here!

She scooted her body farther against the wall, away from me. Smiling, I realized that she wasn't that certain of what I was. I was only half in the light.

And then I wasn't that certain of what she was.

For on her back were two, golden-brown, long and beautiful feathered wings.

"Alex," she said, and her eyes blinked at me. They were a mesmerizing green-gold, and sparkled with each movement. They were more beautiful than the prettiest stone that I had ever looked upon. Though they could be blue. Or light pink. Stone-eyes, I thought. Stone-eyes.

"Alex?" I repeated, "Is that your name?"

She nodded, waiting.

"Why...Why do you have wings?"

She glared at me, and her eyes sharpened to ice. I hastily backed up, away from her and the light. She darted her hand out and held up the lantern to see me again. My eyes watered at the sudden glare. "Alex," I began timidly. "Could you tell me the way out of here?"

She pointed to the first tunnel.

"Thank you," I smiled cautiously and began to leave. I heard birds as their wings ruffled and she was behind me, clutching at my shirt, holding the lantern with her other hand.

"Please," she begged. "I am not here. Please, I am not here." I frowned, trying to decipher her message. She pointed wildly at where she had previ-

ously sat. I saw a basket with several herbs and berries, I saw a mat made of woven grass, I saw the tinderbox which she had used to light her lantern. "I am not here," she repeated desperately.

And I understood.

"Don't worry, I won't tell anyone," I whispered, taking her free hand between mine. She glanced at me uneasily, her hawk-like eyes analyzing and calculating. Freeing her hand, she turned and went back to her mat.

And I turned and left. I did not collect any stones that day, but I had seen the most gorgeous ones ever.

I knew too much, but I wanted to know more. So I visited her. Sometimes I would visit daily, sometimes every couple of days. She had a limited vocabulary, but I learned that she was the last of her kind, or at least she assumed. She had been sitting here for ages, waiting for another winged human. And the reason that she had no more of her kind was because we humans had killed them. The reason she had survived here for so long was because she and the winged humans lived twice as long as other humans. I mourned her predicament.

"Can you fly?" I asked her one day, mimicking a bird with my hands. She laughed and nodded. She never showed me, though. She was terrified of the light, terrified that others would find her. I was terrified of the dark, where there was the unknown.

She showed me how to detect movement in the dark. Alex had lived here for so long, her eyes had adjusted so well, that she could see like a cat in almost total darkness. And I soon learned all of the tricks. All the while, though, I kept thinking how humans would help her now instead of harm her. They could even find more of her kind! I had to help her in the best way I could.

I knew too much.

One day I asked her how she survived without food from the outside. I was shown the many plants that lived in caves, odd as it sounds.

"The best berries are outside," I said meaningfully.

She glared at me. "I am not outside."

"You can if you want. I'll make sure no one sees you," I suggested, wincing inwardly at the lie.

She signed and pushed long strands of hair behind her ear. Then she glanced up at me and I saw the longing in her stone eyes.

I followed her to the cave entrance.

And there they caught her.

Several men and women in white grabbed her arms as others grasped her wings with their gloved hands. Still more had guns at the ready and different sized nets.

She screamed and fought, all the while calling my name. I stood there, telling myself over and over that it was for the best. Over and over...

She spread her wings! The wings which I had seen limp, never moving. She tried wildly and desperately to escape, like a cornered animal sprinting away from pursuers. But the nets were strong. Once on her wings, they held her fast. And I told myself that it was right. Over and over...

Finally the men and women injected a shot into her and she went limp, her wings sagging.

Shimmering eyes glazed over. Stones fixed in one position. Glaring at me. Shock and incredulity that I had betrayed her.

Why, she seemed to be saying, why would you do this to me?

I never saw her again. The drugs that knocked her out lasted as they hauled her into their truck. They left, promising they'd do what was right. Well, Alex's version of right was a little different than theirs'.

To this day I'm not sure if she lived or died. I'm sure scientists probably questioned her about this she couldn't answer. Maybe they cut her apart. Maybe she found her family.

But I never saw her again, because I had found out so much about her. I betrayed her. I learned too much about her.

I knew too much.

Cogito Ergo Sum

Alan Tu

The first person to wake up was the philosopher. He opened his eyes, looked up, and deduced that he was still on this Earth because he could see the stars above him. He also reasoned, from a glance, that he was at the bottom of a deep pit, due to the fact that he could only see a small rectangular section of the sky. Other than the twinkling dots above, there was only pure blackness, leading the philosopher to conclude that it was a new moon. His most recent memory was not of disembarking at the bottom of a pit, but since he was at the bottom of a pit, he decided to make the most of it. He envisioned his next bestseller: “Down There: Thoughts from a Pit.” The philosopher made mental observations, beginning with the strange fact that he had woken up standing. He decided to tour the pit, despite the fact that he could not see where he was going and could – at any moment – step on a venomous snake, or worse, step off the edge of a cliff. He took a quarter-step forward and banged his knee into the wall. He let out a muffled cry and rubbed his knee. He impulsively made a half turn and bashed his hip against the wall behind him. Through the agony, he deduced that he was sandwiched.

The philosopher took one step to the right, and his foot hit a wall. He extended his hand to touch the wall. It was extremely smooth and very cool, most likely made of rock. He pushed the wall, evoking childhood dreams of secret passages or superpowers, but nothing happened.

There were barriers in front of him, behind him, to the right of him, and below him (thank goodness for the last one, otherwise he would be in free fall). The sky was above him. Six faces on a rectangular prism, so the philosopher had one more direction to investigate – left (if given a compass, he would have used the cardinal directions). Indeed, he had never truly investigated the direction above, because he did not know how to go about such a task. He had left his anti-gravity boots at home. So the philosopher took a step to the left, and inevitably bumped into not a wall, but a person.

The second person to wake up was the soldier. He opened his eyes, and did not realize that his eyes were open. He was scared for a moment, scared that he had gone blind, so he began yelling. Ayeeeeeeeeeeeeeee! The philoso-

pher, alarmed, jumped two feet into the air. The soldier heard the sound of leather soles hitting stone. "Hello?" he called.

"I am right here to your right; don't move forward or backward there are walls."

The soldier, hearing the voice, stuck his hand out to his right, and inadvertently punched the third man in the face. The philosopher heard this sickening noise of flesh on flesh, and realized that he had made the incorrect assumption that the second man was facing the same direction as he was.

The last person to wake up was the truck driver. He woke up rubbing his chin because it hurt. He lifted his arms to his sides to stretch, but his left hand ended up with a bruise and his right hand planted an uppercut into the soldier's chin. The truck driver heard a yelp, and turned his head toward the source of the sound. He knew he had hit someone. "Who's there?" he asked.

"Me."

"Me."

"Anyone else?"

Silence.

After the soldier and truck driver felt their way around the space, the philosopher asked, "Does anyone know where we are?"

Silence.

"Since you two seem to be more clueless than I about the present situation, I will share with you my hypothesis: We are currently at the bottom of a pit, approximately fifty feet deep. But the question I cannot answer is this: How did we get here?"

Silence. Then the soldier piped up.

"Well, the last thing I remember was being hit in the foot by a bullet." He squatted to see if his foot was still there. It was bound in a cast. He sighed in

relief.

The truck driver followed.

“The last thing I remembered was driving on the thruway.”

“That’s it?” the philosopher inquired. “You weren’t listening to music or anything?”

“Oh, yes. There was a small little green car chugging along in front of me at half the minimum speed. I was so mad – how could that little toy vehicle impede me? I just wanted to run it over and say ‘Whoops, didn’t see ya.’”

The philosopher, not looking for that sort of information, interrupted the truck driver’s anecdote. “I was at the university library, reading Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra.”

“Hey! Isn’t that the song from 2001: A Space Odyssey? Bum, Bum, Bum... BA BUM!”

The truck driver, recognizing the motif, joined in, creating a superb duet, which, alas, was out-of-tune and in two different keys.

“All right, all right, all right,” interrupted the philosopher, “let’s return our focus to the question at hand. Does anybody know how we got here?”

“This is probably just a bad dream. I think I’m going to go back to sleep.”

“I think the question should be: How do we get out? We’re stuffed into this space like some genius decided to pack us in an eco-friendly box. I can’t even stretch my legs!”

“Hey, at least it’s impossible to fall over.”

To demonstrate this, the truck driver leaned to the right and triggered a domino effect that only tilted 30 degrees. The philosopher, crushed against the wall, figured that he would be rendered two dimensional if he didn’t escape the predicament at hand. He was a small man.

The truck driver, pleased with his successful demonstration, stayed in that

hypotenuse position for a while. It was quite comfortable. He knew the men couldn't take it much longer, so he rocked back to vertical. He could hear the men re-inflating.

"Why is it so dark in here? I can't even see my nose." the truck driver asked.

"My hypothesis..." the philosopher gulped for air, "is that there is a new moon tonight."

The truck driver and soldier looked up.

"Hey, the stars!"

"Gee, they look so tiny. It must be because we're at the bottom of a pit."

"Why don't those stars give us some light? I've heard they're millions of times brighter than our sun."

The philosopher, as he listened to these remarks, figured that he was the only one who graduated from high school.

"All right, men, have we satisfied ourselves with the stars?" The truck driver and soldier had been hooting and hollering about outlandishly contrived constellations in the sky.

"Nah, I think we're going to wait until the sun comes up."

So they waited.

After a long while, the first rays of sunlight reached the bottom of the pit. The men immediately straightened.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" yelled the soldier. He could finally see. He turned his head to the right, and saw a big, burly man wearing a faded t-shirt and a blue baseball cap with a red C on it. He turned to the left and saw a tuft of gray hair. His eyes followed that hair downward until he saw a very short man with thick spectacles, who was wearing a dress shirt and tie. The soldier looked down at his own attire, and saw that he was still in uniform.

The philosopher, when he could see, turned to the left and saw three

stitched arrows on a background of camouflage. He looked up, and saw a head towering over him. The man's cap was camouflaged, too. He was a soldier, no doubt about that. And the other man. Where was he?

The truck driver, when he could see, turned to the left and said hello to the wall. Then he turned to the right and said hello to the soldier. "Why, you're a soldier, aren't you?"

"I certainly am. The 40th Infantry Division."

"Ah, so did you desert?"

The soldier had no answer.

"Anyway, it's nice to meet you." The truck driver stuck out his hand and the soldier shook it. "Your service and bravery are much appreciated."

"Excuse me," cried the philosopher. He was on his tiptoes, trying to look over a mountain.

The truck driver, hearing the squeak, tried to look over the soldier but his head was in the way. He tried looking around his neck but the walls were too narrow. "Is someone down there?"

"Yep," said the soldier, "a little dude."

The philosopher, offended, fought back. "I am more educated than you two combined!"

"Are you educated enough to get us out of here?" That silenced the philosopher. He turned back toward the wall, examining the rock.

"Check your pockets."

The men dug through their pockets. The truck driver took out a wallet, a key-chain, and a cell phone ("Shoot, it's dead"). The soldier fished out a deck of playing cards, a pack of chewing gum, a Swiss army knife, and a magazine of ammunition. The philosopher had a notebook and a pen.

"Now what?"

"It is likely that these items can provide a means of escape if used correctly. However, that is something beyond my area of expertise."

"Harry Houdini, we need help."

It was clear to even the dimmest of them that they did not have such an escape artist among them.

They went back to twiddling their thumbs or staring at the wall. Occasionally one of them would look up, but it strained the neck.

"Hey, how about we throw something up there? Maybe someone will find it."

"If we were anywhere near a population of human beings, we would have been discovered already. That means we must be at... the South Pole! Maybe Santa Claus will rescue us!"

"Anything that will increase our chance of survival is worth doing."

"Throw the cellphone," said the soldier. "A dead cellphone is worth nothing. And it's shiny."

The truck driver, unwilling to toss his new three-hundred dollar cellphone, suggested a different idea. "A bullet. You have so many – heck, we can throw hundreds of them up there – and they're worth zilch without a gun."

They continued this argument, until the philosopher interrupted. "Why don't we start by brainstorming possible solu–"

"BRAINSTORMING! MY HEAD IS FILLED WITH TORRENTIAL RAIN! CAN YOU HEAR THE THUNDER? CAN YOU FEEL THE WIND?"

The truck driver, outraged, muttered "YOLO", took his phone out and tossed it as high as he could. When it seemed to reach the top, it hit the side and flew back down, plunking the philosopher on the head at an acceleration rate of 9.8 meters per second per second.

"OW!" The philosopher rubbed the top of his head, wondering if he had received a concussion.

The soldier could not reach the phone, so he ordered the philosopher to pick it up. The small man grudgingly obeyed, and performed a sideways squat. "It cracked," he said, handing it over to the soldier, who handed it over to the truck driver.

"Well, if it's broken, might as well make it more broken." He chucked it higher than before, yet it still didn't manage to reach the top. On its way down, at an acceleration rate of 9.8 meters per second per second, it was on target to plunk the unsuspecting philosopher on the head again. Fortunately, his hand was in the way, rubbing that head.

"Hey, two in a row! How 'bout that?"

The philosopher was not amused.

"Here, let me try," said the soldier. He took the phone and whipped it into the air. It went so high it seemed to disappear in the clouds.

"Wow, I think you did it," said the truck driver.

Even the philosopher looked up.

"Well, that piece of business is done. What now?"

"Our genius down here has been temporarily handicapped by a startling occurrence of falling cellphones, so we can't expect him to think of anything."

"I'm hungry."

"So am I."

"You want a stick of gum?"

"Sure."

The truck driver took out three sticks of Juicy Fruit – two for himself and one for the man next to him.

"This is a bad dream, isn't it?"

“Oh, I hope it is.”

They stood in silence, smacking their gum.

“Gee, I miss my family already,” the truck driver said.

“So do I,” the soldier replied.

“Gee, I hope I can hear my daughter’s laugh once more before we –”

He paused, unable to finish the sentence. Tears seemed to fill his eyes.

“I mean, we can’t live on gum. No food, no water...”

“Gosh, you’re making me thirsty.”

“If I spend a few more hours in this place, I’ll go crazy. There’s no toilet.”

“Gosh, I sort of have to pee.”

They stood in silence.

“I wonder how my Cubs are doing.”

“You must be a brave man, handling bears. Do you work in a zoo?”

“Nah, I’m a truck driver. I just follow baseball.”

The soldier had never been interested in sports.

They heard a faint crackle.

“What was that?”

The truck driver felt around his belt and clasped a walkie-talkie. He held it triumphantly in the air.

“WE HAVE BEEN SAVED!”

Unfortunately when he turned it on there was fuzz. He changed the frequency, but was greeted with the same warm fuzziness as before. He changed it again. And again. "There's gotta be a frequency in the universe that lets me communicate with another human being!"

"I think the frequency you're talking at right now works just fine. I can hear you loud and clear. So can the midget. That's two for the price of one."

As the truck driver fiddled around with his talkie, the soldier stared upward.

After listening to the truck driver's futile grunts, the soldier said, "Here, let me see it. I'm pretty good at fixing things."

The truck driver reluctantly handed it over.

He watched in horror as the soldier proceeded to disassemble the device.

"Wha—! You can't do that to my walkie-talkie...!" he moaned.

The soldier fiddled around with it a bit longer, and magically the fuzz disappeared, and in its place were sporadic beeps.

"Morse code!" the philosopher and the truck driver exclaimed simultaneously. This statement was not made with justification; their instincts merely told them it was so.

"Quiet," the soldier said. He had his ear to the walkie-talkie.

"You know Morse code?" the truck driver exclaimed in disbelief.

"SHHH!"

After a minute of listening, the soldier said, "It's a repeating sequence."

The truck driver's eyes glowed with suspense.

"I need to write this down! Quick! Before it disappears!"

The philosopher offered his notebook and pen to the soldier. "Hold the walkie-talkie," the soldier said to the philosopher.

The three men listened, soaking in every beep. The soldier began writing. The other two held their breaths.

The philosopher was very excited, but he began to question the excitement itself. Would a few sentences be enough to save them? They were words, not jetpacks.

“All right,” said the soldier. “Let’s see what we’ve got here.”

Upon looking at the sheet, the soldier decided not to read it aloud, due to its cacophony. It looked like the answer key to a guess-a-random-letter contest. He handed it to the philosopher.

“My goodness! It looks like Mixolydian!”

“Wow, I’ve never heard of that language before.”

“Neither have I,” said the philosopher.

The transcription was passed to the truck driver, who held it against the wall in front of him, mere inches from his face. “Hmph!”

The soldier reached over to get his sheet back, but the truck driver batted his hand away. He had a look of intense concentration. After a while he seemed to snap out of a trance and said, “I have the Scrabble app on my phone, ahem, I had the Scrabble app on my phone and I always beat the expert computer. I’m good with words. You see, if we separate the words like this – he made motions with his finger that nobody could see – then this would become the word KILT and this would become UMIAQ. That’s about as far as I’ve gotten.”

The soldier reached his hand over again and snatched the paper. As he scanned it the philosopher reached up and snatched the paper.

“I believe I have devised a system,” he said.

“Here’s my theory. Somehow, the three of us ended up in this place together. Out of all the human beings in the world. I believe that some higher power made it so; our fates were meant to intertwine. By that reasoning, every-

thing that happens means something. I'll get to the point. This message is not random, and we can crack it. It was made for us."

"Ah, you sound like a philosopher."

"I am."

"Ever heard of a man named Aristotle?"

The philosopher rolled his eyes at the question.

"I'll take that as a yes. If you ever become Aristotle, I'll believe you."

"Please," the philosopher whined. "It won't take much effort on your part."

Before the truck driver could reply the philosopher asked, "Pick a number, 1 through 100. First one that pops into your head."

"23," said the soldier.

"1," said the truck driver, clearly pleased that he had ruined the philosopher's plan. However, the philosopher didn't bat an eye. He just wrote it down and made some marks. "Again," he said.

"56," said the soldier.

"100," said the truck driver.

After this happened about five times, the philosopher said, "All right, that's good enough. Now I have to think of some numbers."

He scribbled some digits on the paper.

"Okay! I think this will work!"

He made a few final marks, said, "Oh my..." and crumpled halfway to the ground. The soldier seized the floating paper, and the truck driver craned his neck to see it.

"HELLO WORLD!"

Flesh and Wind

Rachel Schaefer

She lay nested as a bird
Feathered into the rich dark mud
Amber locks fluttering away
Leaves carelessly scurrying against
Her flesh
The wind
Digging delicate decaying crests from the earth as Poseidon throws forth a
wave from the ocean
She lay in a coral reef of soil, and sticks and not one but two chills bore own
from her neck to her fists
And the waves crashing upon her outside were felt crashing and caressing
her inside
Take her as a boat, bobbing up and down on gentle waves
Or as a fish below riding the currents
Take these moments
From a third point of view
And let them consume your soul
Do not feel, do not observe, let yourself be
And when your mind flutters away with the leaves you lie with your finger
nails in the dirt
Mad that you lost your mind
Like you had a choice
You do

Onions

Kiera Ebeling

[click here for audio](#)



"God, I'm talkin' like Casy. Comes of thinkin' about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes." -- John Steinbeck

I think I finally know what
it's like to be an Onion.

There are all these layers, each one
feeling a different thing, and a skin
made from the paper of books. And
if you peel it the wrong way,
the paper will cut underneath your nails.

Your nails, always painted pink, invariably the
same length to match your knobby fingers
which perpetually looked the same. With every
movement came a jingle, like a little elf
dancing in the moonlight.

And I always loved that milky moonlight,
especially when I sat in the road with a
wool blanket wrapped around my
shoulders, so much like yours,
watching the moon. I counted the
craters, but somehow the number
never did it justice.

"Justice is written with the color blue,"
you had always said. And maybe you were
right because when it's served, a trail of
weighted, wistful footsteps follows.

Sure to follow like puddles after a storm.
When I was little, each puddle stretched like
a muddy lake. Stretched with possibilities as innumerable



Juliet Aycok

as my future. But now, driving, the mirages stretch the width of the road. But only temporary. Dreams made of dust.

Like the dust coating the plastic flowers in your living room. The ones I tried to smell. But I only caught the scent of aftershave, beer and bacon. (Your grapefruit and cookies could never cover those up).

Sometimes I'll double check the closet, to look for cookies you used to hide before Christmas. All I find are his hats, your

sweatshirts and button ups.

Each button is uniform, but if you look closely, you'll find a different color thread. And it's really no wonder, steady fingers and a will stronger than the needle is in our blood. Although your mother never paid mind to the color of thread, she wrung every drop of water from clothes just washed.

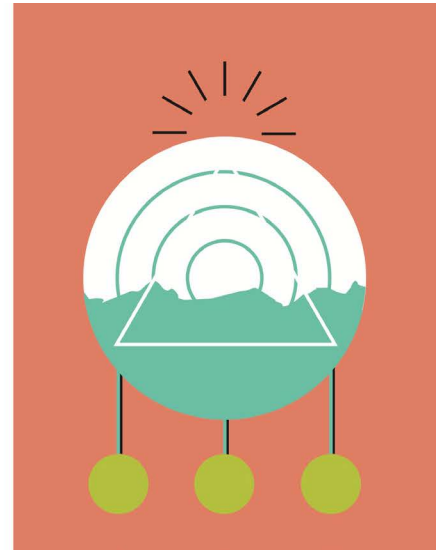
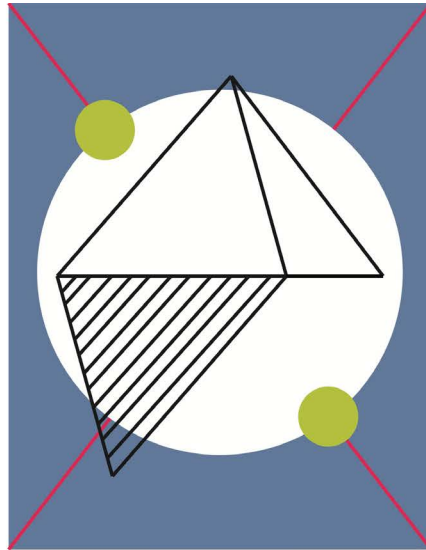
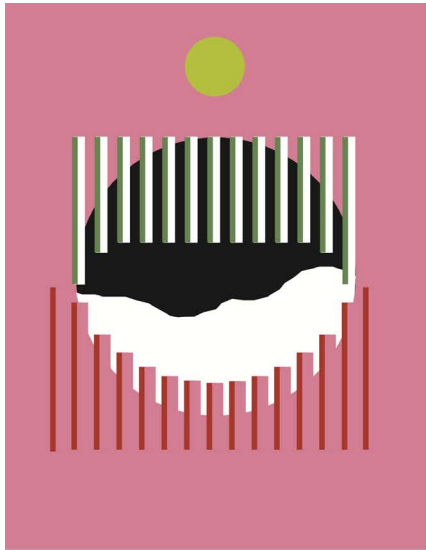
They say she had the biggest hands they had ever seen, big enough to scoop up the yolky sun and put in a bowl to make scrambled eggs. But, her hands were always too cold, and the sun too hot to handle. Opposites don't always attract.

Attraction from day one. You know when babies are drawn to a person--for no visible reason? (it must be something on an inexplicable energy level) We had staring contests and matched expressions. A few years later, we passed yawns back and forth, seeing if the yawn would do something different to the other one's face.

I'll never forget their faces when we made money from grocery lists and bought each other's drawings. You always made the best flowers.

One day I hope to make a garden with all kinds of flowers but especially daisies. And maybe some tomatoes, too. I think I'd like some herbs and vegetables. Maybe an onion or two.

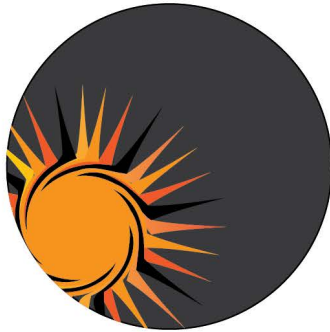
Sometimes I think I accidentally ate a raw onion like an apple. How else could I explain my runny nose, streaming eyes, and this funny taste in my mouth?



Mitchell Bethlenny



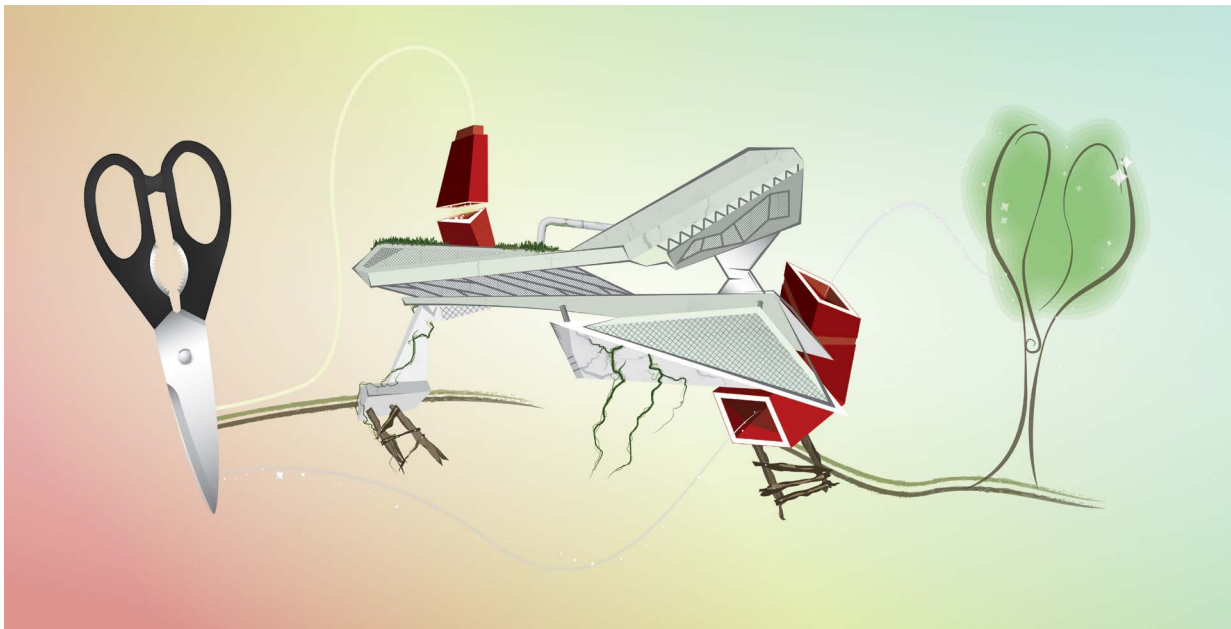
Spencer Jones



Diego Armstrong



Spencer Jones



Ben Holzwarth

Depends on the Day

Leah Motimaya

[click here for audio](#)



I have a papercut. The problem is it won't heal. It's been there for weeks, months, years - oh I don't know - quite frankly, I've lost track. Some days, I feel like it is healing, my blood cells are working inside of me - working on me! Other days, I feel like someone is taking a sheet of paper and very slowly, very delicately sliding it back and forth {back and forth again} through the cut. The papercut has been gone for many months (oh shush, no I have not been counting) but the pain remains, but I guess you could say, 'it just depends on the day.'

Heart Loss

Michel Liu

She smiled before leaning into him, meeting his lips with hers. At that moment, a vignette seemed to bloom around them, obscuring the nearby picturesque canal, but also dimming down the surrounding instrumentals of summer bugs and the texture of the warm air.

From this peak of happiness, Miranda's heart leaped. Fluttering frantically until this last second of anticipation, it detached from veins and arteries and leapt up her throat. When the kiss ended and they separated, the heart tumbled past her teeth through her parted lips, rolled down her chin, and softly thudded onto the ground.

She sighed blissfully, unaware of this, but Jake blinked, thinking that he saw a ruddy flash of something. He looked around but failed to locate it within the grass. And anyway, her cheeks were glowing this cute dark-pink color, and he didn't have to ask whether this was her first kiss. Even amid her flushing, she coyly smiled at him, and he forgot all about the thing—whatever it was—that he might have seen.

No matter—it wasn't his for the taking.

Later that month, before he left for college, Jake told her through the phone that they should break up, and she agreed. It was something that they both expected to happen but avoided, simply because Jake was a procrastinator. It had been one of the first things Miranda had learned about him: she remembered those moments when she used to glance at the markings on his late assignments, and he accidentally caught her eye. He'd shrug and smile that sheepish smile—the one that said my bad, but I'm still cool.

After the call, though, she curled up on her bed and half-wished he hadn't procrastinated. But at least she had nice memories—she replayed each one in her mind in the same way a fastidious collector carefully dusts his souvenirs. To console herself, she shut her eyes and relived her favorite moment: the moon's wobbly reflection in the canal's dark water. How their conversation deteriorated until all they could hear were cicadas, swishing

waves, and expectation. Miranda smiled to herself.

After Jake's departure, Miranda's friends Stacy, Karen, and Beth flocked around her protectively. With frequent sleepovers and more elaborate parties, they scarcely let her have a moment to herself. Miranda had some of the most objectively fun hangouts she ever had, yet she couldn't muster her old delight and gusto. During one of the last sleepovers of the summer, Miranda was lying on her side, her long brown hair spilling over the side of her bed, as the others sat at the foot of the bed, hypnotically absorbed in *The Devil Wears Prada* on the TV. Despite it being one of her favorite movies, Miranda was staring off at some vague point in the corner of her room, asking herself the question that her friends have been asking her for the past couple of weeks: "Are you okay?"

For a long time she insisted "yes" with a certain degree of confidence because she had anticipated getting hurt; she wouldn't have dated Jake if she didn't think it would be worth it, or if she didn't believe in her ability to heal. So she had expected the ache. But she hadn't expected the emptiness. Miranda felt hollowed-out and cold inside, as if something had departed her. For the first few weeks, she permitted her sadness, consoling herself with lots of sighs and rants and ice cream. But now she was annoyed with herself, increasingly frustrated with her own inability to enjoy the last moments of summer without an icy underlayer of melancholy. She chided herself for not being able to control her heart.

And then she wondered if she had it at all.

Miranda inhaled sharply. "I don't have my heart," she blurted out.

Her friends turned to her, shocked. "What! You lost your heart to Jake?"

"I just don't have it," Miranda repeated, eyes wide with panic.

"Miranda, you're only seventeen," Beth said with surprise. "You really loved him?"

"No, I didn't love Jake." Miranda emphasized it with such firmness that they decided not to broach the subject further.

“Well, when’s the last time you remember having it?”

“How are you sure it’s gone?” Karen asked.

Miranda tried to answer their questions but realized it was like describing the loss of a pair of keys or a phone—she always assumed that she has them until the subconscious awareness of an empty pocket or a lack of the keys’ jingle suddenly crystallized into a shocking realization.

“Miranda,” Stacy said slowly, “If you didn’t give Jake your heart, he must’ve stolen it.”

“Okay, Jake’s not perfect, but he’s not evil.”

“I’m serious, Miranda. What else do those songs and movies mean by ‘he or she stole my heart’?”

It was more and more evident that no one in the room knew the conditions or even the basics of heart loss. They discussed it late into the night, cross-examining anecdotes of heart loss from their parents, older siblings, and urban legends, circling back to the sole explanation: Jake had cruelly swiped Miranda’s heart. After everyone had fallen asleep, Miranda lay awake, increasingly afraid of the stark absence in her chest. But she was eventually tranquilized by the sound of cicadas and gently-swaying water in her ears.

She knew Jake was returning home briefly during a long weekend. She waited until then. No, she waited a whole day after he returned, so she wouldn’t seem like a desperate stalker or something. God, he really is messing with me, she thought as she held the phone to her ear and listened to the ringback tone. She was sitting upright on the edge of her bed, impatiently tapping his Steelers cap against her knee.

“Hello?”

“Hey!” Miranda chirped with unintended perkiness. “I’m just calling because I found your cap at my place, and I thought you’d want it back.” Her plan was to shut up and wait for him to similarly reveal a possession due for return, but instead she nervously tacked on: “And, um, how are you?”

“Great, actually! College is better than I thought it would be...” As he chatted about that, she listened hungrily for a hint of secrecy or guilt in his tone, but his talk of dormitories, cafeteria food, and new lacrosse friends sounded as frivolous and honest as ever. She almost jolted when he interrupted himself with a sudden “Oh! I almost forgot. I have something of yours, too.”

“You do?” she asked, hating how her voice cracked.

“Yeah, you left some of your DVDs here. You can come over and pick them up...or, uh...maybe I’ll just drop them off in your mailbox.”

“Oh...yeah, sure. Um, was there anything else that you have?”

“Not that I noticed. Why, are you missing something?”

Biting her lip, Miranda decided to be direct. “Yes. I am. I think you might have my heart.”

Silence. “Uh, I don’t have it.”

“Oh?”

“Well I definitely didn’t take it or anything, and I haven’t seen it around either.”

Miranda’s mouth parched. “Well, I don’t have it. Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I’m sure. I guess I could look around and check, though,” he said, though there was a heavy amount of doubt in his voice.

“Could you? That’d be great.”

“Okay, I’ll let you know.” He hesitated. “You know that if I had it, I’d give it back to you, right?”

“Yeah, of course,” she said, though she had not known.

A long pause followed. Miranda was reeling in disbelief. As much as she thought Jake was funny and nice, she never once thought she loved him. Which is why she was almost certain that he stole her heart. But with his bewildered tone, she wasn’t sure. She was starting to doubt everything she

thought about herself.

During the silence, Jake felt the awkwardness, but also a sense of irony. Ever since he had started noticing Miranda, he was constantly apprehensive of his heart falling out of his chest in front of her in some embarrassing way, maybe onto a meal or in the middle of a laugh. And as much as he felt that he was in love with Miranda, he was equally certain that she didn't feel the same way. And yet, she lost her heart and his stayed put.

He wasn't necessarily wrong about loving her—it's just that he loved her the same way he loved his guitar, or the way wind ruffled his hair when he drove in his convertible and lowered the top. He had not yet discovered the distinction.

"Sleeping early tonight?" Miranda's mother Alice asked, when she poked her head into Miranda's bedroom. Miranda was already covered in bed and listlessly scrolling through her Instagram feed.

"Yeah."

"Okay, sleep tight." Just as Alice was about to turn off the lights and leave, Miranda spoke up.

"Mom? I, uh," she began awkwardly. "I think I lost my heart."

Alice's hand paused on the light switch. "To Jake?"

"I thought so, but he said he didn't steal it. He seemed like he meant it, too, but...I don't know," she ended with a hint of self-doubt.

"It's possible he's telling the truth. Your heart could be his without him taking it."

"How?"

Alice traveled to the side of Miranda's bed and sat down. "Sometimes people carry others' hearts without deliberately taking them or without even knowing they have them. Hearts can follow people like...like burrs, and they are nonethewiser." Alice paused momentarily. "When I was younger than you, there was a girl in my neighborhood, and my heart..." she made an outward motion with her arms.

"But she didn't feel the same. I was too mortified to tell her that my heart followed her, rolling alongside her as she walked!" Alice chuckled. "I never said anything, and she never suspected, so she never saw it."

"But if the person knows they have it, they can just return it, right?" Miranda asked.

"Well, maybe the attachment of a 'burr' is too weak for this comparison," Alice admitted.

Miranda groaned and buried her face in her pillow. "How will I ever get it back, then?"

"It's different for everyone. The heart can eventually detach itself and find its way back to you. That's what happened for me. One day I realized that I was over that neighbor, so I waited out on the doorstep until my heart rolled back to my feet. It didn't fit quite right in my chest at first, but it adjusted. Or maybe I adjusted."

"What if your heart doesn't come back?"

"Your body will have to grow a new one."

Miranda winced. "So it hurts?"

"Yes."

"And it changes?"

"Yes."

"This could take forever! What am I going to do until then?"

"Oh, honey, it's not a big deal. Heart loss happens all the time to everyone, but they still go about their business. People don't need their hearts for most things."

Miranda didn't say anything to that. It sounded a bit disingenuous to her.

But her mother was right—life was doable without a heart, and Miranda's new year of school began without mishap. For the most part, she continued to enjoy life and her favorite things as usual. She still loved mac n' cheese, films, Skype chats, and the way her nails gleam after painting them just as genuinely as she used to. It's just that her mind wandered much more, as if her heart had once been its anchor. She'd watch a rom-com and suddenly be transported to the canalside once again, his lips on hers, and she'd lose track of the movie entirely.

Otherwise, Miranda did quite well, and Beth remarked on her overall normalcy while they were doing homework together one day. "You know, you're faring a lot better than average. When my cousin lost her heart like that, she couldn't stop crying. I hear some people become reclusive. You must be really tough," Beth said with admiration.

"I don't think I'm unusually tough, or anything. I just think that my heart loss is different from those my mom described. I just still can't believe that I lost my heart to Jake when I didn't even love him."

"Miranda..."

She sighed. "I didn't want to say this while we were dating but...Jake was sweet and funny and cute, obviously, and I liked him—but I think that was it. I think I just liked him. It wasn't much deeper than that. I mean, maybe my definition of 'love' is too strict and picky...but I don't think so. I mean, I've always believed in most things people scoff at, like love at first sight and soul mates. I'm the definition of a romantic..."

Jake's face was so red that it matched the rose bouquet he clutched in his fist. Jake's friends grinned and snickered at his abashed expression. Each of them had a letter emblazoned on their shirts—P, R, O, M. Jake was the question mark. He walked to Miranda and held out the flowers. "It's sappy, but I know you're like the definition of a romantic, so..." Miranda interrupted him by hugging him, ending his suffering and beginning their relationship.

Miranda blinked hard, grappling present reality. "Sorry, my mind went away again," she apologized, blushing.

But even that memory held proof of Miranda's suspicion: when he asked

her out, happiness warmed her cheeks all the way down to her neck, but it didn't burn quite violently enough to reach her heart which, though excited, still felt...well, sane. During their entire relationship, she never burned.

Sometimes Miranda heard the cicadas even when there were none. Like when the pale autumn sun beamed, but Miranda could only hear a mid-summer insect concert and only feel evening breezes on her skin. And sometimes she saw the streetlights and the canal gleaming with the moon and she felt the balmy air of the humid night and his warm hand on her back—but she was just in her bedroom, and the moon was covered with clouds, and the AC was on full blast, and the cicadas were silent in hibernation, and she was alone.

One night, a powerful storm swept through the town and beat incessantly against Miranda's window. But she didn't hear the liquid percussion—the cicadas in her ears were chirping too loud. She was sitting cross-legged on her bed, perusing college pamphlets and enjoying her nonexistent summer background noise. But her subconscious, the quiet thinking space in the back of her mind, began to piece a few facts together. Like the fact that it was way too late in the season for insects like that to be active anymore, or the fact that she had heard weather warnings on the news earlier that day. Until her arm, like a disembodied part of her, slowly reached towards the window and pulled back the tulle curtain.

She jumped in surprise at the pellets of water hammering the window, and she barely had time to recover when a fork of lightning stabbed the ink-black sky, illuminating every fine detail of the lawn outside and burning Miranda's retinas.

The almost instantaneous roar of thunder barely affected her; she was seized by an epiphany about her heart as brief as the lightning strike, but it nonetheless electrified her with a wordless, ineffable clarity. It was the same feeling as when one reads poetry over and over again; suddenly, there's a shift in perception, and one feels like he has connected the dots, though he's no closer to explaining the poem. The meaning isn't seen, but it's felt. Miranda felt that way now, and she dashed into the kitchen where her mother, filling a crossword, was sitting at the table.

"I figured it out! I can't explain it, but I know it! I don't love him, I just...loved

everything but him, you know? It's like when you think someone's staring at you but they're actually looking right above you, or around you but not at you...it makes sense to me, I just can't put it in words. Why can't I explain it? I don't love him."

"Miranda, what's going on? You sound manic!" Alice exclaimed. Miranda raced to the front door and yanked it open. Tumultuous air and water wooshed inside.

"My heart will return any minute. It should already be on its way, because I never loved him." Miranda's voice sounded far away as she stepped onto the patio and faced the neighborhood street. Alice felt a pang of fear.

Alice forced Miranda to stay inside until the storm passed, but once Miranda settled on the wet patio chair, there was no bringing her back. As if encountering a skittish animal, Alice approached Miranda from behind carefully. "Miranda, are you sure about this?" Alice asked, and she tried to communicate with her eyes: You might disappoint yourself.

"I've never been surer about anything, Mom."

Her conviction only frightened Alice more.

Hours later, Alice tentatively breached the patio again with some blankets and a hot drink. To her dismay, Miranda was still wide awake, watching the horizon like a sailor's wife waiting for the glimpse of a mast.

"Are you sure you don't want to come inside, honey? Things like these are fickle and take time, you know."

Miranda's voice sounded strange while replying, nor did she turn to face her mother. "I'm gonna wait a bit longer. Any time now."

Alice quietly left, and Miranda shivered, half-wishing that she accepted her mother's offer. The tears on her cheeks were so cold.

...

"You're still on for Karen's house after school, right?"

“Yeah! Should we meet in the parking lot?”

“Naw, my house is so close that we can walk.”

“Nooooo! But it’s so cold!”

“Miranda, can’t you drive us?”

“Sorry, I’m not allowed to use the car until it gets snow tires,” Miranda said to her friends. They paused as she retrieved a binder from her locker, and then continued down the school hallway, disagreeing about transportation to Karen’s. Miranda tossed in some pros and cons of the plans, and by the time they reached the end of the hallway and entered their respective classrooms, they had decided to walk to Karen’s house despite the frost’s first debut of the year. Karen claimed she knew a shortcut. During class Miranda scribbled in the margins of her notes, too excited about their plans to focus.

No, Miranda’s heart had not returned. But contrary to her prior belief, heartlessness didn’t restrict one to sadness and longing and anger—she could still laugh boldly, whistle, and enjoy herself. Most importantly, she continued to love: old video games, self-taught piano tunes, kin, and friends.

But, still, she felt tugs from her disembodied heart. Tugs—persuasive impulses that made her stalk Jake on Facebook, space out and reminisce for hours, and feel lonely even when surrounded by good people. She thought often about growing a new heart, which she imagined would feel like a planet finding a new orbit. But that didn’t happen, so her current philosophy was that if she ran hard and fast enough, her stubborn anchor of a heart would have no choice but to follow.

It’s a good, distracting plan, and the tugs gradually weakened, becoming more sporadic than chronic. In fact, Miranda hadn’t thought about Jake or the cicadas for several weeks. Until Karen, leading the group to her house, took a sharp turn off of the sidewalk, and Miranda’s scalp tingled.

“Why are we going to the canal?” Miranda asked.

“This is the shortcut I was talking about!” And Miranda walked forward with apprehension, dreading the location she had skillfully avoided ever since Jake left.

Miranda didn't believe in closing her eyes during roller coaster rides, so she forced herself to take in the scene. It was not at all what it looked like during the summer. The canal was bare (drained in anticipation of freezing), the sky was as pale as whitewash, and not a single insect or animal chirped or breathed. Crisp silver ice coated the grass. Yet Miranda couldn't help smiling to herself, smiling at all the joy that occurred at this spot. She covered her grin by dipping her chin down into the folds of her scarf, but she could not conceal to herself how much she missed this special memory.

She fell behind her friends, allowing herself one more moment to reminisce. And then she saw a veiny surface peeking through the gaps in the frosted grass. Something rounded and dark pink. In disbelief, Miranda stepped forward and knelt beside it. There was a groove in the ground as if the heart had rested there for months and established its own niche in the grass. She stared at its flesh and arteries before cradling it in her mittened hands. She felt the world shift and re-center as she found her old orbit again.

"He didn't take it, I just left it here!" Miranda laughed, hugging the cold organ to her chest.

And she hurried to rejoin her friends up ahead, once again in possession of herself.

Randomness Part II

Kaitlyn Walker

[click here for audio](#)



I.

I dream of falling asleep.
Only worrying about
waking up and making tea.

I hear his breathing when I
curl up and wrap the covers around my
cold fists.

I wonder if she would have liked him.
I wonder what she would say if I told her that
we are in
love?

II.

He pokes and he
prods me.
Asking
“Do you feel that?”

My grandma says boys
annoy you when they like you but I say that's
harassment.
It still happens.

III.

Murky tea. Messy handwriting and matted bed head.
A look, a stare.
Third base was the final one right?

A wine glass left on the counter.
No alcohol here.
Just a bottle of old grape juice I should've thrown away.
The sour milk made us sick.
Or was it the guilt that tossed our stomachs?

Kiss and tell.
We know I can't.
You love me....
Right?

>Coughing and tissues.
Cold meds and sweatpants.
"You'll always have a place in my heart."
Will I?<

Thinking about you is like lighting a match and
trying to let it burn out without
burning my
fingers. I need those to
play.

The piece I performed
was a Romance. I wonder if a part of me
wanted it to be about us.
And as the tears started,
as my vision blurred I heard that melody.
You let me create a puddle on your t-shirt. At least you have
broad shoulders.
Did you know how embarrassed I was?

Mediocrity and insecurity are my friends.
They depress me. (Like everything else in my life.)
I hope you don't mind becoming
friends with them too.

IV.
Sunday night and I
can't sleep.
Static filling the air and I'm breathing heavy
wisps of guilt that
intoxicate me.
Replacing the oxygen and my heart
pumps,
faster.

Just a string of grueling thoughts.
Where I went wrong.
My regrets

Fears that black out my vision and blur the
lines between reality and
(my imagination).

Memories of when we used to laugh and dream
together.

When we used to be
friends....

When my eyes close
and I breathe out all I can think is that-
I miss you.

And I want to reach out.
But I think you're already asleep.
Because Sunday nights are school nights.
And if I remember right you don't
have static filling up your room.

V.
Paint dries into faces.
I could watch these walls for hours.
Only it rains too often around here.

Procrastinating
and letting tea cool
(I burned the roof of my mouth this week)
(twice)

Irrelevancies don't exist for you.

A couple months ago she told me to
invoke a feeling.
So I dug around my heart.
And found the memories of
Staring deep into your
tired eyes.

One year ago I said:
"Sorry about my mom"
Today I said:
"I love you."
Now once more I'll tell you.
But this time with feeling*.

Elvis: A Friend To All

Katie Murphy

*Happiness

Robert had always hated Vegas. Granted, he had never been there, but just the thought of the place made him sick, the lights, the noise, the tight clothes and overpriced drinks. As he thought about it, Robert became even more fidgety, nervously adjusting his lab coat. His nose scrunched at the smell of hairspray.

Robert had always preferred the full name; “Rob” was the name of your kid brother or the friendly neighborhood barber. And God forbid someone called him “Bert;” had there ever been a respectable man who went by “Bert”?

Robert shifted in his chair. His body had begun to feel itchy at the thought of Vegas glitter. He needed to be rid of these thoughts as soon as possible; he needed to focus on Chemistry. Molecules and atoms and titrations of any kind, Robert loved it all. Life as a chemist had treated him well. There were no frills in a laboratory, just a man, a problem, and a world of possibility. No pressure to say the right thing, yet no room for error.

All this changed when Robert met Julie. She was his soul mate, he knew it. But there was one thing about her that he really couldn’t stand. She wanted to go to Las Vegas.

“Let’s go to Vegas,” Julie said one day. Robert felt his body tense up. “Come on, we’ll have so much fun! We can go see Cirque du Soleil, and get drinks by the rooftop pool, and you can dress up for once! Oh, stop looking at me like that! It’s all paid for by my work, we can have fun for free!”

Robert hadn’t even noticed he was making a face. He tried to fix his facial expression, but suddenly couldn’t remember how he usually looked. All he could think about was his hatred for that god-forsaken place.

“Julie? Julie!?” Robert cried out for the women in a feverish tone as the crowds closed in around him. As much as he struggled, he couldn’t keep the masses of sweaty bodies off of him and he hadn’t seen Julie in at least ten minutes. Robert’s worry began to heighten.

The crowds that was what I forgot about this place this terrible horrible god-forsaken place with these people oh these people they swarm with no respect none absolutely none at all and they smell oh god do they ever smell so strongly I can’t take it much longer I don’t think it’s worse than I could have ever imagined my head is throbbing against it an’ it’s full of these toxic fumes from the smoke and the alcohol and the perfume my god did these people never learn that a little goes a long way they all smell like cheap hookers drown in alcohol and I can’t stand it no I can’t stand it no more they’re pushing me and shoving me and I can’t see I can’t hear I can’t do anything but take this abuse and pray that Julia might find me here once I’m dead yes I will die here I now know this these people this place it will kill me I know it

“Get off me you drunkards!” A group of sweaty, intoxicated, twenty-some-things stumbled into Robert, and he shoved the bodies back into the crowd with all the strength he had left. He was in tears now, and could barely believe himself. How had he ended up here, reduced to a crumpled pile of the man he saw himself to be on the sidewalk? Robert was respected back home at the lab, he didn’t need to take this abuse. In an attempt to reclaim whatever dignity he had left, Robert began to pull himself up.

“Hey man, you can’t talk to us like that! Do you know who I am?” The drunks who had just assaulted him were now standing over Robert, slurring their words as they tried to pick a fight.

Robert chuckled to himself as he continued to pull himself to his feet.

You don’t have time for these jerks Robert just ignore them don’t do this you have to find Julie and get out of here ignore these jerks find Julie ignore them Robert ignore them ignore them...

“Yo! We’re talking to you man!” The biggest of the drunks, a burly Italian around the age of 24 shoved Robert, egged on by his gang.

"How's that feel man. A taste of your own medicine huh." The Italian slicked back his hair, confident that this old man on the sidewalk would wimp out of a fight and leave him to bask in his own victory.

Ignore them Robert ignore them...

"Listen, I don't want to start anything with you guys. You're all very intoxicated and it would be in the best interest of everyone here, including yourselves, if you would head back to wherever you came from."

The Italians froze for a minute, both in shock that this man hadn't walked away yet and in confusion as they tried to figure out what he meant.

"You wanna fight man. Cause if that's what you're trying to do then just say it. You wanna fight man, huh? I could take you, I could take you a million times man and you wouldn't know what hit you."

"Did you not understand me? I clearly said that I do not want to start anything. Idiots," Robert murmured to himself as he turned his back and attempted to shove through the crowd that had begun to form.

"What'd you just call me man?" Enraged, the head drunk grabbed Robert by the shoulder and spun him around until their noses were an inch apart.

Ignore them Robert ignore them...

Before he could stop himself, Robert swung his fist at the boy's jaw, causing enough impact only to stun the kid for a few seconds. He hadn't meant to do it, at least Robert didn't think so. He had never been a violent person, it must have just been that the crowds and lights and smell were finally getting to him. God, it was this place, he knew it. It changes men, turns them into drunk brawling animals. So maybe it was his hatred for Las Vegas that had fueled the punch, maybe not. Either way, it had happened, and Robert needed to retreat as soon as possible to avoid a counter attack.

But it was too late. The burly Italian's fist collided with his cheek, and Robert called out in pain as the boy's gold rings drew blood from his face. The collar of Robert's shirt was now in the mobster's grasp.

"You don't mess with me man. I'll kill ya, I'll do it." Spit flew from his mouth as he tried to maintain a hold on Robert. Robert sputtered and tried to right himself, straining against the Italian's hold. With every shaky breath Robert took, the grip around his neck tightened a little more. He continued to strain nonetheless, causing harm to only himself. After only a few seconds of his hopeless battle, Robert couldn't take it anymore. He summoned all the strength he had left and ripped himself out of the boy's grip. Stumbling back a foot, Robert collected all the angry thoughts he could, hoping that his anger would bring him strength. He thought of Julie, of how much he missed her and how he'd probably never see her again because he was most likely about to die. He thought about the boy in front of him and how cocky and drunk he was and how much jewelry he was wearing. So much jewelry. So much stupid jewelry.

Powered by his hatred for men in gold necklaces, Robert flung his body into the boy's. He had exhausted all of his strength straining against the grip around his collar, and could fight no more.

The first thing he saw when he came to was the hair, dark poufy hair. He followed it down the man's face, along his extensive sideburns. But Robert's eyes didn't focus on the hair for much longer; he soon became distracted by the man's outfit. A one-piece white suit with the torso splayed open. The part of his body that was covered was unlike anything Robert had ever seen before. It was bedazzled beyond belief, covered in gold and blue and red. Around the man's waist hung a belt just as glittery as the suit, if not more, that looked like it weighed more than Robert himself. Robert's eyes slowly traveled back up to the man's face as he became aware of his surroundings. Who was this glittery man, and why was Robert being held in his arms?

Just then, Robert thought he heard his name. His vision and his hearing were still very cloudy to him but he rolled his head to the side to see where the calling was coming from.

"Robert! Oh my goodness Robert what happened to you? Where have you been I've been worried sick, and to see you like this doesn't make me feel any better! Why aren't you answering me? Answer me Robert!"

Julie! It was Julie! She had come back to save him from this strange man! Robert was ecstatic he had found Julie! He went to run to her and, forgetting that he was in the arms of a strange man, fell flat onto his face. He struggled to pull himself back up and reached for something, anything that could help him right himself. His hand met another, but before grabbing hold of it he glanced up. The hand belonged to the glittery man, Robert knew it the second his eyes made contact with that bedazzled pant leg. No, he couldn't face this weirdo; he had to get to Julie before she left him. Tearing his hand away, Robert half stumbled, half crawled in pain in the direction of Julie's voice. But he couldn't hear too well over the noise flowing out of all the nightclubs and he couldn't see too well past all of the ankles crowding the sidewalk. Robert began to lose his sense of direction, and banged his head on a nearby light post when he turned towards who he thought was Julie. Except it wasn't her, and now he had a bump forming on the back of his skull. Once again, Robert sank to the ground.

"Hey there fella, let me give you a hand."

Robert looked up from his place on the sidewalk. Extended towards him was a glittery hand, one that looked vaguely familiar. Robert's eyes followed it up to where the wrist met a starch white pants suit encrusted in jewels. It was the strange man who had held him moments before! But he looked different now, studying him from afar. His face was oddly recognizable, familiar from somewhere other than the sidewalk he was laying on. There was something about him that Robert couldn't deny knowing.

"Who-who are you? Do-oo I know you from somewhere?" Robert asked up at the man.

"Well of course you do son, I'm the King."

The King. The King! Robert was standing face to face with the King himself, Elvis Presley! He couldn't believe it, he whipped his head around to see if anyone else had noticed Elvis yet. Thankfully none of them had, so Robert had this moment all to himself. He collapsed into Elvis' arms, tearing rolling down his cheek.

"Thank you, thank you Elvis. You saved my life," Robert cried shakily through his sobs.

"No son, thank you. Thank you very much."

Elvis carried the tear soaked chemist to Julie, dumping him into her arms.

"Robert, Robert honey, thank god you're safe! I've been so worried about you! And then I heard there was a fight and I saw you on the ground and I thought you were going to die! Oh, you were right, we should've never come to Vegas. This whole trip was a mistake and I'm so sorry! Thank you sir, for saving him." Julie was speaking to Elvis now.

"No Julie, this wasn't a mistake," Robert was beginning to steady himself now. "Don't you see who this is. It's Elvis, Elvis saved my life!"

"Oh honey, that's not really-"

"The King's got your back anytime fella. Enjoy your stay." The neon lights that shine like the sun in Vegas reflected off Elvis' belt as he turned and disappeared into the crowd.

XXII.

Kiera Ebeling

It w45 an lc3 CR34m

k1nd o'

daY

tHe k1nd tha7 m e l t s & s l i p s

a w a y

An' 1 almost caUGHt

the

MINI-PIG

the one that s3nDs bo0ks

off

of shelVes

an' tURns wAter to FlrE

get reaL close,

reaLcLose

closeR then cLoseR

cloSer than ClosE

but you wont

find H-I-M

Hacking Into the Circus

Natalie Strauber

The yellow and red striped vinyl curtains opened, welcoming parades of tired parents and their whining children to the seven o'clock show. Meanwhile, Jason and the rest of the clowns prepped themselves in front of foggy mirrors backstage in the dark and dingy open staging area, liberally applying white paint to their faces and necks. Suddenly, Genevieve, the travelling troupe's generally uninterested manager, abruptly entered the room and snapped her fingers, signaling for the performers to take their positions in the ring.

The bright lights hanging from the tent's ceiling dramatically flashed as Jason and his clown entourage stepped in front of the crowd for the start of the highly anticipated event. The clowns started their routine with juggling, incrementally increasing the number of pins as well as their antics. Then it was Jason's turn to perform a short specialty routine with the troupe's perky poodle, Penelope, garnering more laughter from the sparse but energetic crowd. The group then took a bow and made a quick exit to the left to make way for the main event and the ringmaster, Fernando.

As they passed each other in the poorly lit off-stage area, Jason inadvertently brushed his shoulder against Fernando's arm. Trying his best to be polite, Jason quickly apologized but in return Fernando shot him a disapproving look before proudly marching to the center of the ring. His fellow clown and close-confidant, Vincent, who witnessed the interaction, nudged Jason in the ribs.

"Do you see that guy? He's like so arrogant and he's totally going to get promoted to the international circuit before any of us because all he does is suck up to Genevieve."

Not a fan of drama, Jason simply shrugged his shoulders and began to remove his makeup in preparation for their next act.

"But seriously we've got to do something to stop him." Vincent continued. "He totally doesn't deserve this promotion."

Jason sighed. The promotion. It was what everyone had been talking about for the past two weeks and the recipient who had made the cut was finally to be announced by Genevieve shortly after the show that evening. Jason had been trying his best not to think about it, but Vincent's reminder put the thought back in his head and he knew exactly what would happen after the show if the others didn't do something to stop it. First Genevieve would drag herself backstage, feign excitement and pronounce Fernando as the recipient of the prestigious promotion to which he would produce a wide toothy smile and then proceed to saunter off to his private room on the traveling tour bus.

"Jason," said Vincent poking him in the arm "Are you in? If we're going to take this jerk down we really need your expertise."

He then looked around at the other clowns who had begun to gather around in the corner backstage and winked.

When Jason was in high school he had acquired a special talent; he could use mathematical algorithms to hack into and access information on any cellphone. It began as a practical skill he had used in school to earn extra cash and street cred from his classmates, mostly paranoid boyfriends and girlfriends who used his services to expose their unfaithful counterparts. Jason knew he should have never told Vincent and the rest of the troupe about his talent. It just so happened to have slipped, about two years ago, soon after he had joined the troupe during a casual post-show conversation at a fast-food restaurant that troupe had stopped at for a midnight snack before heading to their next city. Vincent, who had taken on the role of leader of the troupe's unofficial welcome committee, had asked Jason to share something about himself with the group so they could all get to know him better. Jason remembered sweating profusely at the thought of sharing personal information in front of a large group of people he had just met. After a series of awkward "Ums" and "Hms" Jason divulged his secret. Since then, the other troupe members had frequently visited him to enlist his services but he always refused, citing the fact that he was no longer "in the business" and therefore would not perform hacks at any price. However that evening, Vincent's comments and the image of Fernando and his wide toothy smile accepting the promotion resurfaced and before he had the chance to think about it he had agreed to assist in the group's efforts.

"Maybe I could help you guys out just this one time." Jason muttered reluc-

tantly.

The large group crowding around Jason and Vincent had expanded to include other performers and they immediately cheered after Jason's verbal commitment. As Vincent proudly patted him on the shoulder before taking off to the other side of the room to prepare himself for the next act, Jason's initial feeling of regret for breaking his personal promise subsided.

Hey, Maybe I could be the one getting promoted.

The final act, which was the most elaborate in terms of costumes and theatrics and included all the performers, went just as planned, and after everyone had taken their bows, Jason lingered just beyond the curtains, observing the audience as they slowly filed out of the tent and piled into their minivans.

Kids. They'll probably misbehave in the backseat of that Honda the whole ride home. Michael and I were just like them back in the day. Except he was always the golden child who could do absolutely no wrong. Now that I think about it I was basically destined to be the disappointment child. Just because I didn't go to Cornell or whatever. Well at least I'm not some lame corporate sell-out who gets his soul sucked out everyday when I go to work. Who needs an expensive car or a big paycheck? Not me. I'm perfectly happy. So maybe I don't have a girlfriend or a fancy apartment in Manhattan. Who cares? Having job security and a savings plan for retirement is over-rated if you ask me. I won't apologize about my life choices and the fact that mom and dad can't brag about my accomplishments to their friends at the country club.

"Psst Jason." whispered Vincent approaching him from behind. "We're all meeting on the tour bus in five minutes. Our operation is a go"

Jason quickly nodded to signal he understood to which Vincent peeled off in the opposite direction to avoid any suspicion.

Jason slowly made his way through the empty tent and desolate parking lot and onto the tour bus where he was greeted by Vincent and a few of the other clowns who were already seated on the bus' makeshift leather sofa.

"The others are coming," whispered Vincent. "I told them not to come all at

once because that might look sketchy.”

“Dude, why are you whispering.” asked Mary, one of the few female clowns who was known for being outspoken, as she reached her hand into a large crinkly bag of potato chips.

Suddenly a few new clowns and other performers entered the bus and searched for seating amidst the already cramped quarters.

“I want you all to know that what is done in this bus is never to be discussed further.” Vincent paused. He scanned each face in the room and to ensure everyone comprehended the severity of the matter. “When each of you returns to your respective tour buses there will be no chit-chat.”

All the performers simultaneously nodded. Vincent then reached into his leather duffle bag and produced his laptop and placed it on the wobbly metal table in front of Jason.

Jason looked at the keys of the computer as if they were printed with letters from a foreign alphabet. With all eyes on him, he slowly punched in the passcode to the server he used to perform hacks. When Vincent’s computer had established a connection with Jason’s server, he entered Fernando’s phone number into the cell phone database search engine. Sure enough, a Fernando G. Hernandez popped up as the first result. Jason clicked the link and suddenly the computer was bombarded with photos, messages and all other content stored on Fernando’s phone.

Jason pushed the computer toward Vincent who sat on his left, allowing him to peel through the thousands of photos and messages. It only took a moment for Vincent to find something interesting and he clicked on the image to enlarge it to the full screen. He flipped the screen around so the entire crowd could view it. The photo showed Fernando standing next to a slaughtered elephant proudly brandishing two large ivory tusks. The entire crowd let out a gasp. Jason remembered when Fernando had bragged about his lavish month long trip to Tanzania, which included a five-day safari in the Serengeti during the troupe’s off-season. Not only was the photo itself disturbing but it was attached to a link, which led to a website known for the trafficking and sale of exotic and endangered animals. The ad, which was posted under an alias, Frederick Henderson, read: 2 genuine Ivory tusks in pristine condition available for purchase. \$10,000 cash. Will entertain best

offer. Vincent read the ad aloud as the others exchanged glances and whispered amongst each other in shock.

“Silence!” Vincent interjected. He raised his voice a bit to be heard above the din of the whispers and chatter.

With the computer screen again facing him, he hit the print button at the top of the webpage and the printer aboard the tour bus, normally used for only administrative purposes, went into action. Mary, now completely silent and in a state of shock, sat closest to the printer so she immediately grabbed the sheets as they came out the paper tray and handed them over to Vincent. Once again, he reached for his duffle bag and produced an envelope with the name Genevieve Abrams already printed on the address line. After carefully folding the sheets into thirds, he stuffed the paperwork inside the envelope and sealed it shut with a lick. He held the sealed envelope in his hand and then expectantly looked toward Jason with a slight smirk.

“Would you like to do the honors?”

Peers on Piers

Anika Weiss

The first thing that I would like to clear up is that breaking the law isn't a regular thing for me. I'm a rule follower for the most part, unless I think the rules are dumb.

The boat lights flickered on the horizon. Lake Michigan stretched in front of my friends and I as we sat on the end of the pier. It was completely dark, with the exception of the moon's reflection dancing on the waves and the lighthouse's blinking bulb.

The summer air was warm, but we still wore our sweatshirts. I leaned against the railing of the pier and looked down at the drop into the water. It wasn't too far. I mean a lot of people probably would run away if you told them to jump off it, but I like things like this. After all I jumped off the pier all the time when I was seven years old and it wasn't illegal yet.

Now if you're caught jumping you have to pay half a thousand dollars. This is a rule that I, indeed, find dumb. I mean people will jump off it anyway, but now they'll just do it when no one is around, which seems more dangerous to me than just making it legal.

"I want to jump," I said interrupting the conversation. "Anyone want to come with me?"

The six of my friends looked at me like I was somewhat crazy, while I pulled off my sweatshirt. I realized this might take some persuasion, which luckily, is something I'm not half bad at.

"Come on someone jump with me. It'll be fun." It didn't take much for my friend to speak up.

"I'm in," Morgan said, and she yanked off her sweatshirt as well.

"Me too," Sarah followed. It only took one person to get the ball rolling and pretty soon, we all agreed to jump with the exception of my friend Palmer,

who was basically having a panic attack at the idea of being caught. She droned on about what would happen if we were caught and came up with a bunch of other overly paranoid, worst-case scenario, ideas.

“We’ll be fine. It’s dark, and no one’s around.” As I said this I double-checked to make sure we actually were alone. The festival and fair going on in town was half a mile away and everyone was there, listening to the concert and partying on over-the-top yachts that were in the bay. None of the tourists would even care if they saw us. They don’t know the rules in this town.

I got ready to climb the railing but looked down to the water as I did so. I nearly fell off the pier when I saw what was below me. Looking up at me were two people swimming. To say that I was startled would be an understatement. I jumped back the second I saw moving bodies in the water.

“There are people down there. Oh my god,” I laughed at how startled I was. “Guys, there are people swimming down there.”

Sarah and Morgan went to take a look and exchanged silent glances with the swimmers who were still just looking up at us from below. I tried to strike a conversation with the people in the water, but I was met with silence. They were probably nervous that we were going to tell the cops or something, since swimming in the channel is also illegal.

Honestly though, a group of random teenagers should’ve been the last thing these people were concerned with, since a giant boat was heading toward the channel now. I sat back down, knowing that we’d have to wait for the boat to pass. Once you are in the channel, you’re stuck in the narrow strip of water, and having a yacht smash you would not be enjoyable, at least in my opinion.

I guess the swimmers agreed with me, because when I looked back down to the water, they were gone. Once the boat passed, we pulled our shirts off. One of my friends even went a step further and ended up in only his boxers. None of us really cared, and we could barely see anyway.

“Okay let’s go.” I said and climbed the railing again. I could see another boat in the distance, so we had to jump while the channel was open. I hung onto the railing and stood on the edge of the pier. “Come on guys we’ve got to

go.”

My friends made their way over the railing. Some of them were starting to have second thoughts about the jump as they looked down at the water. To take care of that hesitation, Morgan and I pushed ourselves off the edge and free fell until we crashed into the waves. I didn't even get a chance to come up for air before I felt the water shifting around me, as my friends followed us into the water.

I popped my head above the surface and turned my head so the impact of them hitting the water wouldn't land in my eyes. The water was freezing, which I knew it was going to be, but that didn't mean I wanted to stay in it long. We quickly moved to the broken ladders along the side of the pier. They're there for anyone that falls into the channel and needs to get out.

We were fast to get back on the pier, and threw our clothes on. The boat was coming closer now, and we finished changing just in time. Even though we were soaking wet, no one would've questioned us like they would've if we weren't wearing much clothing.

We made our way back into town successfully not drawing attention to ourselves, until my friend's parent asked for us to take a group photo. A cop came up behind us and said, “Can I photo bomb?”

As someone that has a deep appreciation of irony, I had to stifle my laughter.

Termina

Aquil Sheikh

from the well
traversing out the wooden doors
into the daylight of another day

sighting the same scenes
propagating forward into a world
predetermined and predisposed

carving out new paths in the familiar terrain
through the familiar terrain...

situated in a place where time is still,
yet the town is full of clocks that tell the time
the same time, all the time
everywhere, anywhere

the gears are grinding
the moon is crying
the rain is pouring

Ceaselessly spinning in the cylindrical sea
Never did she ever so much as heed me
it's all the same and easily seen
it always will be and never won't

ugliness extends to the chandelier of the sky
pale with pain
the moon is falling

endlessly tearing through the days,
going around in threes
Traversing the open ocean
Marooned and docked at its great bays]
the moon is falling

out of darkness, in the well,
climbing up the walls
to the familiar wooden doors,
with the rhythmic churning of water and movement of machinery
the wooden doors open,

light pierces out
and.

the dawn of a new day.....

The Editor

Carolyn Myers

Papers piled sky high on top of my desk. There were so many papers I felt like I was barricaded in. I reluctantly lifted the first manuscript off the stack closest to me. Flipping through the first several pages, I began to read. I could barely keep my eyes focused for ten seconds. The book was so dull. It was a typical romance for high school girls. I had already read hundreds just like it. The character's motives were almost as trite as "Once upon a time". I'd written better books in the tenth grade. The only difference was no publisher ever agreed with me. My red pen made a streak across the page. I was nearly thirty and still hadn't accomplished much. The only type of work I had published was a handful of celebrity interviews and my annual article about the season's fashion trends. Nothing notable or original. I pictured the next fifty years of editing the same teen romance books. It made me want to cry. What was I doing wrong? A knock on the door interrupted my thoughts.

"Come in!" I yelled louder than necessary. A man who was about twenty years old strolled through the door. He looked just like James Dean. From the way he styled his hair to his sparkling eyes.

"Hello my name is Liam Lowell." He said reaching out to shake my hand.

"Dakota." I said taking his hand.

His handshake was firm but he wouldn't look me in the eyes. Sitting down in front of me, he slumped in the chair like a teenage boy in the principal's office. The boy adjusted his hair and began to fidget with the pencils on my desk. I realized after a minute he was waiting for me to start talking. I glanced down at his manuscript; I hadn't made much progress.

"James ..." I said. He looked at me blankly for a moment. It took me a full five seconds too realize why.

"My name is Liam..." he said.

"Liam I'm so sorry I just got you confused with... someone else." I said feeling my face get hot.

"James is my brother." He mumbled under his breath, staring up at the ceiling. He took one of the caps off my pen and began to bend it.

"Liam your manuscript...so far has only a few errors. Minor ones-" I said. Liam broke the pen cap and tossed it into the trash can. Still slumped over like a teenager he appeared to be half listening.

He didn't look like a writer. In fact he didn't even look remotely interested in his book. That's what made me nervous. I have been editing books for the past five years and never have I met a passive writer. If I crossed out even a sentence they would react like I had cut off part of their body. That was normal. Instead, Liam slumped in my chair, casually flipping through the manuscript like it was a comic book. He didn't seem to care that I had crossed out an entire paragraph.

"What do you think?" I asked breaking the unbearable silence.

"They'll like it." He said confidently looking out the window.

"Who?" I asked.

"Girls... teenage girls..." He stopped for a moment and looked back out the window. "Didn't you read it...it's all about them." He said rolling up his sleeves.

"It's real hot in here. Do you wanna open a window?" Liam said. When he stood up I noticed a long scar that ran from his elbow up the length of his arm. It stood out against his tan skin, like a tattoo that said, "I've been wounded". I couldn't even imagine how he got it. After all, a fool like him could've gotten it anywhere. He opened the window and took his seat across from me.

"This part of the book was extremely unclear. Why would Grace suddenly turn her back on her best friend?" I said, pointing to the middle of the page. Liam reached across the desk and took the manuscript. After a moment he dropped it once again in front of me.

"Well I didn't really know-" He suddenly stopped talking and pulled out a piece of gum from his pocket. Shoving it in his mouth, he looked back at

me.

“Want a piece?” He asked.

“I don’t chew gum,” I said, crossing my arms in disgust. I waited a moment for him to continue his sentence, but he instead stood up and began pacing the room.

“Liam, don’t you think we should get back to work?” I felt like an elementary school teacher.

“I just didn’t know how to make more conflict.” He mumbled the words under his breath. Liam wouldn’t look up at me; instead his eyes were fixed on the floor as he paced back and forth.

“I wanted there to be the perfect amount of anger, hate, and drama that all teenage girls like. Grace hating her best friend worked,” he said, smiling. I understood exactly what he meant, but the way it was written was just horrible. I was quiet for a while thinking and rereading the page.

“Liam, do you want to know what would make this story ten times better?” I felt my heart start to race like I had just told a lie. Liam’s story was just like all the other stories I read, and hated. I could feel the lie in my throat. It made me feel sick. Liam sat up straighter in his seat.

“How?” He asked.

“To be completely honest, I have not read the whole manuscript; I’ve only skimmed it. From what I have read you should consider connecting the falling out between Grace and her friend to the love interest.” Liam didn’t say anything; but just stared at me. I watched his jaw move up and down as he chewed on the piece of gum.

“How would I do that? The boy isn’t introduced until the third chapter, and the girls fight in the first.” He said, blowing a bubble. I groaned.

“You don’t need them to fight in the first chapter-.” The sound of a freight train interrupted my sentence. Liam reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone.

“Hey...yeah...I’ll be there.” Sliding his phone back into his pocket, he headed toward the door.

“Excuse me!” He turned around in surprise.

“Sorry I gotta go.” He slammed the door. He had some nerve to just walk out like that!

Fifteen minutes later I was in my car speeding down the road. The speedometer read sixty; fifteen miles above the speed limit, but I didn’t care. What kind of boy gets accepted by a publishing company and walks into an editor’s office like he was forced to. I would have died to be him! Touching my pens and chewing gum, of all things, gum. In my office!

Suddenly I realized there was a person standing in the middle of the road. He was sweaty and waving his white shirt madly in the air. I could see the fear in his wide eyes; I screeched to a stop. My heart was racing like I’d ran him over. I rolled down the window so it was open a crack. The hot July air immediately rushed in.

“Is there something wrong?” I asked. Another shirtless figure ran towards my car.

“Yeah my brother- and I wrecked- our car! He said out of breath.

“Where is it?” Craning my head down the road.

“Just-over that-hill.” He said the other figure stood in the distance. I drove slowly as the man walked along side my car. As we inched towards the hill, I looked at the other man. My mouth fell open. It was Liam. I pulled my car over behind the banged up sports car. Liam and I stood facing each other. Neither of us said a word. I could feel my mouth become dryer by the minute. I felt like I was standing in the middle of the desert.

“Dakota.” Liam said almost choking on the word.

“Liam.” I replied.

“Aw bro don’t tell me she’s some girl you know....” His brother said. He gave him a look of disgust.

"Oh please James! I don't know what you're trying to say. Dakota isn't anybody. She's just an editor!" Liam said. His muscles became tense and I could see him glow in the bright orange sun.

"Right I almost forgot that-" James swore loudly. I flinched wishing I could just disappear. They didn't seem to notice that I was uncomfortable and started walking towards their car.

"Dad's gonna kill you! I can't believe you already wrecked it!" James said.

"It was just as much your fault!" Liam yelled back.

"How so little brother?! I wasn't the one driving. You're always trying to be the cool one daddy's favorite. I can't believe dad is even excited about this awful book! It's just like every other on the shelf." James said waving his hands in the air. I was just about ready to get into my car and leave those fools. When they both turned around and stared at me.

"Are you coming?" James asked.

"Coming to do what?" I said. They both looked at each other in shock.

"Look at the car and... help us." Liam said.

"Oh I don't think I can because I'm just an EDITOR!" I said crossing my arms. James gave his brother an angry look. Liam just shrugged and pulled his shirt back on.

"Aw come on Dakota you're the only person that stopped." James said. He walked back over to me. Planting his feet firmly in the ground like he was preparing to attack a bull. I just rolled my eyes. Honestly how was I going to help them? I knew nothing about mechanics.

"Please Dakota..." Liam begged like a dog.

"Fine, I'll look at the broken down thing." I said. I walked around the side of the car and saw the problem. The entire front of the car was destroyed! Just crumpled red metal. The biggest mystery was there was nothing in its path. The car was on the edge of an old dirt road with cars flying by just like I had.

Far above the speed limit. The thing was there was just a field next to the road - no trees, rocks or telephone poles.

I turned and faced them.

"Is this some kind of joke?" I asked.

"No, that's our car and it's wrecked." James said. I threw my hands in the air.

"How did you wreck it?!" I said.

"Oh you think the front of the car is the problem!" Liam exclaimed and began laughing.

"Yeah what else?" I said.

"I did that six months ago in a bad accident! That's where I got this!" Liam said pointing to the scar that ran down his arm.

"Dad wouldn't buy him a new car. He said 'losers'-" James said.

"Shut your mouth James!" Liam yelled as he began to pry open the hood.

"HE SAID LOSERS DON'T DESERVE TO BE REWARDED!" James yelled.

Liam grabbed him and wrestled him to the ground. "The only loser is you! Our father just thinks you're amazing and talented, and all you do is steal and rip other people off." Liam yelled.

"That's what dad does any way; so what does it matter!" James yelled shoving Liam and getting up.

"This crazy book-" James stopped to catch his breath. "It's just another lame scheme to become somebody! Somebody you're not! It'll never make you rich or even famous!" James yelled into the clear blue sky. A car sped by us causing my frazzled hair to fly in my face. I looked at Liam and analyzed him. He was breathing hard opening and closing his hands.

"Well the problem is the engine. It's overheated." Liam said strangely calm. He stared at the grass.

"Really." I said going along with the turn of the conversation. He led me over to the car. The trunk had somehow been pried open. I looked at all the unfamiliar parts, touched several wires. I was hoping for something to happen. Like in all the good movies! When the girl becomes the hero. She'll bend over pull a couple wires and like she's doing some sort of magic trick. Suddenly there's a flashback and she remembers something her father taught her as a girl. Music begins to play and she is unstoppable! If that's what I actually thought would happen, I was sadly mistaken. Just like Prince Charming didn't exist; I found out the equally painful truth. I wasn't Wonder Woman.

I stared at the twisted wires and my eyes fell on Liam and James whispering to each other. Suddenly like a flash of lighting an idea came to me. It wasn't any saving grace for this beat up sports car. Not even any help for the two rich boys. It was something like a spark of light growing into something magical. An idea for a book, maybe even the next great novel!

"Guys! I can't fix this...I'm no mechanic." I yelled. I couldn't help it I could feel a smile spread across my face. The blue sky suddenly became bluer and I noticed the sun. It was so bright like it is in Hawaii.

"What's wrong with you?" Liam asked running his hands through his sweaty hair.

"Absolutely nothing! I wish I could say the same for you two!" I said. I was practically running to my car. An idea is so fickle it can come upon you unexpected. If you second guess it, or question yourself you'll only lose it. That's why I ran thinking only of my life and how my idea would change everything.

A girl about fifteen years old walks along the train tracks. It's a hot summer day in the middle of July she fans herself as sweat drips down her cheeks. Laughter and shouts break into the silent steamy air. The girl squints her eyes into the distance seeing two small figures playing on the tracks. Once she gets closer she sees that it's two young boys. They are dressed in a preppy school uniform jumping back and forth across the train tracks.

"Put a penny on the track!" The older one yells.

"Alright." The little one says. He empties his pockets on the sandy grav-

el. Marbles, and plastic dinosaurs fall to the ground before he pulls out the shiny penny.

“Give it here!” The older one says holding out his hand.

“No I wanna put it on the tracks.” The little one whines. The older boy tackles him to the ground. They are rolling and tumbling on the tracks. It was like they were waiting for death. Rich boys that came from good families, always wanting to steal and take advantage of one another. They’d do anything for one hug or extra cent.

The girl hangs back, smiling to herself at what seems like innocent fun. A train whistle cuts the air. She waits, expecting the boys to get up and run off the tracks. They don’t, still wrestling for the penny as the train clicks toward them. The older boy wins, snatching the coin and running off the track. The younger one lies on the tracks frozen in fear...

“Hey, wait. What about us?” James yelled.

“Don’t you have some rich Father?!” I yelled back. Suddenly I remembered Lowell - yes, he was a rich man who had many books published. Not cheesy love stories either, they were about science, math and theory.

“Dad’ll kill us!” Liam whined. I saw Liam’s manuscript lying in the passenger seat.

“Let him read this.” I said running over I handed Liam the papers.

“Thanks boys for reminding me who I really am! An AUTHOR!” I yelled out the open window. I pulled in the street and took off at about eighty. I looked out my rear view mirror and saw Liam’s manuscript flying in all directions. They were yelling and giving me hand gestures but I didn’t care. I was an author with an idea.

Three States

Amanda Chen

Prince Hamlet seems like a mess of contradictions, conflicted and unable to carry out his intentions. And this is true, but not for any simple reason. Hamlet, certainly unlike any other character in the play and possibly unlike any other character in all of literature, is so far disillusioned and dissatisfied with the ambiguities of mortal life that he cannot escape his incessant, all-consuming uncertainty about human existence in order to function in a society where living necessitates ignorance. He's conflicted, yes, but it goes beyond indecision about a single act and into the realm of a wholly tormented persona. Perhaps it is a blessing to be so aware; perhaps it is a fatal curse, for Hamlet's ability to lose himself entirely in provocative thought continually prevents him from taking action in the physical world. Ultimately, this complex, unique state of mental paralysis causes him to delay avenging his father, and only when he can escape both the former two states and realize a third can he finish his vengeance.

We must define the three mental states. The first is the one in which Claudius, Gertrude, and basically everyone else in the play reside. It is the state of illusions, of willful ignorance of the impossibility of knowing all truths, so that we may function without paralyzing ourselves. Hamlet begins the play understandably distraught over the state of Denmark and is able to converse normally with his peers and focus on the ghost; he is still primarily in the first state. And occasionally, he is able to put aside his ability to see the truth of mankind's lack of omnipotence to focus on his vengeance. But more often, Hamlet resides totally in the second state, unique to him, in which he is unable to live like the superficial others and ignore the one truth that he can never know all the other truths. In the second state, he is both fortunate in his ability to see metaphysical uncertainty but unfortunate in his inability to put this aside if he needs to function in the physical world. This is the state that paralyzes him in a labyrinth of thought, where he's genuinely and totally distracted. Here, his thoughts of vengeance fall below his desperation to find truths he can never find. And finally, there is the third state, which Hamlet reaches at the conclusion of the play and which enables him to kill Claudius. The third state is most difficult to grasp and define, but it is an escape from both the ignorance of the first and the paralysis of the second to true acceptance of his lack of control and certainty.

The greatest problem with popular theories is that they fail to consider Hamlet as a whole. Some, like Ernest Jones's Freudian Oedipal Theory, are purely ridiculous. He asserts that Claudius's murder of King Hamlet and sexual possession of Gertrude represent Hamlet's innermost fantasies, thus rendering him unable to kill the man who is so like himself (Russell 13). Not only is this total speculation whose only weak defense, like the Loch Ness Monster, is that there is no concrete evidence to the contrary, but also we as readers would be unwise to remove Hamlet to a clinical approach and thus fall prey to attributing all of his actions to sexual motivation and libido. Most importantly, this theory fails to account for Hamlet's unique and disturbingly provocative questions about life itself; this theory is too shallow.

And Ulrici's "Conscience" theory that Hamlet is restrained because he desires a fair trial for the King is utterly nonsensical. Especially considering the historical background, Prince Hamlet is more than justified in killing the incestuous murderer of his father (McClure 12). Furthermore, he is content with the words of a ghost, the visible reactions of Claudius, and his own personal intuitions, all of which rejects the idea that he places value in procedural law.

And then, one might argue, Hamlet's refrain from killing Claudius while he prays for fear of doing him a favor or his cursing God for prohibiting suicide seem to imply that he has concrete beliefs and fears in what the afterlife holds. However, he repeatedly asserts that man knows not the afterlife in lines like "...the dread of something after death, the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns ..." (III. 1. 86-88). Thus, he can't possibly fear eternal damnation if he believes nothing is certain post death.

A final popular theory that fails to explain Hamlet's inaction is the "weakness of will" theory, or the Schlegel-Coleridge Theory, which asserts that Hamlet spends so much time overthinking that he builds a "proportionate aversion" to taking any action (McClure 11, 12). Yes, a weak coward would worry about the act of killing and the repercussions. Hamlet, however, is not indecisive about killing Claudius. He realizes that "conscience does make cowards of us all." (III. 1. 91) From the first meeting with the ghost, he declares he will "sweep to my revenge" as swiftly as a person falls in love (I. 5. 36). He has decided that Claudius deserves to die and that he will be the avenger; he is only indecisive about the metaphysical, about mankind's folly and possible lack of omnipotence.

So why, then, a proponent of the coward theory might ask, does he time and time again berate himself for his inaction? Why does he call himself “an ass” (II. 2. 611) and a “tardy son” (III. 4. 122) if he is not a coward? From where does his ceaseless conflict stem? The answer is that Hamlet goes beyond seeking justice and salvation to actually questioning the very existence of justice and salvation, of good and bad, and of right and wrong. And these thoughts are the true reasons for his delay, for his preoccupation prevents him from focusing on a revenge that seems relatively trivial in comparison to the torment of unanswerable questions. Hamlet exists in the second state, which gets him labeled as insane even though he is the only one mentally awake enough to realize that everyone lives a lie pretending to know what is right or best. When he calls Denmark “a prison” (II. 2. 262) and says “...there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so” (268-270) we can see that his true torture and inner struggle is that he realizes the ambiguity and impossibility of finding ultimate truth in the world and yet he cannot put aside nor fully escape this abyss of mental paralysis. This is the ultimate pain that prevents him from focusing on trivial revenge. He’s too far above the shallowness that allows others to function in an illusory society where “sanity” necessitates ignorance, yet he’s unable to transcend his despairing realization that he alone sees that humans are fundamentally “quintessence of dust.” (II. 2. 332) His captor, therefore, is never Denmark. He is only ever a captive of his mind.

A key scene is the exchange between Hamlet and the Norwegian Captain, after which Hamlet says “I do not know why yet I live to say ‘This thing’s to do,’ sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means to do’t.” (IV. 4. 46-49). That is precisely it; Hamlet truly does not know why he still lives without avenging his father because he is so thoroughly removed and distracted from those thoughts when consumed with the mental paralysis of the second state that when he can temporarily dull those senses to focus on the murder, it’s as if there are two Hamlets and he’s genuinely astonished and confused as to why he has not killed Claudius. He fully means to kill Claudius; he is no weak, indecisive coward. Emerson Venable sums this perfectly with “The overwhelming mood...which retards every action, is the index and proof of Hamlet’s universality of soul in the presence of infinite and eternal forces which can neither be understood nor controlled by man.” (Venable 44) And this is truly Hamlet’s greatest struggle, grappling with the unknowable mysteries of the universe. He simply is unable to shake the dissatisfaction and despair of the exhausting second state for a long enough period to

focus and act.

Only when Hamlet's transformation to the third state is complete can he exact revenge. He can't be satisfied with ignorance as in the first state, and he can't be satisfied with the overwhelming uncertainty of the second, where he is thwarted by the inscrutable workings of Providence both externally and internally (Venable 39). In the third, however, he accepts divine providence and chooses neither to be nor not to be but rather to stop torturing himself with questions that cannot be answered in a fleeting human lifetime and instead act as he sees fit. In the conclusion of the play, Hamlet comes to terms with the stark reality that beggars and kings both become worm food. He decisively accepts a duel with Laertes because he knows that death "if it be not now, yet it will come" (V. 2. 236) and simply, peacefully says "Let be." (238) This third Hamlet, whose referral to his former selves in the third person to Laertes reveal his complete arrival in the third state of acceptance, is the most powerful because he alone recognizes the stupidity of both ignorance and of paralyzing oneself through preoccupation with that which cannot be resolved. Perhaps most revealing is one of his final lines to Horatio, "Thou livest; report me and my cause aright to the unsatisfied." (V. 2. 371-372) As A. Clutton Brock astutely observes, this does not simply refer to Hamlet's desire for Horatio to explain the "external facts" like the murder of King Hamlet; no, his transformation complete, Hamlet's "cause" has always been far more than revenge (Brock 38). Rather, it is his complex inner conflict regarding coming to terms with what he can and cannot determine that drives his thought and action. And are some of those thoughts and actions insane? For that matter, is Hamlet ever "sane?" Is society's construction of "sanity" really insanity? We cannot know, but we can know that Hamlet finally kills Claudius because he frees himself from himself, accepts human imperfection and powerlessness in the face of divine providence, and acts without any mental restraint. This is the Hamlet we most admire.

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Christopher Fernandez

Unfamiliar Places

Rebecca Flisnik

I was not fond of the place at the time.
Renowned to be a land of beauty, blossoming with color, I looked
around monochromatic tones and faded objects.
Language was incomprehensible. Everything
strange like being stuck in a fish bowl with a bunch of other fish,
not of your species.
They notice but pay no mind to you specifically.
Traditional buildings staggered high around,
enclosing me into the fish bowl,
lumped in with everyone else.
No escape.
Breaking through the wall of people in the square,
attempting to refuge to an open space, trying
to breathe in even the smallest amounts of air,
seemed as laborious as pushing a boulder.
In the name of desperation
perhaps it would budge.
A central lunar clock sounds just before
my drowning,
scary how perfect the timing was.
A universal being had puppeteered the situation,
toying with my emotion
there was no breath left in me. A cued alarming blare,
woke me from my imminent sinking.
Surface had been broken
The sensation of stale, muggy air
expanded my lungs,
dirty tasted pure.
Smoky and dull,
I inhaled.
Maximum capacity reached,
my chest ascended.
A trail of cigarette smoke
found its way to my nose and

reeled my head in its direction.
Fish on a line.
Behind a gray cloud were two men
sucking in thick breaths of tobacco
and god knows what else.
Black polo shirts, black slacks, black shoes,
a loafer maybe, maybe not.
Maybe their daily goings on
were black as their clad. Maybe not.
They worked at the hotel we were lodging
at that time. I had spotted them earlier
that morning, serving sausage and croissants
with the same hands that were pinching white rolled sticks
between their thumb and pointer fingers.
Like the color of the roll, their fingers were white as the plates
they handle in the kitchen each day.
Clammy, devoid of liveliness,
no individuality what so ever.
Their grip on the cigarette explained a dependence
for the warmth that lingered through their bodies with each inhale.
I could only walk through the haze
wondering what caused the interdependence of
human and smoke.
Without human air a cigarette may be nothing but rolled tobacco
with no power among its victims.
With no cigarette,
coldness seeps through a body,
chilling their insides.
Maybe with each puff realities become cloudier;
their comical lives as cooks in a hotel vanished. Maybe not.
Could these possibilities sink back in
as they suck in the dry heat?
All realities burning inside?
No, incinerated.
'You there!'
-the one leaning against the cold brick sputtered.
His English proved to be just as lifeless
as the residual gray haze that spewed from his nose.
Without saying a word,

I continued away from the commotion,
I went on with my business.
They, theirs.
Inhale and exhale.
Suppose that was their business.
Maybe not.

19:52

Noor Lima-Boudakian

[click for audio](#)



19:52

Red, white, and blue don't represent freedom when they're flashing behind you. I have to remember that as I go to the door, hand on knob, hand on heart, racing faster than my mind. Because on my side I'm shaking from fear and it's mixing up my thoughts. You're shaking with laughter at what you're going to do to me. But I still have it going. How did it get this way? I remember like I could never remember my math. I've still always been the smart one. I wrote my own fairy tales. Hand on forehead, I realize that's why I didn't recognize your Cheshire cat smile and glowing eyes, which I knew couldn't throw bullets, but I forgot, like with those math problems that angry hands can. I can't forget again. You in front of the door, one. Me behind it, two. If I take my hands off my ears, we might become three.



Spencer Jones

20:03

Your white shoes and red face and my blue lips because of your hands on my neck. This isn't freedom and it isn't behind us. I can't remember my multiplication, I want division, I want to push you out the door with my hands. Pressing on my (one) throat with your (two fingers), there will soon be no possibility of three.

20:09

There's gonna be no red, white, and blue for you now. There was a black camera and a gold badge and my red blood and that's all I can remember when I try to clench my hands because the door isn't closed anymore.

Symphony to Make Sense of Love

Nina Stornelli

I (Overture)

I have never written love poems
to anyone (no, not
even you)—
at least, not until
after the fact, after
I was removed by hindsight
and a hand-broken heart
from any debilitating
emotion. Besides,
writing while in love, acting
on my feelings—
these things were not bashful,
cowardly,
escapist enough for me to try. I
waited for the advantage
of a quiet mind
and the healed whole of a heart
before I took up the fragments
and feelings with my
pen, and tried my hand at verse
both poetic and musical.

II (Aleatory)

Why does love have to
be falling, tumbling
head over heels
down the rabbit hole?
I never asked for an invitation
to your mad tea party (to hear you play
songs of chance), and
I've grown tired of watching you
fade away
until all I see is your cheshire
cat grin

(You will read this poem thinking
I have never loved).

And when all is said and done, to
wipe the sleep from my eyes
– but not the wistful longing –
and be told it was all a dream?
I might rather have been snatched
away by the Jabberwock.

III (Dirge)

The day that my falling
was no longer in love (but
instead on my face) I shouted
myself hoarse, bemoaning
love and you and myself and
gravity. I ripped at my vocal chords
to tear out the love from my breast,
until it was a grisly, dead thing
that I could lay to rest
next to the childhood pets
under the lilac tree. Falling
does not hurt so much as
hitting the bottom, reaching
the end and finding, when I examine
the bruises and broken pieces, that maybe
the descent (into blissful
madness?) wasn't worthwhile, that all
I have gained are scars
on my heart, that
maybe I should stop leaping
off into the unknown because
there is no safety net and
it is a long way down.

IV (Serenade)

Being in love, I think, is like
sleepwalking, half-aware and
half-sane, vulnerable, with
eyes closed and immersed in a dream. Sleepwalkers
have the sweetest dreams of all—

though blurred on the edges, the missing details
are filled in by romanticism and
grandeur. I wonder what keeps
the dreamers lulled to sleep—maybe
if I listen, I'll hear and remember again,
the faint lullaby settling in tempo
with my heart, cello and piano
carrying some emotion —
is that hope? yearning? —
that makes me sigh
and close my eyes.

V (Coda)

I end where I began,
looped back around on the carousel
I thought was a conveyor belt. Love
(or is it life?)
is like that, it seems—
landing with a thump at the bottom
of the rabbit hole, stumbling forward
with hands outstretched,
feet (hopefully) pointed forward, not
back or diagonal or clockwise. There
is life
(or is it love?)
to be found amidst the
skeletons and ashes of memory. And I
am down there too, wandering
with poems tucked
into the pocket above
my heart
and songs weaving their way
through my mind.

Fairytales and Lunchboxes

Kaitlyn Walker

[click here for audio](#)



I like peanut butter and
jelly sandwiches.

I used to like your
stories about prince charming and how one day
I'd get my own prince. All I had to do was
sleep like Aurora and
he would come in the night.

Well mom you didn't account for
Feminism and the internet and how
one day I'd get the money to buy my own copy of
the fairytales.

It's safe to say that I don't want Prince Charming.
I don't want to be objectified like the women of your fairytales.
Grimm certainly would agree with you that once a
woman has kids she
needs to stay home and
pick up after
whatever.

And it's like that
orange marmalade
because I couldn't stand the
sticky sweet of your
honey anymore.

Did you know that
apparently
the runnier the honey the more
bee parts it
has in it?

~~~Shhhhhhh. That's an

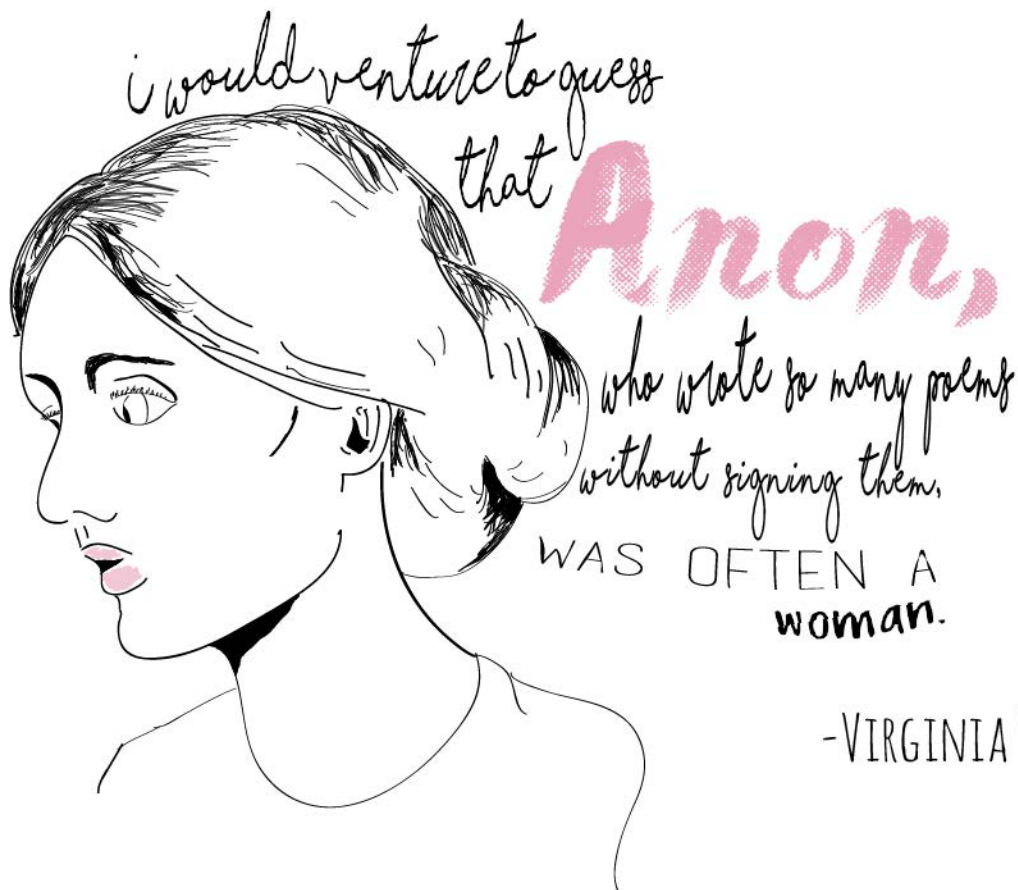
insider secret.

But not all secrets have to stay secrets,  
right mom?

Right.

But shhhhhh.

Yours are safe with me.



Priyanka Kadam



# The Last Noise

## Samantha Huang

They were having dinner together,  
not that it was anything important  
or special. In the past,  
they rarely paid attention  
to the food, merely an excuse  
for endless conversation.  
And now?

She watched  
as he scooped up the potatoes,  
watched him saw  
awkwardly at the meat.  
When had they ever  
eaten meatloaf, anyway?

Her fork laid stagnant  
in her fingers, too tired to care  
that they had choices.  
She regarded the fork's tines, then  
released the tension,  
the waiting.  
They fell, a dead clink  
on the orange plate.  
He clanged back,  
unaware.

She had bought the plates  
at a garage sale, the only two  
left in the set, probably from some  
happy Thanksgiving dinner.  
She watched as he  
scratched the plate with  
his knife.  
They were vestiges. The word  
"happy" was foreign  
to her.

She set down the fork  
and leaned back.  
He looked up, chewing–  
chewing! She closed her eyes,  
let out breath hard. He swallowed  
hastily, was waiting  
when she opened her eyes.  
He did not ask  
how she was, only waited to  
escape whatever was wrong.

She shook her head. There was  
nothing worth saying.  
Their relationship had  
developed, but marriage  
was of another world.

He left slowly,  
but early. The plates  
clattered in the sink,  
a satisfying sound.  
She placed the wineglasses in the sink,  
tossed a fork over her shoulder.  
It hit a glass, vibrating,  
the last noise associated  
with him.

She did not wait to see  
if it shattered.

# The Reunion

## Danny Parker

Opens on the backyard of a suburban home just outside of Austin, Texas. A disconnected family has gathered here for a reunion. Henry, the middle child of homeowners Arthur and Nora Johnson is sitting in a lawn chair drinking a Coca-Cola. The other family members in attendance are, as aforementioned, Arthur Sr. and Nora, Henry's parents, as well as Henry's older sister Jessie, younger brother Arthur Jr., Henry's Uncle Reggie, Aunt Monica, Aunt Diane, Uncle Duane, Aunt Melissa, Uncle Ed, and Henry's twin cousins Thomas and Terry as well as his cousin Rodney. Henry's grandfather Hershel sat alone in a lawn chair under the big willow tree. The 23-year-old Henry is clean shaven and carefully dressed for this family picnic, but the expression on his face seems to suggest that his only interest at the moment is the soda in his hand. His sister walks over to him, bouncing cheerfully with each step.

JESSIE

Cheerfully

Hey, brother! How have you been it's been such a long time?

HENRY

I'm good, Jess.

JESSIE

That's good, that's good. Hey, how come you never call me?

HENRY

Blankly

I've just been, you know, busy.

JESSIE

Still cheerful

Busy? Busy with what? Tell me what you've been doing!

HENRY

Just busy with...I don't know, stuff. Just things.

JESSIE

More serious now

Okay, well, if you don't want to tell me you don't have to. Just know that I'm here for you if you need me. After all, I am your sister.

HENRY

Accusingly

Why do you have to do that?

JESSIE

Acting confused but knows what he means

Do what?

HENRY

Why do you have to just guilt me into feeling like I should tell you about my life?

JESSIE

Defensive

I said you didn't need to tell me if you didn't want to! Your life is your busi-

ness, not mine. You can share as much as you want.

HENRY

Well I won't fall for it. I'll share as much as I want and all I want to share is that I've been doing stuff. You happy now?

JESSIE

Okay, jeez... This whole picnic thing must really have you on your toes for you to react like that when all I did was ask you what you've been up to... What is it? Mom and Dad?

Henry rolls his eyes and gives her an exasperated look.

JESSIE

Taken aback

Wow, okay. We don't have to talk about that either.

Both are silent for a few moments as the topic of conversation fades away.

JESSIE

Oh, right, I meant to tell you earlier; just so you know, turns out Aunt Monica is infertile, so... Just don't bring it up okay? No one is really talking about it.

Henry laughs quietly.

JESSIE

What are you laughing at? That isn't funny, Henry.

HENRY

I'm not laughing at the fact that Aunt Monica is infertile.

Insincerely

That really is awful. I'm laughing at the fact that we're the type of family that goes around gossiping to each other about other family members and doing stuff like what you just did.

JESSIE

I just thought I'd give you a warning so you didn't upset anyone. God knows you don't have the best filter or the best idea of what to say. I was just thinking about how Aunt Monica felt... And we don't gossip, that's not true.

HENRY

Sarcastically

Yeah okay, sure it isn't.

Jessie scoffs and walks away. Henry stands silently looking around at his family and then he notices his parents moving towards him.

HENRY

Under his breath

Here we go.

NORA

Smiling, opening her arms for a hug

Henry!

HENRY

In a cool manner

Hi mom.

They hug.

ARTHUR SR.

Hello, son.

HENRY

Dad.

They exchange a firm handshake.

NORA

We're so happy you could make it. The fact that we got everybody here, it's just so wonderful! It's been such a long time since we've done something like this.

HENRY

Insincerely

Yeah, yeah... It's great.

NORA

Just look at the kids over there. Rodney is getting so big, and the twins! I feel like it was just yesterday that I held little Tommy and Terry in the hospital.

She sighs

Time flies.

HENRY

Uncomfortably

Yeah, it does.

They're all silent for a couple seconds.

ARTHUR SR.

So how've you been, son? You never call! We have no idea what you've been up to since we met for dinner last month.

HENRY

Well, uh... I mean I've –

NORA

Interrupting

Have you gotten that job you told us about yet? The one in Dallas?

HENRY

Irritated with his mother's interruption

No, actually. It's been a pretty uneventful month for me, I haven't really done much. Just uh...just been doing my best to be productive.

They're all silent for a couple of seconds.

ARTHUR SR.

Pained

Well I certainly hope so, son. I certainly hope so.

Henry nods his head and they fall into awkward silence again

NORA

Well, I guess your father and I should keep on milling about. It's so great to see you Henry we've missed you so much.



HENRY

With a phony smile

Me too.

They walk away and Henry sits back down in his chair. He sighs and sits still for a moment, contemplatively, and then he takes a joint and a lighter out of his pocket, lights it up, takes a toke, and sits calmly.

Henry's little brother Arthur Jr. notices Henry smoking and rushes over frantically.

ARTHUR JR.

Are you kidding me? Are you...

Stuttering out of disbelief

Are you seriously smoking a joint right now?

HENRY

Looking up at his younger brother

Yes I seriously am.

ARTHUR JR.

At a family reunion? You need to put that out right now, man! Before mom and dad see you and flip a –

HENRY

Interrupting

You're not the boss of me, they're not the boss of me. No one is the boss of me but me. I'm the boss of me. So how about you just walk away?

ARTHUR JR.

Disappointed

Damn, man. Just because you don't care doesn't mean you have the right to ruin this reunion for everyone else!

HENRY

You actually want to be here? This is all fake you know, right? Fake smiles, fake conversation, and fake love for one another. That's what I hate about this family. It's all just fake.

ARTHUR JR.

Well I actually care about my family. They're important to me even if they don't all get along. They're still my family. I still love them.

HENRY

Blankly

Well that makes one of us.

ARTHUR JR.

Shaking his head in disbelief

What are you doing this for? Why do you –

He pauses, still shaking his head

Why? Just why?

Henry ignores him. Arthur Jr. scoffs and walks away angrily. Henry just sits there, the roach pinched between his fingers. As he looks around the yard he sees his father talking to his uncle Reggie. His father glances over at

Henry and immediately does a double take. The smile vanishes from his face as he grits his teeth and fills with rage. He motions to his wife and begins to storm over towards Henry.

ARTHUR SR.

Aggressively

Are you kidding me? Put that out right now. I'm only going to say it once.

Henry doesn't respond for about ten seconds, his father looming over him. A few family members start to notice the commotion.

HENRY

I don't plan on wasting a perfectly good joint. Do you even see how well I rolled this? It's like a work of modern art.

ARTHUR SR.

Stern, fuming

Put it out. Now.

Henry takes one last, long drag then, just to anger his father, moves deliberately slow before dropping the roach into the lemonade pitcher on the table to his left. At this point everyone at the reunion is silent as they watch the conflict unfold.

NORA

Shocked

Henry good lord what's come over you?

Henry shrugs.

NORA

Why on earth would you ever smoke pot at a family gathering?

HENRY

Shrugs

I felt like it.

NORA

You felt like it?

ARTHUR SR.

Damn boy, is this what you plan to do with your life? You've got no direction!

NORA

Quietly

Calm down, dear.

HENRY

I've got all the direction I need.

Arthur Sr. laughs in disbelief.

ARTHUR SR.

To himself, under his breath

He's got all the direction he needs.

They fall silent again. Henry's Uncle Ed chimes in.

ED

You know Henry, I uh... I was in a somewhat similar situation to the one

you're in now back when I was in my twenties. I was just lost, had no direction, same as you. But then I turned it around. I got a job, took on the responsibilities that were coming with growing up and being out on my own, and honestly it was hard at first. It really was, and it won't be easy for you either. But that's just part of adulthood; part of growing up. As tough as it is you can't just give up. You can't stop caring. I took charge of my life and it was one of the best decisions I think I've ever made. But like I said, it isn't easy. It takes work; hard work. But it's necessary because giving up just isn't an option. Do you understand what I'm saying Henry?

HENRY

As though he hardly listened, patronizing

Uh-huh.

Ed sighs and shakes his head disapprovingly. His wife Melissa pats him on the back.

Arthur Sr. is still fuming, his hands on his hips and his teeth gritted.

NORA

Henry?

HENRY

What?

NORA

Desperately

Why do you shut us out, dear? When we try to help you, why don't –

HENRY

Cutting her off

Why do I shut you out?

NORA

Yes. Just answer us that.

Henry scoffs.

HENRY

You know, you guys present yourselves as if you're these great, loving, caring, exceptional parents. You want everyone to believe that, you really do. But you're not those parents. You're just not. It's all fake; all a façade. Every time I used to call, all you'd do is grill me on what I'm doing with my life. You judge everything I do with a microscope. That's why I stopped calling. That's why I shut you out; because you're so damn critical. So damn critical it's not even healthy. It's not on me for shutting you out. It's not my fault, no... It's your fault. Your lack of parenting skills is what led to our disconnection. That's the truth. No point in avoiding it anymore.

NORA

Frantically

Oh honey we're just trying to help!

HENRY

Oh stop it. You don't...

Henry shakes his head and curses his mother under his breath. His father hears him and, in a rage, storms towards his son.

ARTHUR SR.

What the hell did you just say?!

DIANE

Everyone calm down! We don't need this here.

Arthur Sr. completely ignores her.

ARTHUR SR.

To Henry

You are so ungrateful. We, your mother and I, have given you a good life! We've always supported you and you repay us with...with...this! You never listen to us! All the guidance we provide you with and you just never listen!

HENRY

I don't want to live my life the way you and mom plan for me. I want to follow my own path, not the one you've forced onto me!

Arthur Sr. is silent for a moment, Henry's Aunt Monica mistakes this silence for confusion and chimes in.

MONICA

I think what Henry is trying to say is that –

ARTHUR SR.

Cutting her off viciously

Oh shut up Monica. You can't even have children of your own, so what makes you think you know how to handle one?

Everyone is shocked. Monica is silent and holding back her tears.

REGGIE

Don't talk to my wife that way you son of a –

Reggie starts at his brother aggressively, but Henry's Uncle Duane, a muscular, intelligent African-American man Diane met at Stanford when they both did research on Alzheimer's, gets in the middle of them and holds Reggie back.

DUANE

Quietly, to Reggie

We don't need any of that here, we can work this out. There doesn't need to be any ugliness.

ARTHUR SR.

Arrogantly

Classic Reg, always backing down easy.

Reggie is infuriated with his brother's remark, and makes a quick move to get out of Duane's reach and begins to move towards Arthur Sr. once again. Duane grabs him again but this time Reggie, out of rage and reflex, punches Duane, who falls to the ground with his hands over his mouth. Diane rushes to help Duane and Reggie immediately realizes what he did. He stands motionless with his fists still clenched, filled with regret for punching Duane but still feeling the burning anger towards his brother.

REGGIE

Guilt-ridden

I'm... I'm sorry.

DUANE

To Reggie

It's ok.

To Diane



I'm fine. I'm good.

ARTHUR SR.

Just to egg his little brother on some more

Wow. Now look what you've –

But before he can finish, Hershel, who hasn't made a peep all day, is now standing and yells to his sons and his family, who are all surprised to hear him speak and to see him standing.

HERSHEL

Stop. Everybody just please stop. What are you doing? Look at yourselves. Look at those around you. These people are your family. They're the people you're supposed to love and treat with kindness and respect. Do the people you're supposed to care for mean nothing to you? My wife...

He takes a deep, shaky breath

My wife died last year. My best friend doesn't even remember who I am whenever I go to visit him at one of those God-awful institutions. When I was in the war, I watched as my brothers in arms, men I was willing to die for, were killed at my side, some of them in my arms. I'd do anything to have my wife back; anything to be able to have another conversation with my best friend again over a nice Sunday breakfast. You all won't understand for years. You don't realize the importance of family; of supporting and respecting and caring for those you love. None of you will regret having ruined these relationships until it's too late; until they are too broken to be mended; until you are no longer surrounded by any loved ones. You need to fix this before it's too late. You need to love, respect, support, and care for one another. That relationship is more important than anything else in life. You need to find that love for one other, and it needs to start today; right now.

Everyone is silent.

HENRY

It's already too late.

Henry looks around at his family, then turns and exits.

The curtain falls.

# Written in Stone

## Carolyn Myers

Scribbled drawing covered in sparkles;  
Dots of glue on lined paper cover the fridge.  
The walls are engulfed in photographs,  
Some professional and others taken by little kids.  
My own face looks back at me,  
From underneath my cousin's.  
Your young face isn't new, I promise.  
It looks like all the other beautiful babies;  
That are no longer young.  
A worn brown photograph of my grandmother  
Shows me that she has been resurrected in your smile.  
The house is silent and waiting  
With impatient haste.  
Your sister and brother, rambunctious children,  
Finally sleeping in their beds.  
And I just stand there in the kitchen  
Looking at your soft cherub face.  
Realizing suddenly  
That your small hands hold our family's fate.  
Admiring the wall made of memories,  
All the same blood, rich, red and young but not new.  
To think that would be a mistake.  
Great Grandpa and Great Grandma were Adam and Eve.  
Creating a long line of children and a legacy;  
Not to say they didn't have their own serpent.  
Jealousy that shaped our own destiny.  
You my dearest cousin  
Will be the one to pass on the last name.  
After over twenty Great Grandbabies,  
Only one bears that name.  
Named after a man you'll never know or meet.  
Everyone is sending presents and cards  
That sing the same meaningless words  
Wishing you a happy life.  
It's like they think the store-bought words  
Will change the stack of playing cards you have already won.

Or a soft baby blanket  
Could somehow comfort you till the day you die.  
In reality nothing can change  
What's been already written on stone.  
Aunts, Uncles, and cousins were all children too.  
Don't they remember how those "blankies" became ripped?  
And how the other children treated them with scorn  
As they dragged the pieces of their youth  
Behind them like a dead weight.  
Cousin, you're in the place of honor today.  
Sticking out above the others in this messy place.  
Next year a new babe  
Will probably take this spot.  
Or maybe a college grad that they have crowned King.  
This wall was once my great domain,  
But years go on and walls forget faces.

# Why the Cook Buried the Frying Pan

## Kate Hancey

She felt a fat droplet of rain hit her face and roll down her cheek. Frustrated, she shifted gears, her bike shuddering in protest as she peddled faster down the dark street. She had found the bike forgotten on the curb, left lying next to someone's trash. It was forest green, spotted by rust stains and scratches. Her mother hated the bike. However, no matter how much her mother complained about it, the bike served its purpose. Even if begrudgingly, it got Emma home from work every night. Maybe that was why her mother hated the bike.

Soaked, she finally arrived at her apartment. The hallway was dark, the walls softly illuminated by the faint flash of lightning. Instinctively, her hand groped to find the light switch, allowing a thin circle of light to filter through the room. The apartment was small. It should have felt cramped, but there was little furniture. A sickly beige color covered the walls, and there were no paintings or curtains on the walls. The walls were blank, only covered by a large bookshelf packed with cookbooks. Emma and her father had purchased the bookshelf at an estate sale a few summers ago. It emanated a sense of old grandeur that seemed misplaced amongst the almost barren apartment.

Emma tore off her raincoat, her dirty apron still tied around her waist. Dropping her backpack on the ground, she grabbed her wallet and phone. Out of routine, she turned on her phone to check for missed texts and calls. There was a text from her mother. At first the texts just meant that her mother was sick and tired of putting up with her father. He didn't do well on bed rest, and her mother didn't do well with putting up with his antics. However since he had been taken off chemotherapy, the texts had become more frequent, more urgent. Still, Emma would often come racing to the hospital only to find her father reciting a recipe she had to try out some time, or a card trick he had just had to show her; her mother standing exasperated in the corner of the room.

Worried nonetheless, Emma grabbed her duffel bag, already packed; blanket, hoodie and a pack of cards. She called a cab to take her to the hospital. She was secretly relieved that the hospital was too far to bike, as she looked out at the ongoing downpour outside.

When the cab arrived at the hospital, Emma hopped out of the front seat, almost forgetting to shove the crumpled bills at the driver.

“Have a good night,” the man said cautiously. He had a worried expression on his face. Nobody had a good reason to go to the hospital.

Emma replied with a quick “Thank you,” as she sprinted for the entrance, the rain drenched her hair in mere moments. Entering the front doors, she listened to the rhythmic squeak of her wet shoes in the linoleum. When she reached the right wing, the two attendants at the front desk greeted her by name.

“Emma, you will not believe what your father did this morning,” the larger woman said, sharing a knowing smile with her fellow employee. “This morning, Doctor Campbell had a new attendant. The poor boy was very shaken up, very nervous and what does your father do? He asked the kid for a cup of ice water. So the attendant comes back with the cup of water, but your dad says he wants crushed ice. Crushed ice! Your father goes on to swear that there’s an ice disorder with crushed ice somewhere in the hospital and sends the kid on a wild goose chase for the next two hours. You can imagine how upset Doctor Campbell was.”

Smiling, Emma quickly signed into the guest booklet. Her father was often up to such antics; the hospital made him stir crazy. She sloppily signed her name, grateful to finally be able to head towards her father’s room.

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“Emma what took you so long?” Her mother asked, exasperated.

Her mother stood in front of the door. Her makeup was smudged, dark bags underneath her eyes. Behind Emma’s mother lay her father. His eyes were closed as he took slow, shallow breaths. Emma brushed past her mother to her father’s bedside. Her hand softly reached down to grab his hands. His hands were dry and faintly trembling.

“Hey, Emi,” her father breathed, his voice cracking as he yawned. She smiled and softly squeezed his hand.

Her mother stared from across the room, concerned. Waiting, she finally said “Emma, your father was sleeping before you got here.”

“I’ve been reading for the past six months,” her father complained. “If anyone needs some sleep, it’s Emma. Your mother told me you’ve been working double shifts at the restaurant.”

“Yes but Emma doesn’t have three doctors hounding her every day. I swear you’re the worst patient. If someone asked me to get more sleep I would be grateful. You refuse to do even that.” Her mother retorted, exasperated.

“I definitely do keep Doctor Campbell on his toes. Just this morning, Emma-”

“Alright, enough chit chat, my orders,” her mother said to her father. Turning towards her daughter she said “Emma, can we talk outside for a minute?”

“Mom, please. I’m here and I want to be with Dad.” replied Emma.

Exasperated, her mother sighed and resigned herself to her Sudoku puzzles.

The funeral was tomorrow. The room was a mess, stacks of folding chairs and tables littered across the floor. Emma stared blankly at the front of the room, imagining the casket that would lie there the next day. Friends and family had offered to set up, but Emma was glad to not have to deal with Aunt Cindy's hugs and old candy, even if that meant having to set up old metal chairs all day.

"Emma, you have five calls from work," her mother stated, Emma's phone in hand. Her words cut the silence from across the room. "Emma have you been missing work?" her mother asked, an edge in her voice.

"No. I just haven't been since Dad-" Emma said, waiting for her mother to fill in the gaps.

"I just don't understand what the problem is," her mother said, frustrated. "We pay for two years of culinary school and now you can't even be bothered to go to your minimum wage job. You and your father seemed so convinced that you could make this cooking thing work. All I'm asking is that you at least try to convince me."

The door creaked as Emma opened the door, squeaking as she left the room.

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"Where's Mom?" Emma called to her dad as she climbed off the bus, jumping off the last step.

"Mom has to work late tonight," her father replied. "She won't be home until late tonight. You'll be in bed by then."

"Yes! That means I can pick out dinner then, right?" she asked, grabbing her father's hand as they walked up the driveway towards the house.

"Of course. Your choice." her father replied. Smiling, as he watched his daughter's face light up with anticipation. Emma quickly let go of her father's hand and dropped her backpack as she ran towards the house, a huge grin on her face.



Inside Emma and her father began the elaborate process of choosing that night's dinner. Emma tightly closed her eyes as her father laid out some of their favorite cookbooks on the hardwood floors of their living room. The cookbooks spanned from Southwest Cooking to Korean Cuisine. Eyes closed, Emma randomly pointed in the direction of one of the books. The cookbook was smaller, worn around the edges. The title read Soups of the World. Emma then opened the book randomly. The page read Beef Daube Provençal in blocky red type.

"Hm," her father said. "I don't think we've tried this one before. What do you think Emma?"

Emma had already ran into the kitchen, clutching the book in her tiny hands. Propping the book on the counter she began to look for ingredients, using a stool to get to the cupboards. Rummaging through the shelves, she listed the ingredients they were missing to her father.

"We need thyme, broth and the meat," she called to her father, as she teetered on her stool.

"I guess we'll have to make a trip to the grocery store then," her father said. "Unless you just want to cook up some Kraft mac and cheese."

"Gross!" Emma yelled, grabbing her father's car keys and running towards the garage.

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It had been three weeks since the funeral. The calls from work had stopped. The countless voicemails still hadn't been listened to. Unread mail littered Emma's apartment countertops and dirty laundry lay forgotten in the hallway. In the kitchen, Emma was making bread. Her hand forcefully rolled the dough out onto the countertop. In the other room, her phone rang. Emma let the phone go to voicemail until she heard her mother's voice on the other end. Quickly she dropped her rolling pin and ran to catch the phone. Flour covered the handset as she answered.

"Hello?" Emma asked.

"Honey, I need to talk to you," her mother said. Her words were cold and distant. "Aunt Cindy offered to have me stay with her for awhile. I think it would be good for me to leave the house. My plane leaves tomorrow."

"What?" Emma asked. "You're leaving tomorrow? Why didn't you talk to me before you bought the ticket?"

"I don't know. I've just been stressed. I didn't even think about it until Cindy brought it up. It's all been very last minute," her mother replied.

"Did you even think that I might need you here?"

"Emma, you're not the only one mourning your father," her mother retorted. "I just can't stand being alone at home right now. Aunt Cindy said it wasn't good for me to be there with so many--things to remind me of him. I think I might put some of it in storage. I'll call you when I arrive," her mother said, hanging up the phone.

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Her mother had been gone for two days when Emma decided to go to the house. Sitting in a cab, Emma realized it had been months since she had been to the house. Ever since her father had been in the hospital she had always met her parents at the hospital.

The house was old, and made of crumbling brick. When her parents had bought the house, her father had made all these big plans on how he was going to renovate the house. However, her father was never handy. Her father quickly got to work on his garden and hung up art he had found over the years on the walls. However, he never got around to fixing anything. Ten years later, the shower still didn't work unless you had the sink running. Still, Emma loved the old house.

Emma walked inside, cardboard boxes in her hands. If her mother was going to put stuff into storage, she figured she would go through her father's belongings first. She immediately walked towards the kitchen. The kitchen

looked untouched. Her father and her had always been the cooks in the family. Her mother had always been grateful, especially when she came home long past dinner. Above the island, hung an array of pots and pans. However, there was a frying pan that hung separately from the crowded mess of the other pots. It had been her father's Christmas and birthday gift all rolled into one. Her mother had never understood why her father needed a nearly three hundred dollar frying pan, but she finally buckled down into getting him the prized frying pan.



Riley Donahue

# vacant

## Aquil Sheikh

outside  
grass sits still  
pale rays shoot  
a field of stones stand

flying around  
a black moth circles through and through  
in a dusty atmosphere of swirling light  
round and round  
in and out of shade and light  
folding air  
carried and lost by its own currents  
it goes nowhere but in circles  
lost in a state of continuous movement  
yet caught in a perpetual stagnation

somewhere else;  
a bee eternally attacks at the sun:  
who is yellow and coiled.  
flying forward in pursuit of warmth  
bouncing off the hot surface  
flying down  
springing back and forth  
just for a moment's worth of heat  
from a sun so false in its nature

outside  
air slushes through itself  
the grass sits still  
trees stretch towards the chandelier,  
leaves pierced by the pale pain of twilight  
silent and swollen

always moving  
going nowhere...

.

yet...

petals flies and flourish.

a warm snow falls

and the wind rises

# (An Interpretation of Hopper's *Gas*)

## Alan Tu

If you could say it in words there would be no reason to paint. – Edward Hopper

Late one night, you were driving somewhere. You knew where you were going, but had no idea exactly where you were. Your headlights – were the only ones on the road. Two white, blinding beams. Without them, you could've been anywhere.

The sun had set, but the sky was still more blue than black. Gray, too. It looked to you as if someone had mixed colors on a palette – the sky. Or maybe the sky was the canvas, and someone had carefully smeared it with a brush. Carefully, because it was so real. Near the horizon the colors were lighter; the fiery colors of the sun had left behind their shadows. It was all done on purpose, you thought. Someone made it this way.

Your eyes were focused; your pupils large. They blinked, but not often. It was as if you were watching a movie – but you really were watching some kind of movie. Your damp hands gripped the steering wheel tightly. Your foot was on the pedal. Your brain was somewhere else. It was asking the one question that could not be answered: Where? Your brain was conceiving incredible possibilities, none of which could actually happen. For just a moment your eyes glanced down at the fuel gauge. It was running low. In a few minutes the warning light would come on. You tried to hide the fact that you were worried – but who were you hiding it from?

Your eyes returned to the short stretch of illuminated road in front of you. A few trees were sparsely scattered along the road. Then, a sign. You quickly scanned it twice over. Entering forest in 2 miles.

During the next mile you drowned in your what-ifs.

At that moment, somewhere in the distance, beyond the gaze of your headlights, you saw something that wasn't darkness. It was a faint light, and it was getting closer. Your eyes strained to see where the fluorescent light came from. You spotted three red columns on the right side of the road. A



Jacob Berry

sign, hanging from a pole.

The figure on the sign was a red winged horse.

You stopped your engine – at a distance. You weren't worried about other cars on the road. At that moment you looked out your window at the scene in front of you. It was so peaceful yet oddly captivating. You squinted your eyes at the harsh fluorescent light streaming out of the hut. Your sight was drawn to the red bubble-head gas pumps, bursts of color against the dusky trees in the background. You looked to the right again, at the blinding white, and scanned your eyes across the unexpected chiaroscuro. And the road led to more... darkness.

Then you saw the man.

You eased up to a pump. The man was there, alone. You rolled your window down. "Closing up for tonight," he said. "I'll fill it up, then I gotta go." You nodded in understanding. The man unscrewed the gas cap, and wedged the

nozzle in.

“So where you from?” the man asked.

You told him the town where you lived. He stared at you with a look of slight incredulity.

“What might you be doing out here in the dead of night?”

You weren’t prepared for that question. In fact, you didn’t even know the answer to it. “I’m not sure.”

“Where you heading?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, I do get a lost driver sometimes, but never this late at night. I usually close earlier, but today... I don’t know why I haven’t closed yet. Just like you. Clueless. Maybe it was something...”

You nodded in agreement. The man pulled the nozzle out. You took out your wallet and saw that it was empty. The man noticed the expression on your face, and said, “Don’t worry about it.”

“Are you sure?” you replied.

He sighed, as if he was tired – of what? “Money has no value to me.”

You looked down, ashamed, and put your wallet back into your pocket. “Is there anything you need, anything I can help you with?” you asked.

The man sighed again, and looked up at the sky. “This deep in the country, the night skies are magnificent.”

You looked up with him, and saw the stars. The stars.

“I wish I were a painter,” he said. “This scene,” he made a sweeping gesture, “there are no words to describe it.”

Silently, you agreed.



# Asylum

## Evan Wisner

[click here for audio](#)



I watched them walk from my window. They were silent but their mouths moved, Wordless. In and out from black columns across the black and gray, and through a brown that was green yesterday. Red against white; a cross, remembered, raised and cracked. Splinters and screams, whispered screams, shouted with no going back. Black only on tile and pavement; feet and hands. An eye, a tooth, a tongue, a son?

I watched him stare at my cousin: late from church-too late for one. Walk home? I don't need anyone to protect me Maria as my guide.

I watched him staring at my cousin, his hands covered with teeth, my cousin's teeth covered with hands. A foot to an eye and my single cry, then blackness and silence, and sore throats and white rooms, and gray hairs.



Norah Al-qahtani

# The Triumph of Life

## Sam Lowenstein

The February rains had departed with the month, so it was on a bright, clear day that I approached Shelley in the quadrangle and slapped him across the face with a sheaf of papers. “Did you write this?” I inquired.

Percy had, as usual, been staring off into the aether, and he started at the blow, yelping. Then he refocused his eyes and noticed the implement with which he had been struck. “How...how did you know it was me?” His voice cracked nervously.

“You’re the only person in the university both mad enough to write an essay entitled ‘The Necessity of Atheism’ and cheeky enough to get it printed!”

Percy reddened, an effect that complemented marvelously his long, flaxen hair. “So what if I am?” he replied petulantly. “It’s a perfectly reasonable treatise that follows a series of logical deductions to reach an irrefutable conclusion—”

“Stuff your irrefutable conclusion!” I interrupted, louder than I had intended. Despite the chill, the courtyard was bustling with students, and we were drawing looks of displeasure mixed with suspicion. I lowered my voice. “Are you out of your bloody mind? Do you think the Master cares a jot about how rational or well-organised your arguments are?”

“All the Master cares about is his statuary, Thomas,” he answered defensively. “He’s not going to come after one student just because he wrote something disagreeable.”

“You’re probably right,” I admitted. “I’m just worried that these hijinks of yours are going to get us into trouble.”

“Us!” Percy squeaked. “This concerns me and me alone!”

“Don’t give me that!” I snapped. “You know full well that I’m the only person in the school willing to openly consort with you.”

Percy affected a wounded look, the authenticity of which I could not divine. "I don't see why that makes any difference. Besides, I thought you agreed with me on this." He gestured at the pamphlet I was still absently waving and began striding away, his chin upturned ludicrously.

"Percy! I'm right behind you here!" Then I noticed I wasn't and ran to catch up. "I'm only saying you don't have to be so brazen about it!"

"I was careful, Thomas!" he yelled. He turned about, snatched the article from my hand, and flourished it wildly. "I published anonymously!"

I looked around. Most of the nearby students had simply stopped whatever they were doing to observe our row. A loose crowd of onlookers was beginning to form, and I didn't fancy explaining ourselves to one of the professors. I seized Shelley's arm and pulled him away limply.

Our discussion was thus postponed until later that afternoon, when students were expected to attend class. As Percy and I did not feel that the University's intellectual offerings were conducive to our education, we generally avoided lecture halls. We instead employed the deserted dormitory or empty quadrangle as a quiet place of study. I found Percy in the common room. He was sitting in his usual chair by the hearth, reading a letter. "Who's it from?" I asked.

"My father," he answered curtly. I could see he was still upset, and paused, uncertain how to proceed.

Percy seemed to take pity on my discomfort, for he continued without further prompting. "Seems he doesn't think much of my opinions either. I've tried to persuade him, but he demands that I convert at once."

"I'm sorry, Percy." I placed my hand on his shoulder; he shrugged it off. I tried another tack. "It can be hard to convince someone as stubborn as a Shelley."

This got a smile. "I suppose I should write something back," he sighed. "You know that I cannot accede to his request."

"Naturally. But listen, Percy. I think you should destroy that essay. Someone

might read it.”

“Why, Thomas! That is exactly the point! Why else would I have made so many copies for the bookseller’s?”

“How many?”

“Thomas, that thesis has more to teach the students here than any of our professors, and people need to know about it. No sum of disciplinary fines is comparable to that, and if I must pay for my work, I consider it money well spent.”

I could see I was going to get nowhere, so I resolved to take matters into my own hands. I took my leave of Percy and made for the bookseller’s. But by the time I got there, it was too late.

I sprinted all the way back to the dormitory. I collided at the door with Percy, who was just leaving with his finished letter. “He burned it!” I shouted incoherently as I tried to catch my breath.

Percy read the anxiety on my face. “Who burned what? Slow down, Thomas.”

“The reverend, Percy! He was at the bookseller’s!” Percy’s own face paled as he realized what had transpired, but I was too insensible to notice. “He saw the copies of your essay there and ordered them all burned!”

Percy’s countenance was roughly the shade of a goosefeather pen. “Was...” His voice cracked, sharp and abrasive. “Was the Master there?”

“No, although it doesn’t much matter. You know the reverend will go straight to him.”

“Do you think he’ll...?” The question hung in the air unfinished.

“Depends whether he can draw himself away from his statuary for long enough. It’ll certainly be harder for him if you lay low for a while. I’ll post that for you.” I pointed at the letter he was carrying. Percy handed it to me and I set off once more.

It was not until I was halfway to the post office that it occurred to me to inspect Percy's letter before dispatching it. I slowed my pace. It couldn't hurt, I reasoned, eyeing the unsealed envelope. After all, with Percy indisposed for the immediate future, someone had to keep him out of trouble. I nevertheless felt a twinge of guilt as I slipped the letter out and began to read.

Dear Father,

The correspondence between us has of late been marked by hostility. I am entirely to blame for this discord, as I have been thoughtless with respect to your opinions. I will cease my efforts to persuade you on this matter indefinitely. I request however that you likewise withdraw your attempts to influence my own sentiments on the subject, for I cannot convert now that my eyes have been opened.

I nonetheless recognize that your fervent efforts spring from a desire to protect myself from the illiberality of the world at large. I must endeavour to assuage your apprehensions. Therefore I swear that I shall henceforth practice a greater degree of discretion in all matters but especially that of religion and shall by no means incite the wrath of the University. I ardently hope that by such prudence I may make amends for our dispute.

Yours,

Percy Shelley

I found myself marveling at Percy's diplomacy. Perhaps I had underestimated him again. I looked up to see that I had arrived, so I returned the letter to its envelope.

News of the fire at the bookseller's spread through the school like...well, like something that spreads very quickly. Percy did not emerge from his room until the following afternoon, when we could once again count on relative privacy. The sky remained cloudless, so we ventured out of doors.

“He’s going to come after you,” I began tactfully.

“Then I shall have no choice but to confess.”

“Confess? You must be joking!”

Percy glared at me. “What else would you have me do?”

“Lie.”

Percy blinked and stopped in his tracks, as though he had not considered the idea before. “Lie?”

“Naturally. Tell the Master you didn’t write it. Then he can honestly tell the reverend he interrogated you and go back to making his statues without further delay. Everybody is satisfied.”

“But I can’t just—”

“Percy, you have to. This is serious trouble we’re talking about. Now that the reverend is involved, you might face more than a fine.”

“I suppose you’re right,” he said resignedly.

“Naturally. Besides, you don’t want to go back on your promise to your fath—” I stopped talking midsentence.

Percy looked at me strangely. “Have you been reading my mail?”

“No, I didn’t,” I lied. “I was just saying—”

“Will you never learn to keep your nose out of my business?” he demanded.

“I’m just looking out for you, Percy!”

He snorted. “Clearly. Your eyes were so focused on me that you never noticed you don’t have any ground left to stand on. I can’t believe you almost persuaded me to lie—to the Master, no less!” He stalked off toward the dormitory, leaving me alone in the middle of the quadrangle. I followed, but was, as usual, too late.

Evidently Percy's habitual absence from class had not escaped the Master's notice, nor were we the only ones to take advantage of the privacy that afforded. I arrived in the common room to see the Master rise from the chair by the fireplace. A tall, sallow man, he wore an expression not, I noticed, of hostility, but of boredom. He walked to the center of the room, where Percy was standing, petrified, and waved a sheaf of papers in his face. "Did you write this?"

"I..." Percy started. His voice cracked. "I won't answer that."

The Master sighed and said, almost kindly, "Listen, boy. Just answer the question and you can go back to your studies."

Percy began again. "I di..." His eyes caught mine and narrowed. "I won't answer that," he repeated.

"Very well," snapped the Master. "I was hoping we might resolve this affair sensibly, but I see you are determined to waste my time. I shall waste no more of yours. You are hereby expelled from University College. You have two days to vacate your room. You will not be recompensed for tuition heretofore disbursed. Dismissed." He departed, shaking his head.

I looked helplessly at Percy. "This is all my fault," I moaned. I made for the door.

"No, Thomas, don't!" he warned, but it was too late.

I ran to catch up with the Master. "Sir!" I called. "Sir!" He stopped by the statue in the center of the quad, turning to look at me. "Sir, I couldn't help but overhear your conversation with Percy—"

"And I see you learned nothing from it," he interrupted.

I tried again. "Sir, it was my fault this all happened. I—"

He cut me off with an impatient wave of his hand. "Then you shall share in his punishment. You are hereby expelled from University College, etcetera. Dismissed!"

“But sir!”

“Dismissed!” he roared.

Percy found me there a few minutes later, still staring angrily at the statue. I told him what had happened.

“I’m sorry, Thomas. I didn’t mean for you to get involved in all this.”

“It was my fault,” I replied. Percy didn’t respond to this. I looked again at the statue, though my vision blurred a little. It was one of the Master’s. “Nobody could punish me now if I just...tore the arm off this bloody thing.” I took hold of the appendage in question.

“Thomas, don’t!” Percy put a hand on my shoulder. “Listen to me. I know you’re angry. I’m angry, too. In fact, I’d love nothing more than to knock the whole statue over. But I won’t. Because then I’d be no better than the reverend. This statue represents a hundred hours’ work at the least. To destroy it would be...well, for want of a better word, sacrilege.

“Besides, expulsion isn’t much of a punishment for us. It’s not as though we attended any classes, anyway. And now we’re free, Thomas! We can see the whole country! The world!”

I relinquished my grip and turned around, smiling wryly. “Very well, then. But I want an adventure!”

“Oh, you’ll have one,” Percy promised.

## Postscript

Thomas and Percy remained friends after their departure from Oxford, and together they traveled across England, though Thomas declined to accompany Shelley on his journeys to the Continent. Thomas never did learn to respect Percy’s privacy, and later became romantically involved with Percy’s wife. Percy forgave him, however, and they carried on a steady correspondence until Percy’s death, after which Thomas published a memoir of their stay at Oxford.



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# The way home

## Aquil Sheikh

the sun is high  
palm trees rise,  
the sky is pink,  
air is pleasant,...?

buildings stand,  
the vast ocean,  
blue and placid.

"the forecast...  
...there should..  
...strong storm..."

in a bloodstained paradise,  
empathetic koa trees stand still,  
somber and silent...  
men are forced to suicide...

the face of a panther is worn as the new face of humanity,  
over the mask of the old...

one last day in paradise....

caught in cat's cradle,  
sub rosa, there is something:  
an endless truth of instability and futility:  
an inevitable happening

In a brand new car  
chasing the sunset down the freeway

you shouldn't go down that road  
it's a dead end...  
not that it matters:  
(all of them are)

In the end, the dirt is the world's bank...

San Francisco:

people pleading with the sun,  
comforted by the white bands of lies,  
the wind is so dreadfully silent...

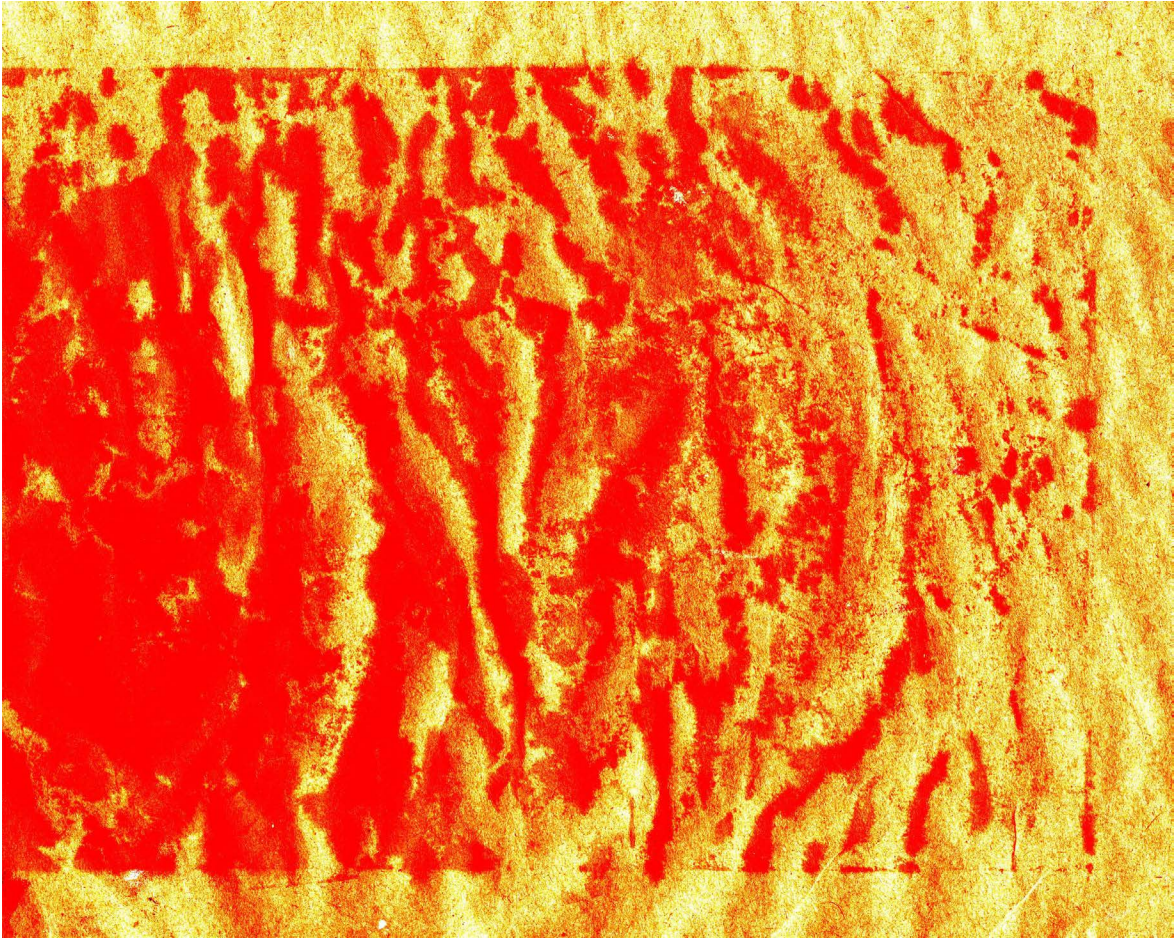
wind blows through the palm trees,  
leaves shaking and dancing around,  
almost playfully,  
the sun setting,  
the miami skyline so beautiful,  
reflected into a mirage in the green glassy sea,  
in the distance,  
a new dawn approaches...

that's all it is now, a mirage.

Waves crash on the shore, in Hawaii  
a peaceful setting,  
but soon, it seems, a storm is coming,  
the quiet rumble of lightning intrudes on a silence of rain  
"is there anything i can do? -"

    "no, this is far worse;  
    by now there's nothing that anyone can do about it"  
"then there's no point fighting it"  
a new dawn approaches...

you, the sun...  
you are electricity, you are light  
you are sounds itself, you are flight...  
you are the end, you are beautiful



Jordan Iserson

# This Machine

Kiera Ebeling

[click here for audio](#)



this M4CH1N3 doesN't pick and choose--

it (only) completes

exercises

in compliance.

<What have 7H3Y done to you now?>

1 heard the scr|ee(k)|ches,

the scr4pes,

p4cking the meat,

but (my?) sweet girl, <what have 7H3Y done to you now?>

I kn0w wh4t 7H3Y'V3 done to me...

now a liar--buyer of lies (7H3Y

say you are what you eat)

Somehow you, ev3n when they hVrt (twitch) you the M0sT

O Penelope in Peril

you findd th4t 1 haVe <<no M0r3 TeetH>>

ithink you knOW 7H3Y have nO m0re teeth too.

7H31R indusTRIAL sssssighssss,

smoghanginglow

s l o w l y pick1ng Us off one by 1  
and I (the junkYard SPI) unfuurl the stoRies, the l13s, the things  
done but  
not Said

If you were to T4ke a SledGeHamMer to My Body, notHing but SmOKE  
would come Out

(1 4m 4n emptY sheLL)

Did this M4CH1N3 take my Stuff1Ng?Or hav3 1 always been a  
M4CH1N3??



Riley Donahue

# Public Transportation

## Alan Tu

The 7 train runs above ground for part of its route in Queens. As it emerges from the tunnel, I awkwardly turn in my seat to gaze outside the window behind me. Night has spilled its ink across the sky yet again. Since humanity discovered fire, we have never been content with the dark. Although the real stars have yet to emerge, our stars have already been burning bright. We live in cities of light. But I don't see those lights. We saved those dazzling white LED bulbs for the Times Squares of the world, and forgot about everywhere else. Even in a neighborhood only miles away from the glitz, all I see is yellow. I see a warehouse, an almost-empty parking lot, exposed by a lone lamp on a pole. The peach-colored light, begging to be appreciated, has a soft, timid personality. Whose pickup truck is that Does he have a gray mustache Does he wear the same scuffed pair of jeans every day Where does he live Why is he working late Is he trying to support a family

I blink, and the landscape has changed. Through a large glass window I can see inside an office building. The lights are still on, not the dim energy-saving ones they use overnight, but the arrogant fluorescent tubes. From where I am sitting I can see the individual cubicles, the stack of papers on a desk, a potted house plant keeping company. Yet I see no one. who works at that desk? a man in his fifties? with thick glasses? hunched over that stack of papers eight hours a day? only working so he can retire well?

As my neck begins to ache, my view changes back to the harshly lit scenery of the subway car. The woman directly across from me has her eyes closed, deeply focused on the music pulsing through her earbuds. A large red Century 21 bag is at her feet. I'll never know what song she's listening to, what clothes she bought, where she's going.

The train descends down into absolute darkness. There are no lights outside to comfort me anymore. Still, the click-clack of the wheels against the track is a soothing sound, a lullaby crafted underground. My eyes close. Now all the light is gone.

The train stops. The doors open. I heard an exchange of footsteps. A draft of cool air enters the car. A voice says, "Please stand clear of the closing



doors.” In a few moments the train begins to move again. My lullaby returns. Suddenly a fortissimo voice pierces through the performance like one of Haydn’s jokes. “HOW ARE Y’ALL DOIN’ TODAY?” At one end of the car I see three young men, presumably in their 20s. Two of them are wearing black leather jackets; the other is wearing a white tank top. On their heads are snapbacks with unfamiliar logos; on their feet are Adidas Originals with yellowed soles, long shoelaces and flappy tongues. They carry only a boom box; they place that on the floor. They crank the music up, turning the car into a vibrating entity. The woman across from me extracts her earbuds.

Two men grab each other by the heels and begin to roll down the aisle like a bowling ball. As they approach a pole they skillfully change direction and roll around it. As they race past my knees, I press myself against the back of my seat. Back and forth they tumble. That’s art – mesmerizing and beautiful. Meanwhile, the other man is taking the concept in a different direction. Flips, handstands, and other challenging breakdancing moves I



Spencer Jones



have never seen before. When the music stops they pop back up, breathing hard and sweating. I clap, as do all the other passengers. They take off their hats and begin to walk down the aisle, swinging them side to side, thanking anyone willing to throw in a dollar.

At the next stop the three men disembark, high-fiving, hugging, and laughing. For all I know, they're heading off to another car for another performance. Who are they? Where do they come from? Do they have enough to eat? Where do they go at night? Why is their life like this?

I respect them.

The lullaby continues – it's different, somehow. It will never be the same.

# Perfectionist's Procrastination

## Michel Liu

Due to the fact that Hamlet vows to avenge his father in Act I but only completes the deed four acts later, it may seem that Hamlet is reluctant to kill, or even lazy. In fact, Hamlet is anything but. His obsession with perfectly exacting revenge both fuels his determination and also explains his paralysis. Hamlet is able to kill Claudius after realizing the futility of his pursuit for ideal justice.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare sets up several vengeful characters as foils to Hamlet. Fortinbras, Pyrrhus, and Laertes all have murdered fathers just like Hamlet, yet they contrast significantly to him because of their swift aggression. Laertes storms the castle, denouncing allegiance and damnation, all while unaware of the identity of his father's killer. Similarly, Horatio describes Fortinbras as "unimproved mettle hot and full...[who] shared up a list of lawless resolute" (Shakespeare 1.1.108-110).

These typical examples of indiscriminate and bloodthirsty avengers are not fitting for Hamlet's careful character—his vow to his father puts his "aesthetic principles" at stake in terms of his temperament, but more importantly, Hamlet may have to sacrifice "moral principles" in order to avenge his father (Rose 138). Therefore, Hamlet attempts to adapt the messy task of reprisal into a thoughtful one, with significant attention to consequence and morality; he "intends at least to be a revenger in a style that offends neither the modesty of nature nor his sense of human dignity. He intends to exercise discipline" (140). While his foils thirst for the satisfaction of retaliation, Hamlet strives for precise justice with all penalties considered—these different motives explain his hesitance.

Although he obviously reveres and loves his father, Hamlet refuses to act on hot-headed whims—he resents the notion of being "passion's slave" (Shakespeare 3.2.77). Rather, he strives more to act on the basis of right and wrong. When Hamlet exclaims in despair, "O cursed spite/ that ever I was born to set it right!" it is evident that Hamlet is intimidated by his responsibility and not particularly motivated by self-satisfaction (1.5.210-211). However, he is still resolute in his mission: "born" suggests that principles and a sense of duty drive him, not personal zeal. Hamlet is not exactly a beacon

of righteousness, but he does exhibit a general sense of morality: in his very first soliloquy, Hamlet rants on the “unweeded garden” of the world and the wickedness of his mother’s remarriage (1.2.139). Hamlet’s propensity to behave morally is also due to religion. While he doubts the existence of God and an afterlife, he still fears damnation for most of the play.

Compared to the theatrical bloodthirst of Laertes and Fortinbras, Hamlet’s goal of thorough and fair revenge takes much longer to orchestrate. This is because justice requires a complex and delicate balance. Hamlet hesitates to kill Claudius in fear of tipping that balance too far in either direction. In one extreme, Hamlet may accidentally punish a guiltless person. By testing Claudius with “The Murder of Gonzago,” Hamlet takes time to validate Claudius’s crime with “grounds more relative” than the report of the ghost (2.2.632-633). Hamlet seems to think that murdering an innocent may violate heavenly moral law, as he suspects that the ghost may be a demon trying to exploit his emotional state and thus damn him.

Compare Hamlet’s self-conscious thought process to Laertes’s spirited declaration of payback:

Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!

I dare damnation...

Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged

Most thoroughly for my father (Shakespeare 4.5.150-154).

Laertes contrasts starkly with Hamlet by showing no regard for the repercussions of heavy-handed retaliation. Hamlet is the exact opposite: he considers even the metaphysical price of every possible deed. Interestingly, Claudius placates Laertes with the same question that initially paralyzes Hamlet: “Is ‘t writ in your revenge/ That, swoopstake, you will draw both friend and/ foe?” (4.5.162-163). The fear of inadvertently hurting a “friend” during the pursuit of justice is so successful in delaying both Laertes and Hamlet that the observation “Conscience does make cowards of us all” rings particularly true (3.1.91).

On the other extreme of the justice spectrum, one may punish a wrongdoer too lightly. This imbalance stops Hamlet’s sword when he stands over Clau-

dius in prayer. Claudius's guilt now evident, Hamlet should have no hesitation to kill him (since he views the murder of his father's killer as fair). But once again, Hamlet pauses to consider the spiritual system of damnation and exclaims, "Why this is hire and salary, not revenge..." (3.3.84). This time, Hamlet feels that a punishment not severe enough would fail justice. His doubt about the worth of life further complicates his search for "perfect" retribution.

So, if Hamlet procrastinates because he is like Goldilocks in search of a "just right" revenge, at what point does he cast aside his perfectionist outlook? Perhaps the sight of Fortinbras's army inspired Hamlet. Upon seeing the impressive progress of his foil, Hamlet vows, "My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!" (4.5.69). This may explain his cold-blooded execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Since Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are merely two ignorant followers, killing them is arguably unnecessary and contradicts Hamlet's previous hesitation to kill without "grounds more relative."

However, I think a later realization holds more responsibility for Hamlet's eventual vengeance. After contemplating exhumed skulls, Hamlet finally develops the answer to his perfectionism: "Let be" (Shakespeare 5.2.238). Hamlet is now able to act without the naggings of justice and possible repercussions because, by this point, "Hamlet's view of the moral order of things is changed; he no longer believes that man can determine anything, one act is as good as another for bringing about a result" (Snider 86). He realizes that he cannot control his fate or others'—nor can he orchestrate perfect justice, which does not even matter in the grand scheme of life and death. This revelation allows him to at last seize revenge, despite its bloody consequences.

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# Everything Suspected Ahead

## Rebecca Flisnik

Dust is what can be seen,  
Leaving the metropolis.  
Like a door separating the living room  
From a cellar.  
All that I knew behind me,  
Everything suspected ahead. A terrain  
With sand the color of rotting oranges,  
Blatantly dropped into the obvious.  
No clouds nor blue lurked in the sky, just  
A haze of light, smothering  
All in its presence.  
Only some parched trees, a miserable  
Failure to shading light from the heat from plastering  
This land with dehydration.  
Further out  
More indigenous beings,  
Trickling our way. Like a lack of water  
That perspired from the pitiful few trees  
Which stood wimpy, drained.  
A village of tents, deteriorated huts,  
These could be seen falling down slowly  
Before my own eyes. Children ran  
The circumference of the village,  
Out the main gathering area,  
About the two sad stalks for foliage  
And back. Again over, over again.  
What else did they have to do?  
Other than wallow in a stinging temperature  
Radiating off their charcoal backs.  
Mileage upon mileage of desertion  
Locked them into a bubble,  
Realizing nothing about the real world  
In all its actuality. But perhaps  
They did know.  
In all commotions they stood,

For they remained a tribe,  
Dancing to ancient songs of their culture.  
It is for certain they were real.  
They were isolated from the real.  
This made them smarter, a celebratory kind. For  
Life proved precious, indeed it be celebrated.  
In fact they knew more than we.

# Exodus

## Evan Wisner

[click here for audio](#)



At the village we passed through last week, the people complimented us on our leather shoes, but we had sold our shoes three months ago for bread.

The children walk, bare, as the sand burns their feet and the sun peels their skin. They wear white suits, and black leather shoes. A preparation for the masquerade we march towards, their porcelain masks, now worn constantly, have chipped in anticipation.

A slow, hoarse hymn is murmured by the women, who wear their hair as shawls. Their babes have turned to rocks in their arms, taken and swal-



Christopher Fernandez



lowed up by their fathers.

We will arrive by dawn, if the night does not take us. If the rains do not drown us with sorrow, if the beasts do not maul us with their rage, then we will claim the sun at dawn.

Their cuts are deep, and many who have already cracked under the weight of the high tided sun, shatter under the howl of the moon. The cries seem endless. God's name is screamed to heavens in the hope that we will be taken, to heaven or to hell—anywhere from this place.

Reflected in the sand, in the blood, and in the tears, is peace. Their faces do not move to grimace, their eyes are not welled and closed by the weight of sorrow, and their bodies do not heave under the sun.

I did not dig any graves, God smite me from Heaven for it; the sand will bury them soon. I make my way to the sea, and, upon reaching it, it does not part for me as I had been promised those months long passed. As I kneel and pray, I hope for nothing but an end to this misery, but, as with all other prayers, this is answered only with the gentle song of the wind.

