

PEGASUS

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PEGASUS
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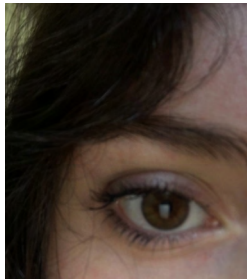


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Distance

Alan Tu

Standing before La Grande Jatte
Walking forward,
walking backward.
Trying to find the point at which
the dots no longer look
like dots.

I give up
and sit down on the large bench
in the middle of the room.
And realize that this is the distance
I have been looking for.



Stardust

Maggie Scharf

“Honey?” Stella DiMae shrieked as she clacked down the nicotine-yellow hallway, cheaply printed early copies of movie posters gliding past her. “Honey, where are you? Which one’re you in?”

One of the heavy metal doors opened and Stella’s adopted daughter, Carmen, peeked her head out. “In here, mom. Keep it down, we’re filming.”

“You said it was your lunch break.”

“I said that forty minutes ago, when it was our lunch break. Now everyone’s filming again. What-”

“Ooh, I can’t wait to see!” Stella’s rings clanked as she clapped her hands together in excitement. “How big’s your part, honey?” Carmen sighed, heaving the door wider open to let Stella hurry through. “Not big. I have another mom role.”

“What?”

“Look, it’s a paying job. That’s all that matters. I don’t have to be some huge star like you were, you know. Anyways, we’re done in three hours. You can sit over there.”

“Aw, I’m so excited! When do you come on?” Carmen rolled her eyes. “The scene after the next one. Please don’t act like such a mom. I thought you were done embarrassing me when I graduated high school.”

“You’re never too old to be loved by your mom, honey.” The two women watched the filming in silence. After a minute Stella leaned over. “Hey, can I see a copy of the script?”

“Mom- wait. What time is it?”

Stella checked her heavy silver watch. “About two.”

“What? You’re supposed to be picking up Luisa from school right now!”

“Aagh!” Stella yelped. The entire crew turned to stare at her as she clattered to her feet and towards the door. “I’m so sorry, sweetie! I’m coming!” she called to her non-present granddaughter.



“I’m so sorry, sweetie, I’m really, really sorry,” Stella apologized fifteen minutes later. The rain-drenched girl said nothing as she climbed into the front seat of Stella’s 1957 Bel Air convertible. “Your mom was filming again today. It’s that flick with the ghost.”

“Hmm,” Luisa grunted disinterestedly.

“So, uh,” Stella began, “how was school?”

“Good.”

“That’s good. Almost didn’t recognize you with that new hairdo.”

“It’s a pixie cut. Lots of girls are getting them.”

“Oh. Yeah. No, I mean, it’s good, I like it.”

The old car’s sputtering rumble was all that filled the air for a few minutes.

“So have they announced your musical yet?”

“Yeah. City Lights.”

“Ooh, like the Chaplin film?”

“I don’t think so. It’s new.”

“Aw. Well, I’ll still come, even if there’s no Chaplin. Is it sad? I always cry at the end of City Lights. Maybe I shouldn’t come.”

“Grandma-”

“Aw, heck, of course I’ll come. I’d never miss anything with you in it, sweetie.”

“But-”

“When’re you auditioning?”

“Well...auditions are today.”

“Oh, you already went?”

“No.”

Stella swerved over to the side of the street. “What? You’re kidding.”

“No, I’m not-”

“I’ll take you back.” Stella signaled to turn back onto the road.

“No, please don’t.”

Stella’s hands dropped off the wheel. “Why not?”

Luisa tried to bury her chin in her hoodie. “I actually... don’t want to audition this year.”

“Whaaaaaat?!”

“Mom said it’s okay-”

“Sweetie, what’re you talking about?”

“I’m doing stage crew instead. Mom said it’s a good compromise.”

“Wha, wha- Compromise?! Why? Why d’you gotta compromise?!”

“I mean- I just don’t want to-”

“Don’t you wanna be in the spotlight, sweetie? Not behind it?”

“Uh-”

“But, but listen, don’t you wanna, y’know, keep your acting skills sharp? You’ll be all rusty next year!”

“I... don’t want to do it next year either.”

“Aagh! I don’t believe it.” Stella was calm enough now to pull back onto the street. “Let’s go home, talk to your mom. Let’s see what she says.”

“You said she was filming.”



"Ugh!" Stella braked hard in front of a red light. "You're right, you're right. Later, we'll talk about it later."

Luisa's chest rose and fell, but Stella couldn't hear her sigh.

Five minutes later Stella caught herself driving to the studio and made a U-turn. "But sweetie," she realized as she pulled into her lane, "what about next year?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if you don't do it this year, how're the directors gonna get to know you? So they can cast you again? You'll want a part next year, wontcha?"

Luisa frowned. "Next year?"

"Yeah."

"Well, it won't matter, right? Won't I be at another school?"

"Huh? No. What grade are you in?"

"I'm a freshman."

"Yeah, so what do you mean?"

"Like, after we move?"

"After you what?" Stella couldn't stop herself from screaming. The convertible swerved out of its lane.

"Grandma, we're on the highway!" Luisa shrieked.

"I know, I know!" Stella pulled over again. "Did you say after you move?" she panted.

"Yeah. Wait, Mom didn't say anything to you about it?"



Stella's dining room came off the kitchen, forming the corner of the downtown LA apartment building. It had the biggest windows in the penthouse and none of the framed movie posters in the other rooms, because Stella felt weird looking at herself when she ate.

Carmen and Luisa were sitting at the table when she walked in. "Here you go!" Stella chirped. "I made lasagna." She set the tray down with those checkered potholders that made her look like a grandma. "And you're always saying I can't cook."

As the three ate, Stella tried to think of something she could say to ease the tension gripping her heart.

"So... how'd the filming go?" she decided eventually.

"It was fine," Carmen answered. "I think we'll be done soon."

The phrase done soon shot a quick burst of fear into Stella's veins. "Wha... Whaddaya mean, done soon?"

"Well...done filming the movie."

"Oh! Yeah yeah yeah, that's good. That's great, I can't wait to

see. Luisa, you excited too?"

"Mm-hmm."

Stella cleared her throat into the sudden pause. "That's good. Anything exciting happening at school?"

"Umm..." Luisa thought for a second. "Robotics club starts tomorrow."

"Ooh, robotics club!" Stella tried. Ok, ok, what's a good follow-up question? she thought. "What's that?" Shoot!

"It's like a..." Luisa was at a loss. "Club. About robotics."

"Oh. Lotta math and stuff?"

The girl crinkled her nose. "Hope not. I hate math."

Stella picked at the corner of the solid wood table as the three avoided each other's eyes.

"Mom... is something wrong?" Carmen asked cautiously.

"Huh? What? Why do you ask?" Stella's crimson pin-kie nail broke as she clawed the edge of the table.

"Well... you sound shrill. And you're fidgeting."

Stella held still for a moment to prove her wrong. Holy cow, I really was fidgeting. "N-no... I'm not... I-" She clamped her lips shut and opened them again. "Are you really planning on moving, honey?"

Luisa flinched so hard she dropped her fork. It rang like a bell as it hit the floor.

Carmen shut her eyes, her face unreadable as she inhaled, gathering her thoughts.

"May I be excused?" Luisa murmured. Stella and Carmen both nodded. The girl stood up, lifting her chair off the ground as she put it back so it wouldn't scrape against the floor. She picked up her dishes and padded out of the room in her socks.

"You wanna talk about it somewhere else?" Stella asked after a moment. Carmen nodded. The two began to clear the table, first the plates, then the silverware, then the pot holders and tray. They picked up the placemats and put them in the cabinet, filled the pan with soap and water and left it in the sink, put everything else into the dishwasher and ran it. When they were done, they stared at the empty table, took some washcloths from the kitchen, and scrubbed it. They changed the vase in the center and changed the flowers in the vase. Then they rinsed out the vase and threw out the old flowers.

Finally there was nothing left to do. The two stepped out onto Stella's balcony, the one that used to make Carmen nervous as a little kid. Now she leaned over the railing and blew an anxious breath out over the city.

Stella had always loved Los Angeles at night, beautiful in an eerie, twinkling way. Like the sky had flipped upside



down and dumped all the stars onto the ground.

"I'm sorry," Carmen said at last. "I was going to tell you sooner. I'm still really just thinking about it." She sighed. "If Luisa told you I'm actually planning on it, it's because she's eager. She really wants to move."

"...she does?" Stella choked.

"I mean- not because of you. She just wants to try living in a new place. Get out of LA. She's still really a kid, you know? She's curious."

Luisa's room had a window above the balcony. Inside, she turned on her lamp, the cold fluorescent light spilling onto her mother and grandmother. Spotlighting them.

Without her permission, Stella's fingers dipped into her pocket and brought out a cigarette and lighter.

"Mind if I smoke?"

"That's up to you. It's your house."

Stella nodded and blew her smoke into the breeze. A door opened in the club across the street and loud, thumping music poured out. A new strain of music fell from Luisa's open window and the two beats clicked against each other until the club's door swung shut.

Stella sighed. "Yeah. And I mean, yeah, that's natural. Wanting to- to move around, and see stuff."

A drunk stumbled across the street below and practically fell into the crosswalk.

"Why do you want to move?" Stella asked hesitantly.

Carmen paused for a long moment before answering. "I've lived here all my life. And I love it here, but... I can't help wondering if I'd be happier somewhere else. Not because I'm not happy now, but... you never know, right? I feel like I have to go see."

The cold of the metal railing bled into Stella's arms.

"And I want to see what opportunities I might have... that...don't involve acting."

Luisa's music changed key.

"And I wish I could have told you another time, because I know you're upset about Luisa dropping the play. But-"

"What're you gonna do instead?" Stella murmured.

"I'm thinking about teaching."

"Teaching?"

"Yeah. Maybe teaching art."

Stella let out a lungful of smoke and didn't respond.

".... Mom?"

"Where do you wanna go?"

"I don't know. I said I'm still thinking about it." Carmen considered for a moment. "Portland sounds nice."

"What, in Oregon?"

"Yeah."

"The hipster place?"

Carmen didn't answer.

"Honey-"

"I'll probably go to college there, and get a teaching degree-"

"You said you were just thinking about it."

"I guess I've been thinking about it a lot."

"When..." Stella whispered, "when are you gonna go?"

"Mom, don't guilt me like that. Please."

Stella tossed her unfinished cigarette towards the dumpster on the street corner. When she blinked, her eyes felt like they had little needles in them. It was these neon lights all over the place, that was what it was.

"I'm 45."

Stella rubbed her eyes. Demandingly bright, those lights, desperate to get someone to look at them. Pay them some attention before they went out. That was all they- or anyone- could really ask for. Wasn't it.

"I have a daughter. I can- I should live on my own."

The sky was a deep black, startlingly dark for all those lights on.

"We'll visit you."

Like a void.

"You've lived alone for years, mom. How is this any different?"

"How many miles away is Portland?" Stella asked softly.

"Mom."

Stella shivered. "Let's go inside." But she didn't move.

"Mom."

The holes in the balcony's metal grating had never felt so big. It was like Stella could just fall right through them.

"Mom, I'm sorry. We're not going anywhere, okay? I didn't want to hurt your feelings."

The light in Luisa's room clicked off. The music kept playing, though.

"Really. Don't worry about it, mom. Just don't worry about it." Carmen opened the sliding glass door and stepped back into the house. A little puff of warm air hit Stella as her daughter closed the door.

And that was it.



I stood in the gilded cage,
Marble pillars holding up the painted sky
Where the lords and ladies of London gathered under the artificial sun.

I was surrounded by hollow smiles painted red
Framed by powdered faces and bejeweled necks.
The clean air poisoned with heavy perfumes
And the foul breath of older men with yellowed teeth.

Dresses of the finest silks and lace trimming
Spun to the tune of the harpsichord.
The prettiest faces hid the pettiest souls.
And yet here, I was still the pretender.

The night beckoned.
I found myself on the balcony
Where the light and music still leaked from frosted windows.
The air promised winter
And my clouded breath was stolen by the breeze.

In the town where tongues are held
And cheeks are turned,
I looked out into the cobblestone streets
Where the shadows fought the yellow glow of gas lamps.
I saw the Thames in the distance
Shards of moonlight scattered across the surface.

I made a pact
With the muttering shadows.
I will wear lies like earrings
And plaster a smile to my face.
I will live by night.



Meena by Mary Bedzyk

Woman in Blue

Mallory Michalko



Whose Navy?

Tristan Berlet



Act I Scene 1

The lights come up on the office of the Admiral of the United States 4th Fleet in the South Atlantic in 1943. It is aboard the flagship, the USS Wardrobe Wilson, an aircraft carrier. It consists of a window stage left, the Admiral's desk center stage, his secretary's desk downstage right, two doors on the wall which covers the back of the stage, one extreme stage left and the other extreme stage right, and a chalkboard on the wall, behind the admiral's desk, slightly stage left, on which is a list of names. Admiral Adam Hicks, is standing at the window, staring out of it with his golden binoculars. He is 45, a graduate of Annapolis. He is one of the few sane people in the entire fleet, and he knows it. However, he is determined to win the war, even with the group he has.

Hicks: *(Pause)* Why is Jenkins...trying to land his plane... upside down? *(Sound effect of a plane crashing. Hicks sighs, walks over to the chalkboard, and crosses off the first name on the list. He then moves to the intercom on his desk and presses a button on it).* Clean up crew to the flight deck.

Honour Garnett walks in through the stage right door. She is in her twenties, beautiful and intelligent. She is in love with the ship's captain, but hates Admiral Hicks.

Honour: Good morning, Admiral.

Hicks: Good morning, Miss Garnett.

Honour: *(As she sits down at her desk)* How's the war going?

Hicks: Just fine. Did you see what just happened on the flight deck?

Honour: *(No emotion)* Yes?

Hicks: Why would someone do something like that?

Honour: I'm not surprised, considering your leadership.

Hicks: *(Looking at her)* And what's that supposed to mean?

Honour: With the staggering level of your incompetence, I'm surprised something like that hasn't happened before.

Hicks: That kind of thing has nothing to do with me. *(Sitting down at his desk)* I just command the fleet as a whole. It's Capt. MacGrath that deals with the day to day operations of the ship.

Honour: It's still your fault.

Hicks: Everything's my fault in your mind. If the junior senator from the state of Oklahoma fell down the stairs of the Lincoln Memorial and crushed the President's dog, you'd say it was my fault.

Honour: Well, it would be.

Hicks: Not everything is my fault

Honour: What about the name of the ship?

Hicks: Now that is my fault. Oversight is my profession, and that was a lack of oversight, and, therefore, my fault. *(Honour huff)* I'm surprised the secretary decided to keep the name. It's somewhat insulting, serving on the USS Wardrobe Wilson. *(Does a little work, then stares out the window again)* I still don't know how that was allowed to happen. I want to talk to Capt. MacGrath, can you call him up, please.

Honour: *(Rising)* I'll get him in person. *(Starts to exit through the stage right door)*

Hicks: No, no, there's really no nee- *(She's already gone)* What on Earth compelled me to hire her? *(Phone rings. He picks it up)* Hello? Ah, good morning, Secretary...what? You're in Hawaii? So it's not morning...But, sir, it is morning over here... So time of day follows you around wherever you go? Ok... what happens if you're dead? *(Holds phone away from his ear as the Secretary scream at him)* Yes, yes, sir, I understand...No, I didn't forget that you're immortal, I was merely...Sir... Sir...It was a hypothetical...a hypothetical, sir...a hypothetical...No, I'm not a traitor, sir...it was A HY-PO-THE-TI-CAL!!! No, never mind, never mind...what was it you wanted to talk about? A progress report. Well, we seem to be doing alright...none of the ships have sunk...yet, and... what? Give me a moment. *(Puts down the phone and walks to the window. He looks out of it, then walks back. He picks up the phone again)* Yes, the sea is still there, sir. Goodbye...*(Honour walks in)* goodbye...*(Honour tries to walk out again. To Honour)* Not



you! *(She stops)* No, sir, I am saying goodbye to you...good-bye...goodbye...goodbye! GO AWAY!!! *(Slams phone down)*

Honour: The Great Capt. MacGrath to see you, sir.

Hicks: Ah, very good. Why don't you start filing an accident report?

Honour: OK *(She sits down at her desk and does so)*

Captain Scotty MacGrath enters from the stage right door. He is the 32 year-old captain of the USS Wardrobe Wilson. As it is the Admiral's flagship, the job does not entail much, and he hates that fact. He wants to be admiral, and doesn't try to hide it. But when the Admiral isn't around, his attitude quickly changes.

MacGrath: Mornin', sir! *(Saluting)*

Hicks: *(Stands)* Good morning, Captain.

MacGrath: How's your great fatness today?

Hicks: Oh, don't you start, I've had enough from her already.

Honour: No, you haven't.

MacGrath: Don't insult her, or I'll shoot you out of one of the deck guns.

Hicks: *(Pause)* This is an aircraft carrier. We don't have deck guns.

MacGrath: *(Like a young child)* So?

Hicks: It's blatant ignorance like that that just killed someone this morning.

MacGrath: It's not my job to teach people how to fly!

Hicks: It is your job to make sure that no one tries to land upside down!

MacGrath: Oh, it's nothing, they were probably just drunk.

Hicks: *(Eyes widen)* There's no alcohol allowed on a navy ship!

MacGrath: *(Putting his arm around Hicks)* Do you really believe that, sir?

Hicks: Yes, I do, and if I find anything to contradict that, I'll have the violators stuffed in the brig with a gigantic cork in their mouth and a bottle of fine whiskey just out of their reach. Am I understood?

MacGrath: *(Sighs and backs off)* Very well. *(Smiles and shakes his head at the audience)*

Hicks: *(Puts on his hat)* Anyways, I'm headed down to the flight deck, see if I can find out what happened. Honour, keep working on that report. MacGrath, try to keep the ship sailing.

MacGrath: *(Salutes)* Yes, sir. *(Hicks salutes and exits through the stage left door)* Cantankerous old fool.

Honour: He'll be even more like that when he hears the news.

MacGrath: News?

Honour: *(Beckons him to come closer. He does, and she leans in)* My mother's coming aboard.

MacGrath: That should be interesting.

Honour: Ha. I'm not sure interesting is quite the right word. She's the reason I'm in the navy.

MacGrath: She inspire you?

Honour: No, I just wanted to get away from her. *(Sighs)* And yet, I've failed. She's 72 years old and yet still manages to pop up anywhere in the world with little to no warning.

MacGrath: What does she want this time?

Honour: She wants to play matchmaker. She doesn't understand how I haven't managed to find a husband on a ship filled with thousands of men.

MacGrath: *(Puts his arm around her)* Well, you've made a good start.

Honour: *(Looks up)* I know.

MacGrath: How long do you think we have? *(Looking at the stage left door)*



Honour: *(Looks at her watch)* About twenty minutes.
They stare at each other for a second, then embrace as the lights go out.

Scene 2

Admiral Hicks, Capt. MacGrath and Capt. Gavin Curran are standing around Hick's desk, staring at the map which is on it. Curran is a 31 year old failed actor who commands the Wilson's companion destroyer, the USS John Pal Jones, another victim of incompetent navy yard painters. He cannot stand stupidity of any kind, and is constantly bickering with MacGrath. He feels a modicum of sympathy for Hicks, on account of having to deal with MacGrath on a daily basis.

Hicks: As we continue further west, the risk of running into a pack of U-Boats increases exponentially. Now, we are expecting another destroyer, the USS Lansdale, to join us in a little under a week, but until then, Capt. Curran, you're going to have to work twice as hard, you're our only defense.

Curran: Yes, sir.

Hicks: How's the Jones running?

Curran: Very well, sir. We've had no problems all month.

Hicks: Very good.

MacGrath: It's sad, ain't it?

Hicks: What is?

MacGrath: That we have to rely on a man like him to protect us from drowned ships.

Hicks: What's wrong with him?

MacGrath: He's too uptight...and he doesn't drink. *(Curran slowly starts fuming)*

Hicks: I think it's better that he doesn't drink while operating a navy destroyer.

MacGrath: It would be a fun and harmless addition to his life.
Hicks: *(Stares at MacGrath)* Yes, it would be fun and harmless for him to start drinking. Maybe he can start swinging his ship wildly from left to right as part of some mad drinking

game. While he's at it, how about firing off his guns in random directions. If we're lucky, maybe he'll hit Berlin. But if we're not, he's liable to sink half of the Atlantic Fleet. Yes, him drinking would be a fantastic idea.

MacGrath: You're all a bunch of boring old farts. I'm going to the mess hall. *(Leaves through the stage right door without saluting)*

Curran: That man is dangerous. He oughtn't to be allowed on a PT boat, much less in command of an aircraft carrier.

Hicks: It's the Secretary's decision, not mine.

Curran: It should be yours, you're in command of this fleet.

Hicks: Well, it isn't, and we all suffer for it.

Curran: Well, I'll try and keep you guys as safe as I can. *(They shake hands, and he walks to the stage left door)* "These injuries the King now bears will be revenged home." *(Salutes)*

Hicks: I hope that statement also goes for Admirals.

Curran nods, and Hicks salutes back. As Curran tries to exit, he is slammed into by Pelagius Fonseca. Pelagius is an aging janitor on the ship, and hates everyone aboard. Because of this blatant hatred, not much else about him is revealed.

Pelagius: Get out of my way before you wear my dirty water bucket.

Curran falls through the door, his feet sticking through the doorway. Pelagius slams the door on them. A squeal of pain is heard.

Hicks: Ah, hello Pelagius, how have you been today?

Pelagius: *(Cleaning up the room)* Terrible

Hicks: Well, glad to see nothing's out of the ordinary.

Pelagius: Yep

Hicks: *(Rolling up the map)* Well, don't worry, you'll be back home to your family soon enough.

Pelagius: Not if Franco has anything to say about it.



Hicks: Hm?

Pelagius: With all the chaos in Europe at the moment, what's preventing him from invading my country?

Hicks: *(Sticking the map in a drawer)* We'll protect Portugal.

Pelagius: Oh, no you won't. All you guys want to do is kill Germans.

Hicks: Well, hopefully no one will invade Portugal. *(Picking up his hat)* Goodnight. *(Leaves through the stage right door)*

Pelagius: *(After him)* I hope you die in your sleep...painfully

Hicks: *(Off)* You too!

Pelagius: *(Continuing to clean up around the room)* I hate this war, I hate this country, I hate salt water, I hate fresh water, I hate Spaniards, I hate fascists, I hate democracy, I hate senior citizens *(Thinks)* I am a senior citizen...I hate myself. Why do I have to clean up after everyone, they're adults, aren't they? *(Huffs)* I'll show them. *(He opens the desk drawer, takes out the map, and throws it out the window. He looks out the window)* Why does it have to float? I hate things that float. *(He walks over to Honour's trash bin and picks it up)* And the girl, I hate her, too, young bimbo, she makes me sick. *(He looks in and sees something. He pulls out a note and reads it)* "My cabin, tonight." *(He looks closer)* I know that handwriting!

With broom in hand, he quickly runs out the stage right door. Hick's voice comes on the PA.

Hicks: Whoever is goose stepping on the flight deck, please stop before our guards mistake you for the enemy.

The stage right door flies open as Honour and MacGrath run on, half dressed. They are closely followed by Pelagius, who is hitting them with his broom. During the following scene, they are running around the room, trying not to be hit.

Honour: OW!

Pelagius: You dirty people!

MacGrath: The window was closed, no one could hear us, OW!

Honour: It isn't illegal, OW!

MacGrath: Why are you doing this? OW!

Pelagius: You foul, foul people!

MacGrath: We had just started the sherry! OW!

Honour: You are not my grandfather! OW!

MacGrath: He is old enough! OW! OW! OW!

Honour: Neither of us deserve this!! OW!

MacGrath: We weren't in your cabin! OW! Do you even have a cabin? OW! Why don't you find a nice girl of your own OW! OW! OW! OW! OW!

Pelagius: It's people like you who are destroying this world, and it's time I rid it of two of them!

He raises his broom up high. A gunshot rings out. They all freeze. Hicks enters through the stage right door in his pajamas. He walks over to the chalkboard and crosses off another name. He turns around and starts walking back. Halfway there, he finally notices the others, stops, and stares at them. He sighs and walks out.

Pelagius: Go to bed, both of you!

MacGrath: *(Looking at Honour)* Oh, we will. *(Gets hit)* OW!!

Pelagius: SEPERATELY!!! *(He rushes them out of the stage right door and shuts it. The phone rings. Pelagius looks around, then picks it up)* Hello? Who is this? Secretary? I just chased the secretary out of the room...she was practically naked...Oh, you're a secretary...who's secretary? The navy's...Oh, you're head of the navy? I hate you...Where's the admiral? Asleep...no it's not eight in the morning...well you're an idiot, then... what does the admiral need to know? Ooh...

Lights go out



Scene 3

The Admiral is sitting on his desk, talking on the phone.

Hicks: Yes, I do feel much taller up here...All of three inches...Yes, sitting on desks is very interesting...Do you mind if



we return to discussions relevant to the navy? Hello? Hello?
(Hangs up. Shouting is heard from the flight deck. Hicks picks up his binoculars and walks over to the window. He looks out) Oh, please don't paint targets on the flight deck! Reynolds! (Becoming concerned, even alarmed) Reynolds! Reynolds!! Reynolds!!!
(Sound effect of a plane crashing. Hicks walks over to the chalkboard and crosses off another name. He then walks over to the intercom) Can someone please wipe those targets off of the flight deck before someone bombs us by mistake! (Sighs)

Recruit Heribert LaFrenz flies through the stage left door, pushed in by Pelagius' broom.

Pelagius: Trash Delivery!

Pelagius exits. LaFrenz is in his early twenties, and has just joined the navy. He is not terribly bright, but still tries to get along with everyone aboard. Hicks pities him, because he keeps him human in this world of insanity.

LaFrenz: (Saluting) Morning, sir!

Hicks: (Salutes back) Good morning, Heribert, I hope Pelagius didn't hurt you too badly.

LaFrenz: Oh, no, thankfully. It was a real thrill, getting to run around like that. Real fun, indeed!

Hicks: I'm glad it was exciting.

LaFrenz: It's the only fun I've had this entire trip.

Hicks: What about that game I showed you?

LaFrenz: Chess?

Hicks: Yes.

LaFrenz: It was boring...and the horsie didn't neigh!

Hicks: (Sighs) It must be hard, transitioning from life on a farm to a crowded ship.

LaFrenz: Yeah, I miss the wide open spaces and the stinky animals. The ship's kinda tight.

Hicks: Are you Claustrophobic?

LaFrenz: No, I love Santa Claus. But I sure hate these tiny

spaces.

Hicks: Do you have any hobbies?

LaFrenz: Huh?

Hicks: Hobbies. Things you like to do?

LaFrenz: I love the rodeo.

Hicks: (Pause) Anything that you can physically do on a ship?

LaFrenz: (Thinks, or at least tries to) No, not that I know of.

Hicks: Maybe you should try to find one.

Honour enters from the stage right door.

LaFrenz: Well, it would be fun!!

Honour: What is it this time? Usually anything that he considers fun ends up in a stampede.

LaFrenz: They do not!! I only let the navy yard horses out a couple of times.

Honour: (Huffs and sits down) What's this kraut doing her anyways?

LaFrenz: I'm Austrian, thank you!

Hicks: And his family has lived in America for over a century anyways.

LaFrenz: Yeah! That's 100 days...

Hicks: ...years!

Honour: Well, I don't care, I still think of him as the enemy.

Hicks: Come one, you two, back to your work, come on, now.

LaFrenz: I'll look into the hobby thing, sir. Bye. (Salutes with his left hand as he exits through the stage left door)

Honour: Such an interesting name for such an uninteresting person.

Hicks: Who do you like on this ship?



Honour: *(Dreamily)* Scotty.

Hicks: We all know that, is there anybody on this ship who you don't smear your lipstick all over on a daily basis?

Honour: *(Thinks)* A few of the sailors, none of the officers.

Hicks: *(Sighs)* Anyways, would you mind calling *(Mocking)* Scotty *(Normal)*, we need him for today's meeting with Curran.

Honour: I'll get him. *(Rises and quickly starts to exit through the stage right door)*

Hicks: No, not physically!!!! *(She's gone. Pause. After her)* Don't show him your knickers!!

Curran enters through the stage left door, escorted by LaFrenz

LaFrenz: I've found a hobby, sir; Escorting Captains!!

Hicks: *(Kindly)* That's your job, LaFrenz, not a hobby.

LaFrenz: *(Disappointed)* Oh.

Curran: Please leave, Recruit LaFrenz.

LaFrenz: I'm sorry, sirs.

Curran: You better be, you ignorant fool, now go! *(LaFrenz sulks out the stage left door without saluting)* First MacGrath, then him, how do you keep this ship running?

Hicks: I don't know, my friend, I really don't.

MacGrath enters through the stage right door, carrying Honour. He trips and falls, sending her flying. MacGrath tries to get up and help her, but trips over his own legs and falls again. Honour had tried to get up, but is taken out by MacGrath during his second fall. All that is seen behind Honour's desk is her leg, which is sticking up in the air, showing off her heels. They struggle for a few seconds to get up as Hicks and Curran watch in odd amazement.

Honour: *(From behind the desk)* Stop looking up my skirt!!

Hicks and Curran turn around. Honour struggles to her feet and leans over her desk, her hair a mess. She is accidentally propelled over it by MacGrath as he stands up behind the desk. He has one of her shoes in his mouth, and his cap is hanging off of one ear. He leans over the desk, and spits out the shoe onto Honour. He looks down and

sees her laying on her head, and hurries around the desk to help her up.

To Be Continued in a Few Years' Time...



Train

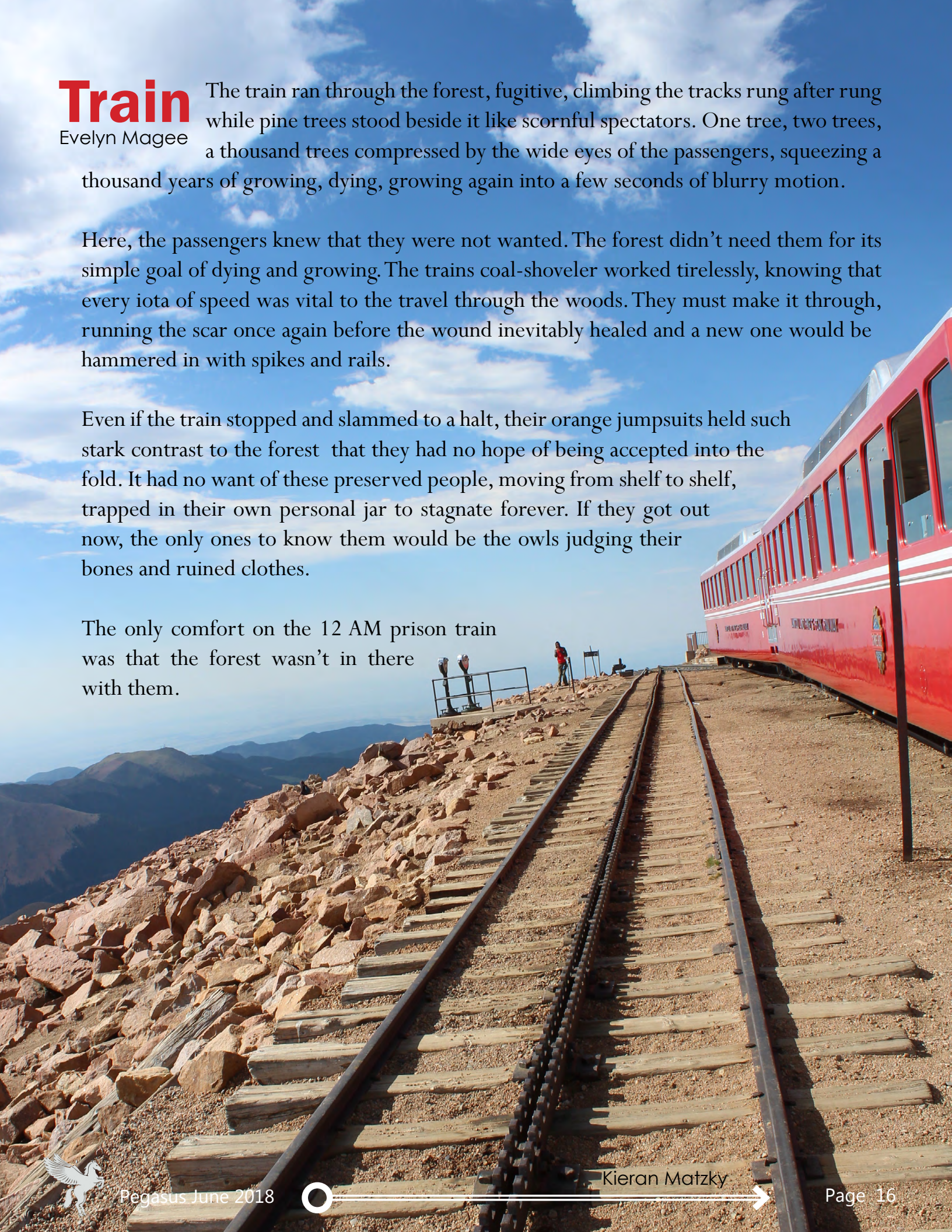
Evelyn Magee

The train ran through the forest, fugitive, climbing the tracks rung after rung while pine trees stood beside it like scornful spectators. One tree, two trees, a thousand trees compressed by the wide eyes of the passengers, squeezing a thousand years of growing, dying, growing again into a few seconds of blurry motion.

Here, the passengers knew that they were not wanted. The forest didn't need them for its simple goal of dying and growing. The trains coal-shoveler worked tirelessly, knowing that every iota of speed was vital to the travel through the woods. They must make it through, running the scar once again before the wound inevitably healed and a new one would be hammered in with spikes and rails.

Even if the train stopped and slammed to a halt, their orange jumpsuits held such stark contrast to the forest that they had no hope of being accepted into the fold. It had no want of these preserved people, moving from shelf to shelf, trapped in their own personal jar to stagnate forever. If they got out now, the only ones to know them would be the owls judging their bones and ruined clothes.

The only comfort on the 12 AM prison train was that the forest wasn't in there with them.



Thoughts of Fleet Street

William Leve

On nights such as these,
My eyes find the many feet
Trampling on worn cobblestone.
My ears catch the rumors that fly off the presses
And find their splintered paths through alleyways and mouths.
“A most curious chaise that travels without horse”
Feel this sweet strait of madness
That we call Fleet Street.

My consciousness drifts here, when the smells oppress me.
In Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese
But that's my lot in this big game we play;
Windows in endless cascade
Picking up what the people leave behind
In the lifeless, hollow hours of midnight.
Just a whiskey dear
After the stench and the mess-
What will I leave behind?

Roman Sandals cantered here,
When Macrinus held the world.
Even Chaucer flogged a friar here,
And he was fined two shillings for his rage.
Even when fire ravaged this sprawl,
Fleet Street refused to be put under.
1666 was no grave marker.

The moon beckons me
As I stroll through this Colossus.
I sought for a theme
The stars stare, piercing my gaze.
and sought for it in vain
Their collective expectation,
Begging for an answer.
Maybe at last being but a broken man
I won't wind forever like this road,
I won't flow forever like the Thames.
What is a road without its bricks?
A river without its waves? A sky without stars?
I must be satisfied with my heart

My feet find Ludgate Circus.
My eyes meet the belfry of St. Martin's,
Eclipsing the dome of St. Paul's.
I pause.

*“In the lifeless,
hollow hours
of midnight.”*



Daryl Hemmerich

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The Hunt

Thomas Pinkham

An arrow pierced the aged wood of a barrel, a foot from the center. Dissatisfied, the young prince Telemakhos plucked another arrow and took aim. The second shot glanced off the rim, the next spiraling into the side. Another soared over the barrel and snapped against the stone wall. Groaning, Telemakhos knocked his next arrow and steadied himself. The shot fell short, and he was rewarded with a chorus of laughter. Behind him, one dozen young men with fine robes and contented eyes grinned at him.

These suitors, sons of wealthy and powerful men across Ithaka, had come this month to court his mother, the widowed queen Penelope. She had sworn an oath to her husband, Lord Odysseus, that should he die at Troy, she would wed another man, and give her son the kingdom. After seventeen years, these men had flocked to the hall, basking in his mother's hospitality. Now, they mocked Telemakhos, who had never had a father to show him how to shoot. Leokritos stood above the rest, coming to Telemakhos' side and asking him,

"Telemakhos, young prince, why do you enrage yourself like this? Three days you've tried to strike this target, three days you've missed. Let me see, have you strung your bow correctly?"

Taking the bow from the prince's hand, Leokritos, the great huntsman, knocked an arrow, and let his shot soar. It struck the barrel almost perfectly on the painted mark. The suitors laughed in delight as the hunter smiled.

"It seems your bow is a fine one. Let me tell you, Telemakhos, stop frustrating yourself with this endeavor. Your failures only ruin your aim."

Taking his bow from Leokritos, Telemakhos spoke in anger,

"I'd be doing much better if I could hear the breeze, or at least my own thoughts. You haven't done me any favors, you know."

Feigning shock, Leokritos backed away, and gestured to himself and the suitors.

"My, Telemakhos, you mustn't be so rude! Your mother has said it herself, we are your guests! Should you not show us some compassion?"

"It would be a great deal easier to do so if you had any respect yourself for me. For my servants. My mother, whom you seek to marry. I couldn't see why she would allow you to consume our livestock so gluttonously, and give

nothing in return."

"Well, I am not at fault if your mother will not make a choice. She could easily take one of us as her husband, and the rest would leave you in peace. I know there are many of us, but few can be as strong, and as swift as a king should be!" Chuckling and baring his arms, he said, "I should think the choice is easy enough. But the woman clings to a dead man, an old legend against youthful men in their prime. If she had her senses about her, she'd have wed a month ago."

Growing furious, Telemakhos raised his voice to a shout.

"Well I can say for certain that my mother would never marry anyone like you! A brute without any respect, who cares about nothing but his own glory! She would want someone who could match my father, not a man who calls himself great and shows no honor, no respect."

Raising his eyebrows, Leokritos stepped back towards Telemakhos and leered down at him.

"It is not a matter of respect, she knows well enough to marry a man who can rule Ithaka. It is a matter of ability, and unless you think you could hold your own amidst the chaos of war, I think you would do best to let the adults take charge."

Turning back, Leokritos stormed through the crowd, and called to the suitors.

"Now, which of you wants to take your weapons and go for a chase with me! Get the spears, and the dogs, let us hunt!"

A group of suitors took his words to heart and tailed the great hunter into the hall.

Red-faced, Telemakhos whirled and delivered a swift kick to an empty basket, slowly unclenching his fist. Taking his quiver, the prince left to find somewhere he might have peace of mind. He set his bow and quiver down by a tree, and sat on a rock, watching the ocean. Speaking softly, he pondered,

"Why is it that I have to endure this? Why have the gods chosen me to bear the brunt of these suitors' arrogance, and to do nothing about it? If at least, my father had died at war, he would have gotten a burial, and respect from his own people. Instead, he is lost to the waves, with no honor in his death, and his people have left his memory behind. My mother always told me that he was strong, and brilliant, she told me he was beloved by his subjects, by even the goddess, Athena. What has brought him to ruin, and let the people of Ithaka become so ignorant?"



Lunch on Main Street

Rosalyn Albarran

Kenzi Chris and I.

My last day, MC's already gone.

Walking around downtown, the aroma from the food carts flooded from every direction.

From coffee to tacos. Pizza and hot dogs.

The smoke above each cart floated with the warm breeze.

A middle-aged guy with rugged facial hair.

Eyes barely open, bags hung under.

Two scars ran across his face, from his left temple down to the right side of his chin.

The flesh still pink and fresh.

Serving hamburgers down at the end of main.

Squad cars parked on every other corner.

People, of all sorts, in the alleyways between the dark sky high buildings.

Smoking loosies.

There. The homeless looking guy smoking a used cigarette.

He tried to rob the girl who worked the 18th, this morning.

She screamed and Josh ran to the door.

Her white blouse was brown from the coffee.

Not much older than I.

Purse straps broken, both hands shaking, squeezing her bag.

Josh stood in the cold morning, watching the man run off.

"What the hell ya lookin' at? Huh!?" He yelled as he grabbed another cigarette from the floor.

We kept walking.

Water flowing. Walking down a bridge behind the our building.

The sun blocked by a dark smoky cloud.

"Eh I like that one on the left" as he chuckled showing his missing teeth.

The one's left, rotting within his mouth.

Kenzi turned, Chris told her to keep looking on straight.

We kept walking.

A man playing the guitar. Walking around humming his own tunes.

Wore a brown hat with nice looking shoes.

Probably on his break, doesn't look like he lives around here.

Walking down an alleyway,



“Haruto! Come, now! What are you doing? Don’t just sit there like a little pump, get up and tend the rice,” said the boy’s mother.

“Ama, I have worked for days and days, when will it ever be enough for you?”

“It is never enough for Sir Hozumi. I can only produce so much grain, but if you don’t help he will come and take everything from us. Everything we have worked for. Do you want that to happen?”

“Yes Ama, I want this. I want to get up before the sun and before the entire bloody world every single day!”

“Haruto! Stop! You are 13, old enough to... do this. What has come upon you? You think because you saw that big man and his son everything has changed being paraded through the streets that one day? We are not them. They are long gone, and we are still here, with the same purpose we have always had, to tend the toyoda.”

“You want me to be a toyoda worker? I’ll be a toyoda worker.” He took his knife into the fields, his back turned.



(Several hours later)

“Stop it! You will hurt yourself.”

“Don’t bother ordering me around anymore, I am old enough. No sleep, no nothing, just tending the toyoda.”

“I’m sorry! I didn’t ask for this. My father, his father and his father, they had to do this. I wish I could give you something better, Haruto. But right now, I cannot. And frankly, I don’t know if we ever will be anything better.”

After 13 hours of incessant labor, he stopped, dead in his tracks. As though he had become paralyzed from the neck down, his machete frozen in time. Right about to hit the stock, it sat there. The anger and hatred transpired from his body into the damp, muddy, insect-filled landscape. As his mother looked at him, sweat came dripping down his face, into the mud, his hopes, and dreams, thrown away. He turned around, spent a painfully long minute staring at his mother, and walked back home. He washed his knife, bathed and went to bed, all alone, in silence. However, he never got to sleep.

What is so special about him, that young boy! What has he done so superior to me? What blood, sweat, and tears has he sacrificed for people to so gallantly carry him and his father over their shoulders? Like a king he sits, what has he done! Who created the damn universe to be such a pit of disparity! I will end that creator, that daimyo, his son and anyone else. The world’s going to start over, I’m going to burn it all.

Freedom at a Price

Simon Narang

For several weeks Haruto continued working tirelessly, rarely speaking. One day an elderly man came upon the farm and saw Haruto. He saw something special in him, something inexplicable. Maybe it was his drive? Perhaps he just looked hopeless, maybe usable. Nonetheless, he slowly approached him, walking on the inclined gravel path towards the shed, with his eyes fixed on Haruto. He appeared almost biblical, with long white hair and a beard.

He surveyed the land briefly and then wrote on a wrinkled notepad some information. In confusion, Haruto’s mother asked what the man wanted. He did not seem wealthy or powerful, just a typical old man. The man said he has come to bring their family a gift. He pulled out a wrinkled sheet of paper, filled with Japanese text.

“What is that?” said Haruto’s mother.

“It’s an offer letter. Your son can work for us, and every month twenty thousand yen will be sent here.”

“What are all these things you have scribbled on this cloth, is this some form of artwork? It is so beautiful.”

“It doesn’t matter what it is, all he needs to do is write his name on the line, and you will have comfort, peace, and money for eternity.”

“Whatever, I’ll believe it when I see it.”

“Here you are, son. Sign there”

Haruto held the pen upside down, in his fist, like a machete. He stabbed the paper but managed to scribble a few lines of ink on the sheet. The man took the paper, said goodbye and slowly walked away.

The next day, as Haruto was eating lunch with his mother and sister, a group of nine men came by. They appeared as though they were nearing death. Haruto’s sister, Hana, immediately screamed, and ran into the shed upon making eye contact with them. They seemed like monsters. They were completely blackened. The only features that stood out were the fading, sinking whites of their eyes and their few, dark yellow rotten teeth.

“What...? What the...? What happened?”

“I don’t know. Who are you people! Where do you come from?”

“I am from Obihiro. When I-”

“Shut up Ani. We are not here for tea. If we don’t get back he will whip all our butts, including yours!”

“You need to come with us, now!”

“You come post up in my house. You come covered



in paint. Now you want to just take my son! Who the hell do you think you are?"

"Ama, its ok. It will be interesting to see what these guys do. I'll just come back if I don't like it."

"Son, are you leaving me? Are you leaving us? These men are going to hurt you!"

"A- Relax! Why do you make everything so difficult? I will be back soon."

"Wait! Before you go, take this. Keep it close at all times. He always wanted you to have it."

"Will do."

With little thought, he left. The men walked for about 20 minutes, and then encountered a dark green jeep. It was noisy and in disrepair. Gasoline dripped in large quantities from the vehicle, and fumes of smoke engulfed the truck, so much so one could barely see it.

Everyone slowly got on, not speaking, not making eye contact with one another. Haruto though, was dumbfounded by the automobile.

"Wow! What does this do?"

"It's just a 'rakku, get in, we are late."

"A what?"

"A torakku! Shut up and get in."

Haruto eagerly jumped to the front of the truck, to

admire the myriad of mechanisms rumbling in the engine. The smoke blew backward into his face, so he ducked to the side to keep looking. Over time, he came to look just like the other nine men. The yin and yang necklace he had been given blackened as well, leaving an unblackened area on his chest.

Several hours later, they arrived at a small factory, with few provisions. Chaos ensued, with men yelling from all directions.

"What is wrong, what is happening?"

"Nothing"

Before Haruto could respond, a large man entered atop a high floor, yelling "Halt! Sir Hozumi has arrived."

"I have come all the way from Sendai. I wasted an entire day of my time coming here. You forced me to postpone a meeting. You have not produced anything close to your quota! I require 17 tons of coal, and you have only produced 10. I believe in fairness, so I

will take a day of your time. No breaks, no food until I see the remaining 7 tons."

Sighs could be heard across the plant. No machines buzzed, nobody moved. The sharp, smokey air made the surroundings appear a virtual reality. The mere silence created a beautiful, calming sensation among the workers. That was until managers becoming shouting commands. All the silence meant then was that no work was being done, and that 7



tons of coal would never be produced. There simply was not enough coal in the earth for Hozumi.

Haruto toiled tirelessly as he always had. He was not productive though. Unlike the rest of the men, coming from urban Sapporo, he was young, and not immune to the deadly Pollution.

One day, Haruto woke up from his cot. Covered in dry mud, his face still black even after washed. One of his fellow workers started laughing

“Ay, Gaijin!” This man, who Haruto had never spoken to in his life, was calling him foreign, inferior, fake. Haruto had had enough at this point, but he said nothing, remained motionless for a few moments. Then, he carefully left the sleeping quarters. He went directly to the manager, Mr. Sato’s office. He was at first not able to find it. He searched for a few minutes and noticed a small dark walkway concealed behind the machinery. He apprehensively walked to the door at the end and lightly knocked a few times. No answer. He nervously stood for a minute before realizing his shift was soon to begin. He knocked again, this time even more lightly. A man opened the door, angered at Haruto’s presence, his face red before even seeing Haruto. “Y-”. But then he stopped. He was vexed, wondering why Haruto was there.

There was no policeman holding him. Haruto did not even appear to have any problem or injury.

“Why are you here!”

“Um... Do you know where Mr. Sato is? I, ah, I cannot find him.”

“Why are you looking for him.”

“I have something very important I would like to say to him.”

“You have something very important? This will be fun.”

“Sā! A worker would like to speak. He won’t leave.”

“Bring him here.”

Haruto slowly entered the large room, complete with displays of foreign materials, ample lighting. The most impressive aspect of the room was its silence. Only a single small window gave a view of the landscape around the factory. Not a single machine could be heard. In the silence, Haruto remained nervous and awkward.

“What brings you here.”

“Perhaps I should leave.”

“NO! What did you come here to say?”

“Sir, I arrived here on the fifth of June. The past 5 weeks I have worked nonstop. I got up this morning to insults from other workers. Can I work here, with you, instead?”

“You are dismissed. Yama, take him away!”

Another day passed, and Haruto’s spirit further declined. The next day in his bunker he again woke up, contemplating whether or not he should continue working. As he was walking out, Yama stopped him.

“Ay! Come here.”

“Ok”

They came back to Mr. Sato’s office. Pensively, he hesitated for a moment, and then began speaking:

“Haruto, I would like you to work directly for me, as my joshu”

“I would be honored sir. What should I do.”

“Firstly, you ought to take two weeks leave.”

“Yes sir.”

Haruto turned around and was surprised to see two men, one with a cup of tea and the other with a platter of senbei.

“Come, sit. I just need you to sign this document.”

“Sir, I cannot read.”

“Ha! Just sign it. When you come back I will arrange a teacher.”

With that, Haruto was escorted out to his vehicle. The warm, soft leather seating was foreign to him. He began to feel at first uncomfortable. No commands were being barked at him. No movement was necessary. All he had to do was sit. He began to feel his sore muscles doing nothing.

How can all these wealthy powerful men remain influential? They just sit. How beautiful this world is. I must be a god to be so privileged. How beautiful the world is. I have worked and worked and worked! I have not done anything special, but I am a god. Nothing can stop me now!

After a comfortable few hours being chauffeured to his home, Haruto walked up the inclined gravel path towards the shed. Once his home, he looked around, stargazing around the land, until he saw the machete hanging on the wall. It looked timeless, still shining, just cleaned.

How foolish of me. I parade myself around in this convoy like an Emperor. Yet my family remains here suffering like peasants.

“Haru! ”

“Ama!”

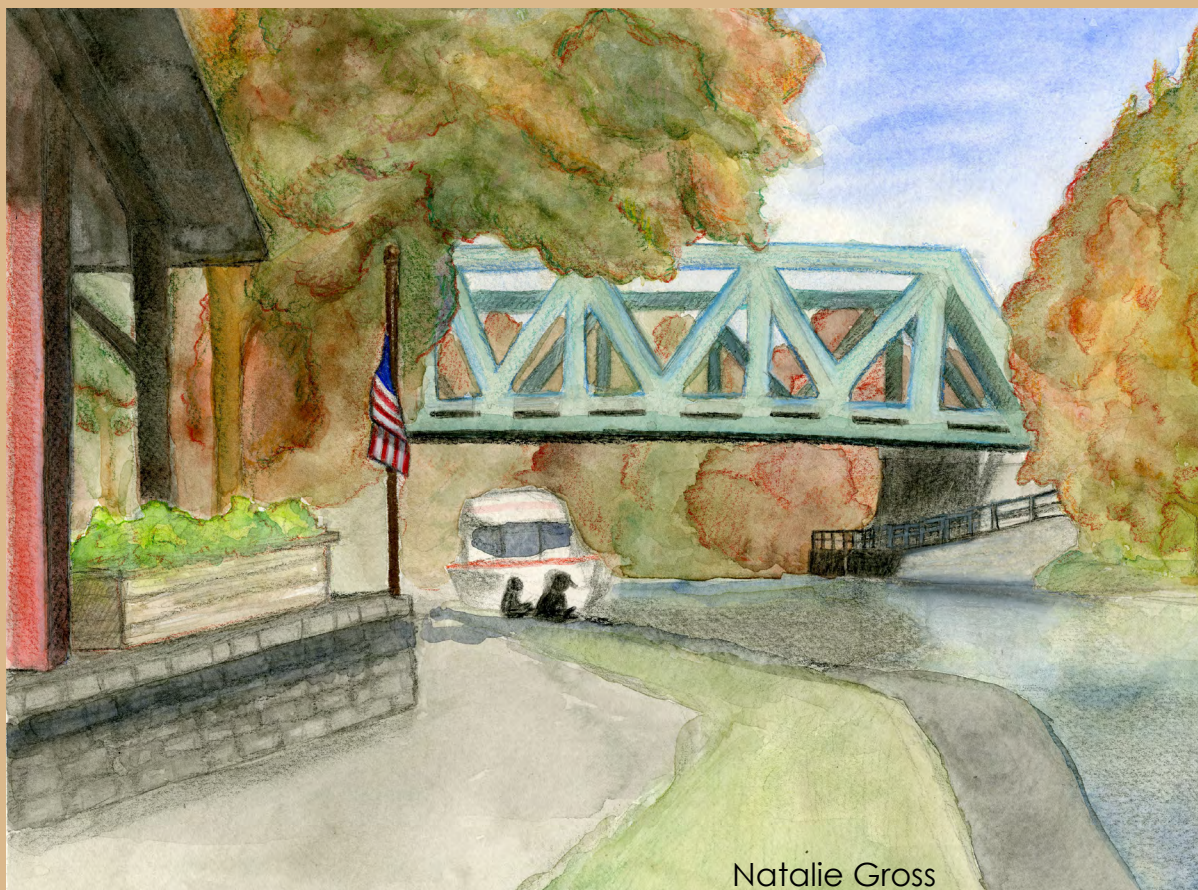
At first Haruto was electrified by the voice of his mother after several months. However, when he turned around he saw her aged, overworked face. Pale and wrinkled, she appeared depressed. Her faint smile was the only indication of the only happiness in her life.

(To be continued...)



November 3rd

Michelle Messenger



Natalie Gross

November 3rd, 2016, the day I killed a man. I remember seeing him and then I remember sirens were wailing all around me, that's all. Lights flashing, people glancing over as they walked by. The world was going by in slow motion, like a scene in a dramatic movie. The police were putting cuffs around me. I didn't fight them off, or plead my innocence. I knew exactly what I did, and I didn't even care.

One hour prior to killing the man, I was sitting in my spot, a bench that had a big tree next to it. That tree carried with it so much history, specifically my history. I was by the tree when I learned to ride a bike. I was under the tree when I had my first kiss. And it was that tree where my mother died in a car accident. It has been ten years since the accident. And it has been five years since I slept under a roof. Being homeless isn't what most people think it is. I barely ever beg for money, only when the café doesn't have food in their dumpster. Most of the time, I'm just sitting on my bench.

Every homeless person knows that the bench on 18th Street next to the biggest tree in the city is my

bench. But every so often, I return to my bench and normal people are sitting in it. I don't mind. After all, how would they know it's mine. But getting rid of them isn't a problem. I just sit next to them and within a split second, they leave with a disgusted look on their face.

The week before November 3, 2016 was very different. It started off as normal as ever. I woke up, went across the street to Papa G's Café and rummaged through the garbage for breakfast. I found a half-eaten bread roll and went back to my bench. Then I heard a song playing, sounding much like a tune my mother used to hum to me, so I followed the voice. It got farther away but I kept going. At this point it became my mission to find the person singing the song. I started to run, faster, faster. The song grew louder, louder. By the time I realized there was no song playing, I was probably two miles from my bench. I turned around to head back home.

On my way back, I walked by my neighbor, Daisy. Her spot is next to the fancy restaurant, waits for the rich people to give their spare change. Daisy is the oldest woman probably in the world. But she's the smartest person I know. I wouldn't be able to consider her a friend, at most an acquaintance. But she



knows me, and I know her.

When I returned to my bench, there were these huge faces on it. The sign said Drake and Miller Law. One of the faces was an old man, his smirk made him look angry. The other man, I recognized.

He was the man that I see every morning get a coffee from the café across the street. He is always well dressed and using at least two cell phones at once. He's a middle-aged man, no older than fifty, his hair becoming more salt than pepper. The first time I saw him was two years ago. When he came out with his coffee and looked straight at me as if he knew me. He moved his head a little towards me. I knew he was giving me a nod, and I waved back. Ever since then, waiting for the man with coffee to come out of the café became part of my daily routine. I never could figure out why, but I felt drawn to this man. We had a connection right off the start. The man with coffee became my second acquaintance immediately.

I didn't mind the faces on my bench. In fact, I kind of liked it. I felt protected in a comforting way. So, I just sat there, for what felt like the whole week. I never even got up for food. I didn't need to eat. All I needed was to talk with the faces. We had some catching up to do.

Then the day finally came. It was November 3rd.

The city is always at its busiest at five. People are all going home from a long day at work, couples are heading out to go on a dinner date planned for weeks. Children are getting the last minutes of daylight to play before dinner. I find it to be the most relaxing time.

A little girl ran by with her father close behind. She was holding a red balloon that looked like could carry her through the sky. She had the biggest smile on her face, but her father did not look amused. He was yelling at her to stop.

I never really knew my dad. He was a military man. He dated my mother for only a month, and one year later, when he returned from combat, I was there. He didn't take the news very well. He disappeared, leaving my mother with a child and no job. My mother was all I had, and I was all she had. No aunts or uncles, no siblings, no friends. It was just my mother and I, that's all I ever needed.

Daisy tried to convince me once that the man with coffee was my dad. I said I didn't believe her, but deep down I knew that there was some sort of connection. I made myself believe it in fact, that he was my dad.

Money has always been an issue for me, but especially growing up. I was ten years old when I got my



first job. I would go to the neighborhoods with the big houses and practically beg them to let me water their plants. I would nearly make twenty dollars a week, which for us was the difference between dinner and no food at all.

When my mother died, I was left with nothing. I was extremely depressed and dropped out of high school. Without a diploma I couldn't get a good job. Without any desire to keep living a normal life, I never left my house. Eventually, when I decided to try getting some sort of income. Employers didn't seem to like depressed, high school dropouts, and the jobs would usually end with a simple "I'm sorry, but we're going to have to let you go". I kept watering plants for a little while, but the normal people didn't want to keep paying a twenty some-year-old to water plants. So, I hit the streets.

I tried staying in a few places. Usually there would be groups of other homeless people with their own sort of village. I never wanted to be a part of that. I needed to be by myself. After all, life always isolated me, so now it was my turn to isolate life from me.

After my mother's death, I would go in honor of her, to the place where she died. My soon-to-be bench. Every year I would spend the whole day on November 3rd there, just thinking. Remembering. Talking. I was my best therapist. I felt at peace on the bench, like I was somehow closer to my mother. I decided this is where I wanted to be. I wouldn't need a job, or a roof. All I needed was to see myself for who I was. And my bench was where I felt like that. Thus, the birth of my bench, and my new home. I still spend every single November 3rd on my bench for the whole day. Honoring and remembering the only family I ever had.

Now, my bench was the home to two new faces. My first official friends. I talked to them all day that November 3rd. They never responded back to me, but I didn't mind. "Do you guys like your job?" "Have any family?" No response. "I'm really glad you guys found me, especially you dad". "Why did you guys decide to come to my bench out of all places in this city? I mean isn't it weird that we would end up together?" "Hey what are you doing here?" The voices said.

Finally admitting to myself that I had gone insane, I looked over at the faces on my bench. "What was that?" I said. "I said, what the hell do you think you're doing here!". I turned around to see my dad and the angry man approaching me. "Dad! Oh, my

good gracious, I mean wow, I can't believe, I mean wow. I would have cleaned up little had I known you we-" "Ok shut up. Please shut up. Firstly, I'm not your dad, you little creep, I don't even know who you are" said the man with coffee. "Listen we just need you to leave our bench" said the little angry man. "We have some ladies on their way now, and we are going to show them our bench and I would really like it if there wasn't a smelly, insane homeless woman sitting on it".

I was confused, I thought the man with coffee had forgotten who I was. "Wait dad, I'm sorry what? I mean you know I would do anything for you but out of all days, I can't leave now". "Just leave before I call the cops". They started walking closer to me. I knew they were going to try and move me by themselves. I couldn't let them. Not now. "No, I can't! You know I can't! Stop, get your hands off me! You can't do this, this is my home! Get your hands off me! GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME!". And then darkness. Nothing in my memory, until the sirens.

Amazing how something can just disappear from your memory like that. Out of thin air.

After the cops put the cuffs around me, we walked by the man's body, all bloodied and bruised. I somehow managed to pull a post out of the ground and stab him in the chest. According to Daisy, the angry man tried pulling me off the man with coffee, but couldn't match up to my strength. Daisy had tried to explain the circumstances to the cops; after all, it was November 3rd, but no one seemed to believe there was any significance.

I never stole. I never littered. I never swore. I never did drugs. I never fought. I lived a life with nothing but depressing stories to tell later. And yet jail was always my destiny. Every person who walked by me on my bench knew that. My teachers all knew that. I even knew that.

They pulled me away from my home, from my existence, with what little I had in the world. They took me from everything I learned in life and brought me to a place where I would never be able to see myself again.

November 3rd is like any other day for most all the world. But for me, November 3rd is no random day. This is the day I learned to ride my bike. This is the day I had my first kiss. This is the day my mother died. And this is the day I killed a man.



Your face moves differently today.
I see your eyelashes and your collarbones,
They don't glow like they did,
Maybe the light is different.

You wash your hands longer today.
You spent hours and days cutting up vegetables for us to eat in silence
Your fingers must be sore.

I feel your heartbeat is not as fast in my right ear
When I wrap my arms around you to feel it on my fingertips, too.
Your hands stay curled just a little
Today.

You say
Words today.
You felt them
Yesterday.
You laugh again
But your eyes don't
Match your mouth.
At least not today.

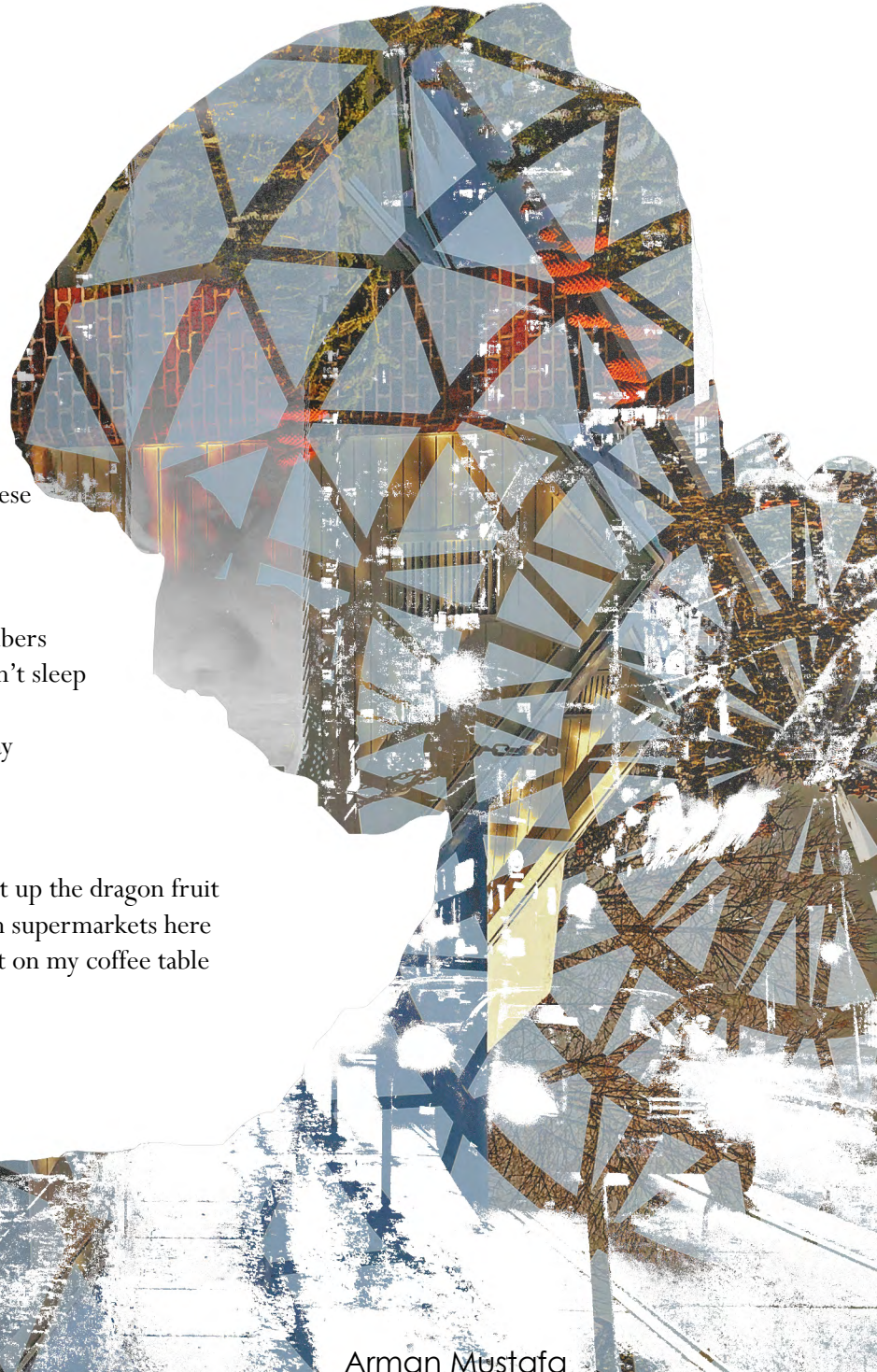
My sheets are cold this time of year
I don't daydream this December
Drive home maybe too fast in a gear too high for these
Somewhat icy roads

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| To a number of blankets - | In so many sizes |
| More than half my age - | In shapes and numbers |
| That need to be straightened - | Or else I can't sleep |
| And two loads of laundry | |
| That need to be folded - | Not to be put away |
| And a cup and a plate that need to be washed | |
| And so do my floors | |

But I just sit and cut up the dragon fruit
That is not found in supermarkets here
But still you leave it on my coffee table
At least you did

Details

Noor Lima Boudakian



Arman Mustafa



DAWN

Christina Bocirnea

"Mama, the sun is rising!"

I got up off my cot. "Nissoue, don't yell so early in the morning. Go get us some water if you have so much energy."

Sure enough, she ran out of the hut, grabbing the big clay jug on her way out. I put on my sandals and walked outside. The sun was just an outline on the horizon. And there was Nissoue, bent over a big log. "Nissoue, what are you doing?"

"Look at this spider mama, he's missing a leg. What should we do?"

"Nissoue, I told you to go get water."

"Poor spider, he lost his leg."

"Never mind then, I'm running late anyway." I went inside and picked up my machete from its hook on the wall. "And Nissoue, don't get into any trouble today. Stay near the hut."

"Mama?"

"Yes?"

"Do mamas ever cry?"

"Of course not, why would you ask such a question?"

"Because Carmelau said his mama cried."

"That is not our business Nissoue, now don't make me late."

So I began walking through my usual path. Careful to step on soft patches of fallen leaves and moss, I made my way through dense shrubs entangled with vines. I couldn't see well in the dim light. One wrong step would send a large thorn up through my sandal into my foot. So I focused my sight on the ground, slowly feeling my way along the path. It was already hot outside. The humidity left my skin drenched. Fragrant trees almost disguised the rotten smell of still waters just off the path. I thought about what Da'amon used to tell me.

"There is no pure good and nothing truly evil in the

world; the earth is round not flat," He would tell me. I thought about how much I needed Da'amon. I needed his strength. I could not be strong for Nissoue without being strong myself.

My poor girl; What would happen to her when she was big enough to work? She would not last a day in the fields. They would lash her like they did Da'mon. I prayed for her.

"Lord, please keep my Nissoue safe. Keep her with me for many more years, and out of the way of the whip." I looked up to check on the sun's position. It was still low in the sky, so I kept moving at the same pace. "And please keep her out of trouble today, amen."

The Dew soaked my sandals, and little droplets of it fell from big palm leaves above me. Everything was wet in the jungle. It was silent apart from the song the ani birds were singing. The familiar tune was not comforting, however. Ahead of me was the clearing. There I saw the fields. Tall stalks of sugar; no birds sang on those fields.

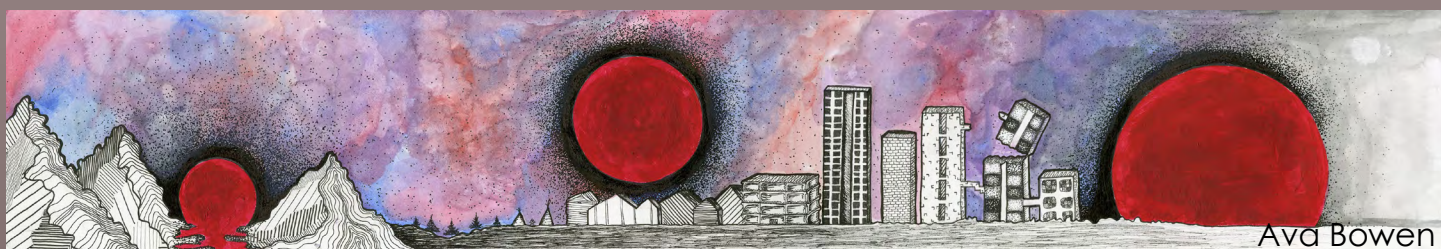
"Good morning Chantale, what a nice day it is today. By the way, how is little Nissoue doing?"

"What's with all the positivity today?"

"Today is a nice day, that's all." Sylvestre looked at the ground. "Master Toussaint said he wants to speak with you. It's probably nothing; maybe he's just bored and needs someone to talk to."

I did not answer him. Toussaint was no man for conversation. But what was I to do? I would have to go see him after work that day. He would not lash me; I was one of his best workers. I could cut cane faster than the strongest men.

So I started yet another back-breaking day. I found my own corner on the field and started cutting down sugar cane. I swung my machete. One by one, stalks came down. I hauled them over to the cart. I focused on my work. As long as I worked hard, my mind would not wander; and it was better that way. As I worked, the sun baked my flesh. Sweat glistened on my dark skin. When my back ached from the labor, I kept chopping. When my arms burned like fire, I chopped even faster. I chopped my life away in those fields.



Ava Bowen



Royal

Somayya Upal

“Fujiwara Ito’? Why, you’ve won again! I don’t understand it!”

Sei was reading off a small piece of parchment, with Ito’s name written in small let-

tering at the top. She looked up indignantly, her painted eyebrows (*hikimayu*) furrowed.

Ito laughed and looked away, playing with her pink *jūnihitoe*. Gold embroidery, imported from some foreign land, spilled from the collar and down to the cuffs of the sleeves. These drawings were matching the summer season surrounding the two girls, with the flower fields and the clouds in the sky. Although it was a new kimono, Ito had already frayed some of its threads from her fiddling. It was a bad habit, she knew this, and the seamstresses were always frustrated with their constant need to restore her clothes. Yet here Ito was, bashfully rolling the silk between her fingers.

“Sei,” Ito smiled at her friend and said, “Poems come to me naturally. I’m not sure why either. It’s... it’s like I have this connection with ink and paper. It understands my feelings better than even I do.”

“You know, for someone who’s so talented at writing, you sure can be incredibly vague at times,” Sei said, laughing and carefully, to not ruin her kimono, standing up.

They began to walk off the stone steps at the base of the palace building. All around them, the influences of art and aestheticism are clear. Roofs behind them

are covered in red tiles, curving down like grass in the wind. Far ahead, the marketplace of Kyoto could be seen and heard, bustling with carts selling pottery and brushes. In the capital of Heian Japan, status and intelligence is based off art.



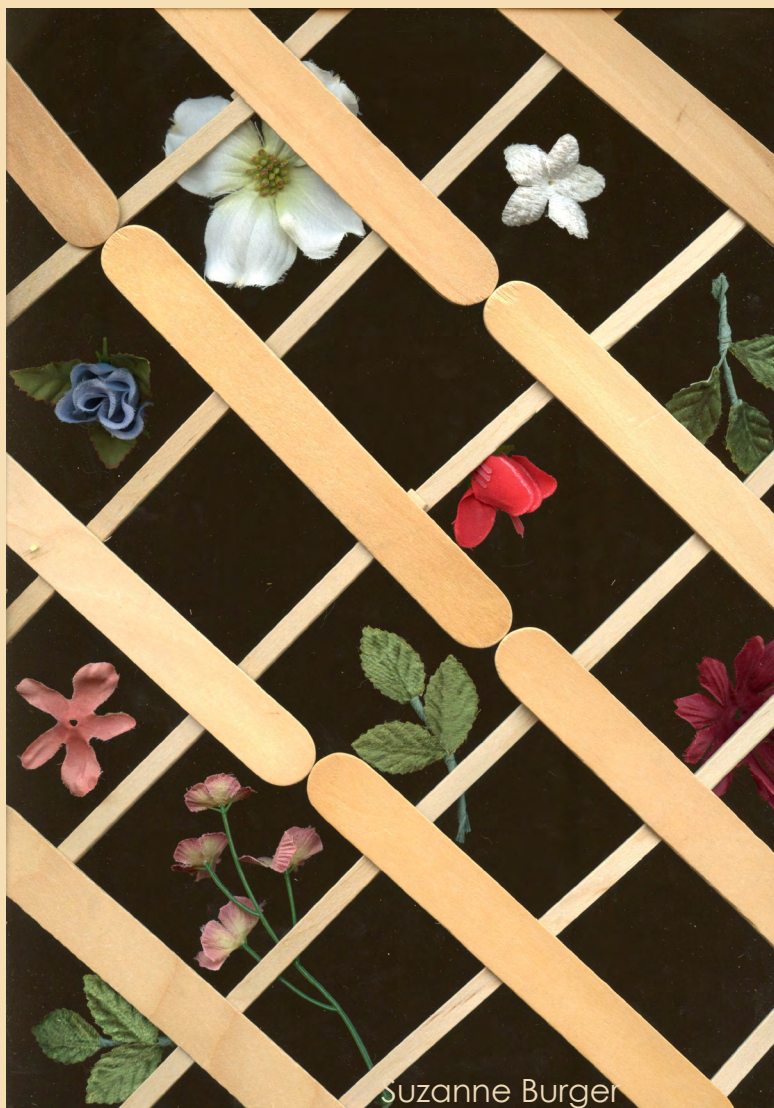
Only a couple hours later, Ito was seated among the other court ladies in the dining room, learning manners and customs from them. She was only fifteen, soon about to become an official court lady. Grilled fish (*yakimono*) and soup laid on the low table in ceramic bowls (which are covered in beautiful brush stroke designs). Even though everyone is sitting on the floor, the location of their seats to the color of their cushion all shows their status. At the front of the large room, poets were always lined up, ready to read their work to the Emperor and court.

After hearing a couple pieces, Ito leaned over a napkin and began to write her own poems, inspired. Her hair fell forward from behind her ear, but she continued to write.

She was so focused on her words, it was as though the entire world around her disappeared. Well, at least until she heard an angry whisper.

“Ito! Do that in your own room later!” came from Izumi, an older court lady sitting to the left of Ito.

“Ok! Ok!” Ito said, writing one last line, before folding up the napkin and tucking it in her long sleeve under the table. “Why can’t I read my poetry here too? I have so much to say!” She sighed dramatically, while Izumi gave her a look of disgust.



"You know it looks disrespectful, besides what if someone thinks you're copying their work when you're writing like that?" she looked around to make sure no one else at the table was listening, but they were all immersed in their own discussions. Leaning in closer, Izumi added, "Women are allowed to present poetry, but at our own meetings. Who cares if it's here or there?"

"But, I'd love to see how *everyone* thinks of my poetry, not just the other court ladies." Ito's imagination began to get the better of her, as she spoke quicker and excitedly, "What if the Emperor liked it a lot? Or what if it was published to the libraries? Or what if-"

"Be quiet!" Izumi interrupted under her breath. She was looking down at her folded hands on her lap. Ito glanced around the room to see rows of straight backs lining the many tables. The air was tense, as everyone waited patiently. Ito, off in her own imagination, hadn't noticed the Emperor entering the room. With many colorful layers of fabric draping off him, the Emperor walked slowly between four other men to his seat at the head of a table. After he was seated, the livelihood at the tables began once again. Across from Ito, Daini, the youngest girl in the royal court, tapped Ito's bowl with her chopsticks to get her attention.

"The man on the far left of the Emperor," she brought up her hand to point, her hand was smacked down by Izumi quickly, "His name is Fuji Yorimasa, and I've heard he's asked for you to be his bride!" A couple of the court ladies around Ito began to clap and whisper excitedly.

Ito's hands gripped the edge of the wooden table, as she turned to Izumi, "What?! I've already been assigned a husband?" But, Izumi just laughed and didn't reply.

"Just don't act like a fool in front of him, Ito!" Daini teased, as the table erupted in laughter again.

Ito laughed along, but her mind was already racing. Did she feel excited? Nervous? Ito had absolutely no idea. Curiosity, perhaps? Maybe he'll be smart and charming. Maybe he'll be like the princes from the books she's read, like *The Tale of Genji*. Her eyes glazed over, as she daydreamed the countless possibilities for the rest of the evening.



"Fujiwara Ito? You have a guest." A lady's voice rang from behind Ito's screen door. It was late afternoon, and the warm sunlight poured in through the light curtains. Plants with broad leaves sat in tall pots,

scattered on the floor. Ito sat up quickly and bolted to her closet to put on something appropriate.

Pulling a yellow robe over her head, she called out, "Yes, yes! Let them in!" She darted over to a wooden chair and sat up proper, just as she heard the screen door slide open. A tall man walked in, with pitch black hair that reminded Ito of looking down a deep well. He looked much older than Ito (but of course, this was typical for girls her age), and had a few wrinkles on his forehead, probably from stress Ito noted. He was wearing a simple black robe, with small silver embellishments along the collar and sleeves. Yorimasa bowed to the woman who had let him in, dismissing her, and walked over to the seat across from Ito.

"Good afternoon, my name is Fuji Yorimasa," he began to speak.

"Yes! I've heard about you! My friend, Daini, was just telling me of you, but I still have so many questions-" Ito cut herself off abruptly, realizing she had already interrupted him. She wasn't quite the best at acting like a lady. "Oh, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me, sir," she said embarrassed and bowed her head.

Yorimasa was still for a second, but then chuckled deeply. "The other court ladies warned me that you were... different." He looked up at Ito and smiled, "but, when I had read your poetry, I was so impressed. I knew that I wanted a beautiful, intelligent wife, like you."

Ito was still looking down, but her cheeks flushed a bright red. Although her poetry often earned her praise among her peers, she'd never been complimented about her looks. Ito hadn't even grown up with a close father or mother to shower her in affection, as they'd given her as a child to the other court ladies and asked them to raise her.

"Thank you, sir," she hesitated a moment before continuing, "I could show you some more of my writing, if you'd like."

Yorimasa stood up from his seat and turned towards the windows. He watched the clouds in the sky for a couple seconds, before turning back to Ito and nodding. Ito retrieved a couple scrolls from a bamboo basket near her bed, and then sat back down. She held them out, arms straight, to Yorimasa.

"Thank you, Ito. Good day." Yorimasa grabbed the scrolls, took a bow, and walked out of the room, not even closing the screen door behind him. Confused on the abrupt ending, Ito stared into the distance, until she finally got up and closed the screen door.



While the royal palace was a highly restricted place, not many foreigners were even allowed in the whole country of Japan, so first impressions weren't exactly Ito's area of expertise. Meeting someone new and exciting was a rare instance. Trying to fall asleep, Ito laid in her bed for what felt like hours, trying to judge Yorimasa based on the short interaction.



Royal dinner the next day began the same as usual. Tables were set in place, jade ceramic bowls placed out, everyone's seated in their assigned spot. The poets at the front began to recite their poems, one by one.

Daini and Ito were talking about the new garden they hoped to visit together. Ito wasn't even paying close attention to the entertainment, at least until she heard a line that sounded too familiar.

Whipping her head around, Ito saw Yorimasa, finishing up reading one of her poems to the assembly. Her mouth opened silently, as the tables around her swelled with applause. Every sound seemed amplified as she felt the blood rushing to her head.

Ito whispered, "Izumi!" Failing to get her attention, Ito tried twice more, before reaching over and tapping Izumo's shoulder.

"Ito, clap!" Izumi looked at her with the same look of disgust given the previous day.

"But, Izumi, you don't understand."

"Really? Are you so selfish you can't even support your future husband? Clap!"

Ito's hands balled into fists, as she spun back around to face the front where Yorimasa was still standing. Slowly, her shaking hands began to clap, pausing for a long time in between each one, as though to emphasize the sound. Although she was filled with anger, her eyes actually started to fill with tears now. The world became blurry and unfocused, as Yorimasa began to read yet another one of her poems out loud. His deep and strong voice echoed through the dining hall, as everyone (except Ito) listened in awe.

Losing control of herself, Ito stood up from the table. As hundreds of eyes in the room search for the cause of the disruption, she marched towards the screen door directly behind Yorimasa.

"I hope you're ashamed of yourself," she whispered, not meeting his eyes. Ito slid open the screen door and exited- without even bowing her goodbye to the court.



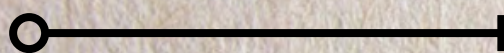
Haille Smith



The curtain is pulled up to reveal the first scene. A prop of a two-level house. The top floor is the bedroom of seventeen-year-old Alan Ruppert and the bedroom of his sister, Abby. Abby has her headphones on and her room is dark because she is watching a movie while lying on her made bed. In Alan's room there is a twin sized bed with a

Steelers blanket on top of it, messy, like the bed was never made properly. Next to the bed on the left, is a wooden desk with an old battered chair pushed in. On top of the desk is an envelope thick with money, and his laptop. The only light is coming from a lamp in between the desk and bed.

Alan is standing by his window looking out. The window looks out into the right side of the stage. It is nighttime, so the room is dimly lit, and the rest of the stage is dark. Strewn on the bedroom floor are heaps of clothes, shoes, a backpack, money, and boxes filled with possessions. Alan is talking on the phone but one can't hear what he is saying. On the bottom level, Alan's parents, Mei and Jeremy are fighting in the kitchen. The center of the room is the dinner table and to the left is the oven stove. On the right side is a door that leads outside to the porch. There are counters on the left and back sides of the room with cupboards above and below both sides. The walls are light blue with white trim. Dinner plates are left half eaten on the table and several beer cans litter the counters. Mei looks sad but Jeremy is red faced and angry. He's muscular but overall shorter than average. Mei is only an inch or two shorter but nowhere nearly as strong.



Scene I:

Abby and Alan have retreated to their rooms after Jeremy and Mei started arguing. The fighting has escalated to shouting and dramatic hand movements.

Mei: (standing at the sink with back to the audience) I just don't understand why you're so hard on him! (turning around so she is facing Jeremy) You need to understand he isn't a kid anymore.

Jeremy: I know that! But his attitude is pissing me off. And since when does he not want to play? (shouting) He can't just up and quit!

Mei: He's not quitting Jer, and I don't know, he probably didn't want to hurt your feelings. He knows that you love the sport. And love watching him play.

High Stakes

Haylee Pink

Jeremy: All those years of practice and summer league, thrown away. And now he wants to go spend spring break hiking in the Adirondacks? How ungrateful! (moving towards the fridge)

Mei: I'm sure he appreciates it, I know he does and you know he does too. He'll be eighteen by then and I think it will be good for him, and fun.

Jeremy: Fun? How does he think he's getting there or paying for the trip? I'm sure as hell not gonna front this expedition. (opens fridge and grabs another cold one)

Mei: Honey, don't you think you've had enough? (worry and concern flashes across her face)

Jeremy: I've had enough when I say I've had enough! (looking at the unfinished table, disgusted) So much for a nice family dinner. (walks drunkenly to the door to the kitchen)

Mei: Jeremy Ruppert, this is our son we're talking about!! He did nothing but tell you he didn't want to try out this year. The hiking trip would do him good!

Jeremy: Do him good? What would do him good is studying for once in his lifetime! If he's not playing anymore, he should focus on school. Sometimes I swear he's dumber than a box of rocks! (laughing to himself, shaking his head) Sometimes, I swear he isn't my son!

Mei: Did you even listen to him when he was talking earlier? You're so drunk you don't know what you're saying! I mean how can you say that about your child?

Jeremy: (turning around and getting in Mei's face) Listen here woman, I know what he said and I know what I'm saying, I'm tired of the ungrateful ignorance and you should stop defending him, he's seventeen for God's sake! And don't get me started with his grades because they suck worse than his attitude.

Mei: (equally as loud and in Jeremy's face) How would you know, you're not conscious in this house for more than two hours and when you are it's only to get another beer or eat. He's not failing—

Jeremy: (interrupting, growling) Barely not failing.

Mei: Passing nonetheless--traveling every weekend for games and missing a third of his classes! Did you ever ask him if he wanted to? Have you had a conversation with him, a sincere one, not yelling at him for one thing or another?



Jeremy: I've tried but he just doesn't get it!

Mei: Get what? That you want him to do what you tell him all the time? That because he is your son he has to be like you and act like you? Because he is not like you, Jeremy, he is not you. Alan is his own person, why can't you accept that?

Jeremy: How would you know Mei? Can you read his mind?

Mei: I'm his mother! And I know he is either too afraid to tell you or so mad at you it's easier to not say anything.

Jeremy: Well I'm his father. I know better. I was seventeen once too and I did what my father said.

Mei: You're the one who swore you would never end up like him! *(scoffs)*

Jeremy: You barely met the old bastard, how would you know if I was like him. *(aggressively exits through the porch door and slams the door shut)*

Mei: *(quietly)* I knew him enough. *(shaking and sobbing, sits back down at the table with hands in her lap)*

Lights cut off in the kitchen leaving Mei in the dark, motionless, only Alan's room is lit up.

Alan: *(talking into his phone)* I so hate that man. How can a father be such an ass? I haven't liked baseball since freshman year. What do they know about my grades? They're too busy biting each other's heads off to notice. I mean you should hear them killing each other right now. They don't listen anymore. The number of times I've told them about you and they forget. Graduation can't come fast enough, they probably don't think I'm going to be eligible to

walk the stage. Honestly I don't know how they were ever in love. I'm so done with this house I need to get out. I need to leave. They're trying to take the trip away from me! I'll be eighteen anyway, so it won't matter what they think. I just need to figure some things out and then I'll be scott free. Can you meet me on Lincoln in an hour? I need to see you. *(Enter Abby into Alan's room)*

Abby: Who was that? Your girlfriend? *(drawls)*

Alan: It's nun'ya. Go back to your books, nerd.

Abby: *(sticks out her tongue)* No need to be rude. I was just asking a question. *(steps into room, looks around, registering the mess)*

Alan: I thought I told you to skedaddle. *(goes back to sorting things out and packing)*

Abby: You going somewhere? *(starts looking through the stuff on his desk)*

Alan: Abby, I told you to get out! *(grabs her arm, spins her around and walks her out of his room)*

Abby: Hey what the hell!

Alan: *(sarcastically)* I'm sorry did I hurt you? I told you to get out!

Abby: MOMMM ---

Alan: *(putting a finger up to his lips and giving her the death stare)* Shut up! My god you are so annoying. Don't bother mom, she's, um, got a lot going on, she doesn't need us arguing too. *(won't meet Abby's eyes)*



Mary Bedzyk



Abby: Oh you mean mom and dad fighting. I'm not a little kid Al. What are they screaming about this time? *(moves the clothes on the bed over and sits down)*

Alan: Me, it's always about me, or at least that's what starts it. But I'm not gonna be a problem anymore.

Abby: You aren't the reason why they hate each other. Don't you remember when Dad came home drunk and mom found the gangster's roll hanging out of his coat pocket?

Alan: No I don't. When did that happen?

Abby: I don't know, a couple months back. You're never around so I'm not surprised you don't remember; anyway, it doesn't matter. What does matter is that when mom confronted him he didn't even try to lie. He went on and on about how he was gonna finally move out of this hole and go live a real life. Kept rambling on about how if he had just a little bit more money to start him up that this would be the one. He felt good about it, confident. Mom was real quiet at first but then she just exploded. I guess Dad had been going out a couple times a week, up to the casino, and gambling our money away and then throwing it away on alcohol when he lost.

Alan: When is Dad ever not drunk? He's just a loser in life. Anyway listen, I'm leaving here. Connor said I could crash at his place until I go to college. I'll still be close by if you need me but I just can't stay in this hell hole any longer.

Abby: Wait you're leaving? Do mom and dad know?

Alan: No and they're not gonna know until my birthday. I'll be eighteen so legally they can't make me come back.

Abby: Have you told them where you're going to be?

Alan: I'll tell them I'm staying at Connor's until Wednesday. I just won't be telling them I'm staying there. Thursday is freedom day.

Abby: *(scoffs)* Good luck getting them to agree to that. *(walks out of the bedroom)*

Alan just shakes his head and continues packing, aggressively shoving things into bags and boxes. Stage goes dark.

Curtain is pulled up to reveal Caroline on Lincoln Street. It's a short street with five houses on one side and the woods on the other. At either end there are lampposts that dimly light the street.

Alan enters from the shadows behind one of the cars parked nearby.

Caroline: Hey baby, what's going on? *Happiness and worry flood her face.*

Alan: A total storm that's what. I can't stay there anymore so I'm leaving.

Caroline: But where're you going?

Alan: I'm driving out to Connor's tonight.

Caroline: Connor's? But he lives in the city. I'll hardly get to see you.

Alan: *(draws Caroline into a hug)* That's not true, I'll still be in school.

Caroline: *(sarcastically)* Yeah because we have so many classes together. *(pulls out of the hug and drops her arms to her sides and steps back)* It's that bad isn't it?

Alan: Last week he came home so drunk he didn't even know my name. He just looked at me like I was worthless. Then he became mad for who knows what reason and I thought he was going to hit me. He's never laid a hand on me before and I thought that night he was going to. I almost wanted him to, so I could call the police on him, get my sister, mother and I out of there. I don't think he's ever hit my mom but I wouldn't be surprised if he has either.

Caroline and Alan start walking down the street holding hands

Caroline: Are your sister and mom safe there with you gone?

Alan: They should be. I'm the cause of his anger, not them. That's why I decided to leave, take the problem out of the equation. He would never lay a hand on Abby, and if he does she knows to call me right away. She knows I'll be there for her. And can I count on you to be there too? You'll be closer to her than I.

Caroline: Of course! Abby is like a little sister to me.

Alan: Damn it's cold, let's go get something to eat and warm up.

Stage goes dark



1. Soon

Sitting, waiting, I turn my head to the left
To the right, to see who resides besides, me.
The contraries attracting all I can see are
Eyes, matched their gaze on each other.
This room reeks of hope it reeks of
Desperation, impatience.
Impatience bites my tailbone.
I don't want to approach the receptionist.
I'll seem impatient,
Or maybe I'll seem valiant, I'll seem revolutionary,
I'll change the chance for assistance,
I'll change the waiting fate for the agitated.
Looking at one another simply.
It's been half a century,
And they stare, gape
They notice, distinguish,
In this rotten room? In this thirsty throat
I swallow my interest, I shouldn't care.
They are, though, too remarkable to
Not witness, not observe.
Why do I do this to myself?
Snapped out of a daydream, a voice shoves the name
Leopold in my conscience.
Leopold, fortunate Leopold.
Aggravation shifts me in my chair,
It lifts my magazine and slaps it back down on my lap,
Restlessness flips the page.
A man stands, shouting his presence, his blessing,
My eyes roll down a cliff,
Roll and roll, I focus on the
Pair once again.
Now they are suspicious, apprehensive,
Keeping their heads bowed and glancing
Up at each other's lips sporadically.
On edge, constantly occupied by tense attraction.
In the moment, I want to tape their eyes closed.
Why do I do this to myself?
A new, formerly lost motive finds itself
Entering my awareness.
Do I want that connection?
Do I want to desire? Someone, something.
I have experienced such desire, which only resulted in regret, frustration.
I think back and try to recreate memories in my head.
My empty gaze at the ceiling shows my public internal isolation in memory.
All I am is impatient, all I feel is nervousness, tension,
My shell oozes of displeasure,
All we are doing is waiting.

It's Always Been Gone

Jenna Vangellow



Natalie Gross

*“In this
rotten room?
In this thirsty
throat”*



Waiting for the next phase, for the upcoming,
Never living now, the true present-day
This day that I wait in this room, observing with my peers what is
In front of us, under our tongues.
We only focus on delay and not today,
How long it takes,
How far we step into the succeeding adventure.
Why not wait?
Why not live in existence
And not pending experience.
I sit waiting and thinking,
Thinking of myself and forgetting the future.
Forgetting the past, learning the present.

2.The Dance

Like two wilting flowers rewinding
And one gust of wind pulling at their stems
Swirling them into a warm embrace
The two pulsate like mortals, like immortals, though
Their feet tangle and their palms magnetize
Their eyes glue and their mouths soundless
Sharing warmth and relief of motion

3.Where has it Gone?

Where has it gone?
The simplicity which shines through the lips of each singing mouth,
The words of wisdom from our leaders which resonate in our minds,
Full of experience and pride and patience and optimism.
Knowing that the people with our lives in their hands can imagine a future
With only sun and fields,
Shaking hands, sharing verses, words which could bloom future potential.

Where has it gone?
Have you lost hope too? Have you realized how much you miss?
Have they, will they realize that their children
Will be living the day after they are not?
That the children will need a home lacking smoke, war, burnt walls which
Block connection with someone who takes the same steps as them,
Someone who takes the same breaths as them, in harmony, in rhythm.
The separation of our species, the coughing, filled lungs of fumes,
The trembling legs of starvation and poverty.
Will you miss it once it's passed?

Where has it gone?
The days we can live through, the days in which we look forward to,
It's never been true, it's never been here,
It's always been gone.

*“This
day that
I wait in
this room,
observing
with my
peers
what is

In front
of us,
under our
tongues”*



What if?

Evelyn Magee

Montag took a good, long look at the stacks of books hidden in the ventilation system. Was it *really* worth it? There was no guarantee he'd be able to successfully smuggle the books into Beatty's house, and that was assuming he could even *find* the Captain's house. Plus the fact that he'd only had the books a couple weeks. Hardly time to memorize them all before he enacted his plan. Things weren't looking all too well, but it wasn't like he could confront the man.

He hadn't been out in weeks, and though he knew Beatty would wait until he left the house to face him, the Hound would have no qualms about breaking through the door and killing him on the spot.

Montag took one last look at his collection, before stuffing them in the brown plaid duffel bag. He put the strap around his shoulder, feeling the weight, and opened the door. He could faintly hear the Hound scrambling away. Good. It seemed that it was still just patrolling, and wouldn't attack him, yet.

As Montag walked, he checked behind him every three minutes. Couldn't be too sure, at least not this close to nighttime. The Firemen would still be on the job or playing cards this late.

After a few minutes walking, Montag had arrived at the firehouse. Taking a good look around, he walked into the alley behind the building. After a good thirty minutes or so, the chatter and shuffle of cards that normally came from the building was replaced with scraping chairs. Montag ducked behind a dumpster and waited for everyone to pass.

When the footsteps were a decent distance off, he walked out of the alley and started to shadow Beatty, about ten meters back. Eventually,

the Captain turned into a side street and opened the door to a house, stepping inside.

Montag waited a few minutes before placing the duffel bag of books, carefully, behind a bush. He started to sneak back, eventually breaking into a run, and made it back to his house ten minutes later. The door lay ajar, and inside he could see the Hound. Waiting for him, ventilation grille lying on the floor in front of it like an accusation. *It knew.*

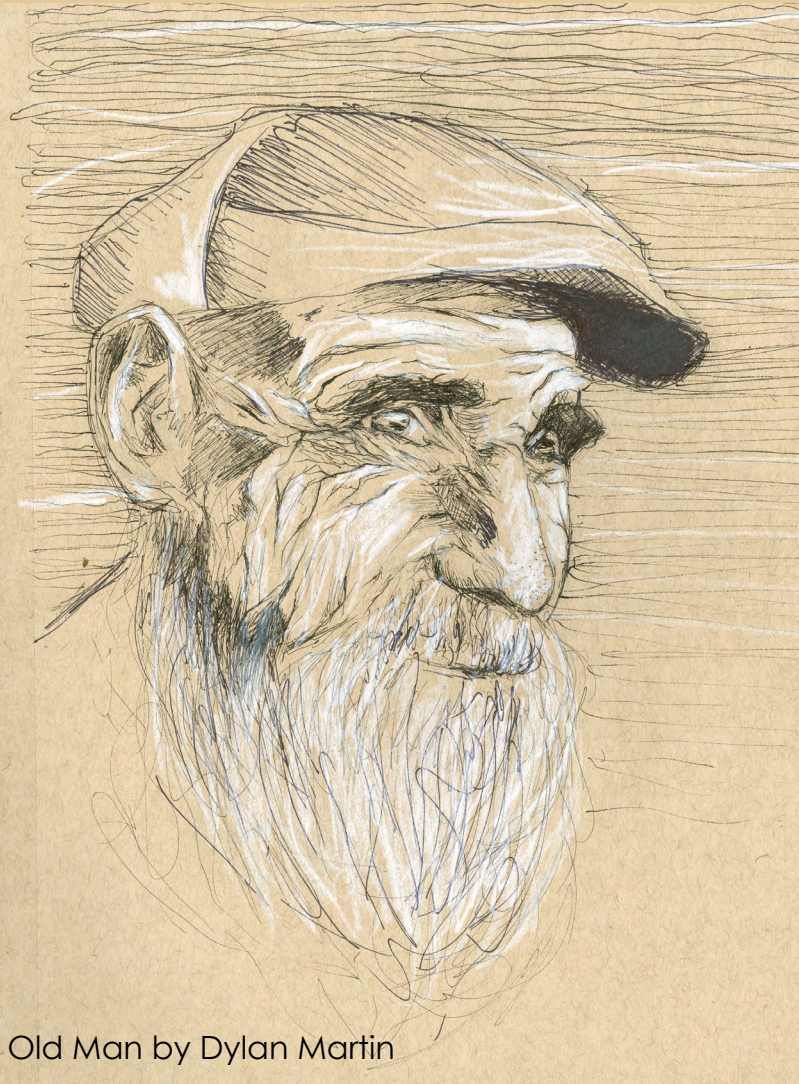
Montag backed up, starting to run. *Faber's house.* He'd go there, call in the alarm for Beatty's house, and make his escape from there! All he had to do was get the damned Hound off his trail... But how? As his legs moved of their own accord, he saw that he was headed for the highway.

An idea wormed its way, unwelcome but badly needed, into his head. If he could just get the Hound to be hit by traffic... Montag ran through the street, hearing the rumble of cars surrounding him. The road was four lanes wide and had a ton of traffic, but it was his only shot. Montag closed his eyes, broke into a full sprint, and screamed. He was almost out of the fray when the *crunch* of a Mechanical Hound being slammed by a car sounded behind him. He made it to the sidewalk and looked behind him, a wild grin on his face. *Now, where was Faber's house again?*



Nuckelavee's Curse

By Thomas Pinkham



Old Man by Dylan Martin

The Orkney Islands are a chain of small islands off the northeast coast of Scotland. This story takes place in 1732 on one of the northernmost islands, Sanday, near what is now Northwall.

"You should get some firewood, Osgar. Ah'm bettin' winter is goin' to be 'arsh this year."

"Pa, the leaves ain't 'ardly started tae fall yet" Cried back Osgar. "An' a got a job at the docks tae do." It was always like this with Osgar's old pa. Always stressing over how much wood the family had, or whether the cattle had been milked

yet. Sometimes Osgar wished the old man would just keel over already. It would make life a load easier for him, without his father over his shoulder. When he reached the docks, he heard a familiar shout.

"Hello, Osgar. How's yer pa been?"

"Aye Flannagan, he's still kickin'. A dunno how the old man has been holdin' on so long." Came Oscar's reply.

Flannagan was the closest mate Osgar could ask for. The two were like brothers. They both had the same job doing the heavy lifting at the docks, so they talked often. Having such a close friend nearby helped ease the stress of a long, hard day.

Flannagan looked to Osgar and told him, "So, boss says we're getting' a ship from England. Some Brit is gonna' open factories 'ere. Glass, ah think." Osgar arched his brow skeptically.

"Why 'ere, all the way out on Sanday? Wouldn't he just stay in England?" He inquired.

"Ah dunno. Why should ah even care?" Was the casual answer. "But 'ey, you seen that Kelsey lass around? She's right fine lookin' in that new blouse of hers"

"Ah wish, but Pa's been ridin' on me all week. He's never happy with anythin'."

Flannagan chuckled and headed to his assigned dock and waited for the ship to arrive. When he saw it, it stuck out like a sore thumb. The British flag was waving proudly from the mast, and the galleon itself was absolutely massive. It took a while to get the ship to a place it could anchor, it was so much larger than the small ships the docks were built for. As Osgar and his team unloaded the heavy crates, he caught a conversation in the air.

"You will soon see that this is a wonderful choice, my good man. In due time, my manufacturing will be able to cover the expenses, and more. You have made the right investment with me." A tall man in a coat was speaking to some local officials in a distinguished accent. "I will be setting up immediately." Osgar and

Flannagan's teams were hitching horses and mules to wagons, and loading their supplies. They worked swiftly and efficiently, only pausing for lunch. By the end of the work day, almost all of the cargo had been loaded, and the wagons were on the way to the site of the factory. When Osgar got home for supper, the first thing he heard from his father was;

"Ah don't like that man. That Brit, talkin' all sure of 'imself." Osgar sighed, and said;

"No b'dy likes the Brits, pa. Ain't nothin' ah ain't 'eard before"



"Well ah just have a feelin' about 'im. Like he's gonna screw somethin' up."

"Pa, He ain't gonna do nothin' to us. What's the worst some glassblowers can do."

It seemed like Osgar's father was always looking for what was going to go wrong. Their conversations always went like this, an argument where it seemed neither would win. It was back and forth, sometimes for weeks before one decided to just drop it. This was one of those times, where they kept going until the leaves began to fall, and the glass workshops were opening.

Just after lunch break, Osgar heard a loud cuss and shouting. He ran to see his father yelling at some poor fool who had just felled a tree on his fence. The sheep, fortunately, were too frightened to think of escaping.

"The 'ell are ya thinkin' ya dobber! Ya Brits cannae go nowhere without marchin' all over other lads' prop'rtey!"

Osgar ran up to his father and tried to restrain him.

"Pa, calm down! It's a fence, ah can fix it right quick."

"Ah dun care aboot the fence! This ned is on mah land! Ah've a right mind to wallap 'em right 'ere!"

"Now, now, let's not get violent just yet. It was an honest mistake, nothing serious."

The Englishman had arrived, and was holding up his hands in a peaceful gesture. He came over and got in front of his woodcutter to introduce himself.

"Todd Gaines, I'm the man opening the new factory here. I'm sorry for my employee's poor conduct." Gaines spoke smoothly, as if he were a natural at conversation. "You are?"

"Drostan Mackenzie"

"Yes, of course. Mr. Mackenzie, I'll be sure this won't happen to you again. I can compensate you for the damages to your property."

"Ah'm sure ya will. What're ya doin' out cuttin' trees at this time. Plenty o' wood over at Donnan's. Just buy some there."

"Well, sir, some of these boys here are paid to do this for me. I want to be able to conserve as much money as I can until the business is making comfortable profit."

Mr. Gaines promised to later repay Osgar's father in full, shook hands with him, and took his leave. The old man turned to his son and said:

"Just like a Brit tae just say he'll pay me and walk away like nothin' 'appened. See what ah mean, boy. Thinks he's better'n the rest of us 'cause he's got money."

Osgar turned back and muttered below his breath.

"Bleedin' 'ell, one tree in the wrong place an' he's

already in a fit. Old codger is goin' mad. He can find just boot any reason tae rant."

The day afterward progressed as normal. Osgar's father was still upset over the incident. Flannagan and Osgar were talking about some lass who had caught their eyes when someone cried out.

"Smoke! Ah see smoke o'er by the workshops! Some-thin's burnin'!"

The townspeople immediately burst into action. They rushed to the pumps to fill their buckets, for they had no fire engine. Everyone abandoned their posts at the docks to help. The glassmakers were already surrounding a fire as black smoke rose into the sky. Osgar found himself shoving through a crowd to get to the blaze. But all he found was a bonfire in a stone circle, with some men using pitchforks to throw seaweed into the flames. The panic was replaced with a wave of relief and confusion.

"What's goin' on here?" Mr. Gaines had stepped out of one of the shops.

"We saw smoke o'er here. Thought there was a fire."

"Oh, I assure you, this is just part of the process. The fire is controlled. Apologies for the trouble, I did not realize the smoke would be so thi-." Gaines was interrupted by an old man barging through the crowd to grab a pitchfork from another man and throw the burning seaweed out of the fire.

"You bleedin' idiots! What in the Lord's name are ya doin'!" Conn MacAngus, an old man well known for being a little mad, was frantically stomping out the flames. He turned to the crowd and yelled, "What are you doin' just standin' there! Don't none a ya know these fools were aboot to get 'emselves killed!"

"Killed? I'm sorry, I don't know what you mean. This is just a part of the production, there is little danger during this stage of-."

"Ah don't mean the fire! The kelp!"

"I'm sorry? What?"

The native townspeople just sighed, while the Englishmen scratched their heads, befuddled. Flannagan

***"Not 'til ah
know this lad
ain't gonna
be lurin' the
demon 'ere!"***



stepped up to clear the confusion.

"Look, lads, Conn 'ere is a bit of a drunk, he's just talkin' about some monster from an ol' wife's tale."

"Not just any monster, boy! The demon, Nuckelavee!"

Osgar groaned as his father pushed his way through the crowd, making his way to Gaines. Drostan spoke a brief prayer, for all feared Nuckelavee so greatly that none dare spoke his name without prayer to ward him off.

"He's the bane of man himself! Devil o' the sea! The smell of burnin' seaweed drives him mad!"

McAngus added on, "The damn beast is gonna ruin us if he catches the scent! All the crops, will wither under his breath, and the cattle will be as good as dead! An' he'll kill every one of us to get to ya, lad."

Gaines, having recognized the situation, changed his tone back to its usual smoothness. "Sir, I think you're overreacting. This is just procedure, no monsters, or demons have ever shown up whilst we've been doing this. There is absolutely nothing to fear."

"Ah, that's what ya say, but ah know how this is gonna end if ya don't stop now!"

"Alright, Pa, enough is enough, leave the poor lad be." Osgar came up to his father and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Not 'til ah know this lad ain't gonna be lurin' the demon 'ere!"

Gaines extended his hand. "If you say so sir, I'll be sure not to do anything that will bring any harm, alright?"

"Good then, ah'm sure ya can wait 'til summer. By then the Mither o' the Sea should be back to keep him under." Drostan held out his hand, and the two men shook on it.

"There won't be any trouble at all, my good man. All will be well."

All was well for the next two weeks, as fall gave way to winter. The crops had sprouted, and the rain was coming down. It wasn't until Eochaidh Allaway noticed that one of his horses had a strange condition that anyone suspected anything.

"Well, doctor, ah just came into the stable with the feed, like every mornin', and Guinnein just starting coughin' like the devil had 'im. An' he looks just horrible. Do ya know what's wrong, doc?"

The local doctor was looking over Guinnein and frowning. The horse's white mane was flat and falling out, he was choking wildly, and the stable door was smeared with

vomit. The doctor was looking worriedly at his flank. There were pustules and sores on the skin. The flesh was blackened, shriveling and gangrenous. Guinnein was obviously in pain, as everyone gathered outside the stable could hear him wheezing. The doctor stepped out of the stable and sighed.

"Ah can say fer sure that he's got the pox, but ah cannae tell what the 'ell is 'appenin' with his flanks. Ah ain't ever seen anythin' like it. But ah can tell ya he ain't got much longer."

Eochaidh was sitting on a stool, hands over his face. "Osgar, ah got a rifle by the door. Could ya fetch it fer me?"

"O' course, lad."

"Thank ye. Doc, I'll lead him out. Better to get it done now."

Osgar came back with the rifle and passed it to Eochaidh. Guinnein was outside, convulsing, and bloody diarrhea was dripping off him. Eochaidh lifted the gun, and cocked the hammer. "Goodbye, Guinnein. You're in the hands o' the Lord now."

The gun fired, and the sick horse fell to the ground with a final raspy cry. Eochaidh turned around and walked back to the house. "No a ya go near 'im, ah'm getting' a pitchfork. Smallpox is still deadly on a dead horse as it is on a live one."

"Lad, ah know you'll think ah'm crazy, but who doesn't. It ain't the pox."

Conn MacAngus was looking on, a bottle of whiskey in his old hands. "Ah'm tellin' ya, that's more than the pox. That horse got the mortasheen. That's his doin'."

"Oh hell! Conn, this ain't the work o' no demon. It's smallpox, that's all. It's common."

"Says you! How d'ya figure he got that on 'im, two weeks after that Gaines fella starts workin' on his fancy vases, and now everythin's gone ta 'ell. Ah tell ya, mah fields ain't 'ardly shown nothin'! They're all dead, an' ah'm willin' to bet who done that!"

"Sure, sure." Flannagan grinned. "A word of advice, if you spent some more time out o' the tavern you might 'ave two pence to rub together."

Osgar couldn't help but chuckle. His father slapped him on the back of the head.

"You can laugh now, but ya won't be grinnin' if yer heads been torn from yer shoulders."

Grumbling to himself, the old man turned and headed back to the house. Osgar glared briefly, before deciding not to hound his father. He elbowed Flannagan and told him

***"The gun
fired, and the
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with a final
raspy cry."***



they'd better get to work. The boss would have their heads if he knew they were slacking off to crack jokes again. The fishing ships were coming in today, and they usually needed as many hands as they could get to unload the catches into the storehouse.

After dusk fell on the horizon, Osgar was out with his axe. He'd decided to shut his pa up and split some kindling. Wiping his brow, he set the next log on the stump and raised the axe.

Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop. In the distance, the distinct sound of horse's hooves echoed through the darkness. Turning to face the noise, Osgar could just barely make out the silhouette of a rider. Curiously, the man held no lantern, instead holding an awkward posture atop the horse. His hands did not hold the reins, but rather, his arms seemed to hang at his sides. The body seemed limp, yet somehow remained upright despite the fast clip of the steed. In concern, and slight curiosity, Osgar called out.

"Hey! Lad, where are ya goin'! You'll get nowhere without a lantern! Do ya need somethin'?"

Abruptly, the horse came to a stop, the rider's form slumping forward. After a moment of pause, the silhouette straightened up and turned, before breaking out into a sprint.

Lifting his own lantern, Osgar strained his eyes to see. As the horse came into clear view, he recoiled in horror.

Bearing down on him was no horse. The skin was missing, exposing the skull and muscled neck of the being. Its jawbones held jagged, uneven teeth, snarling like a rabid dog. The eyes were merely sockets, but the black abyss within its head still seemed to hold a wild fury in it. As more of the beast was exposed, its skinless body revealed pulsating blisters and sores squeezed between muscles. Its legs were odd, with fins protruding around the hooves, like the fur of a Clydesdale. From the center of the creature's back, a torso emerged, forming the rider, a horrid facsimile of a man. The twisted body had arms like an ape, reaching almost to the ground, ending in long fingers and claws. Its head was larger than a human's, with a maw jutting out like the snout of a pig, rotten grey teeth pulled into a grimace. Black bile slobbered from its wide mouth and dribbled down its chin, mixing with pus to form a foul, oily substance. A single eye took up the rest of its face, burning bloody red with hatred. The image conjured only one name. Nuckelavee was staring right into Osgar's eyes, raising his hands with no uncertain intent in mind.



Mary Cristo



The Day the World Shattered

Maggie Giordano

The gray moonlight permeated the world, or at least, this girl's world. She was sitting on her bed, staring at the wall opposite her. All the other elements that had once been the objects of her attention were now useless, pathetic. She didn't need her adventure books, that had once taken her to distant and magnificent places. She didn't need any worldly possessions, because she had the gray, and the gray had her. It enveloped her, comforted her, made all of her problems disappear in an instant. It was her friend, the only one she had, the only one she wanted.

Slam! The movement of her door forced the girl back into the conscious realm. She was bathed in the fiery golden light of the place she wanted so desperately to leave. Her mother stood. And she looked furious. She marched into the young girl's room without a second thought once she had seen that her daughter, her blood, wasn't doing homework, wasn't doing anything productive. And, giving a glare that would make the most terrifying of men beg for forgiveness, she opened her mouth:

"What do you think you're doing?" She asked with disbelief and hatred in her voice. And the girl didn't know how to explain, so she didn't speak at all. "I do *everything* for you and this is the thanks I get? You wasting your life on that *damn* bed?"

Her mother, one of the few people she still loved, even past all the numbness she felt, sounded near hysterical. "Mom, please don't say that, I love you. I'm so sorry for how I've been."

"No, you're not! If you were, you'd be taking your medication, you'd be doing your phototherapy on the new lights that *I paid for when you outgrew your old ones!* Do you understand how hard that was? No, you don't, because you don't give a crap about me! So, you know what? I'm done. If you don't want to have dinner with your family, *don't eat*. If you want to leave all your responsibilities behind and fail your classes, *I don't care anymore*. You hate it here so much? Then *leave*, go live with your father, permanently!"

And with that, she left, slamming the door behind her and marching away. And with that, the world shattered.

What did I do what have I done why am I like this it's all my fault it's always been my fault why am I alive why did they even want me in the first place I'm just trouble and I make my family worry and I'm worthless why didn't they put me up for adoption when they found out what I have I don't deserve them I've never deserved them why why why why WHY I cost too much mom is right I'm ungrateful I'm not trying to be why am I like this I'm a disappointment I'm a charity case that isn't worth the charity mom does so much for me why aren't I happy all the time I'm dying inside I'm broken mom was right to say I'm not worth the trouble but if I know she's right then why am I crying why is it painful when I sob this is what's best for her but I still love her why didn't she think I loved her do I still love her after that she told me to leave and mothers aren't supposed to do that but children aren't supposed to be expensive mistakes that will undoubtedly be dead before they're 20 and now everything hurts and I just want someone to hug me and tell me everything is going to be alright but I don't deserve it I don't deserve anything but I still want it so bad I don't know what to do why am I like this.

The gray wasn't comforting anymore, it was a suffocating, taunting blankness that reminded her of what she had done. Her room seemed even smaller than before, like that at any moment she would be crushed between its walls. She wished that would happen, she wished something would take her away from all this pain. But it didn't, and so she continued to endlessly cry and mourn what she had lost until she was desperately gasping for breath.

Time passed, and the torturous cycle continued. At some point, who knew how long it had been since the incident (Minutes? Hours?), her phone started to ring. All she could do was stare. Stare in wonder at the contact picture. Her dad was calling her. *Her dad was calling her*. She took a second to breathe, try to calm herself down. She wanted to hide what had happened, but at the same time she craved reassurance and kind words; she needed to know that someone still loved her. With trembling and unsure hands, she picked up.

"Hey honey, how are you?" His voice was so soft, so full of *love* that she froze for a moment. Dad was safe; his warm tone and strong arms that hugged her like it was the last he would ever get would always be there for her, no matter what.

"Daddy?" Her voice cracked with emotion and she started to sob again. But this time it wasn't just because of sadness, it was relief too.

"Sweetheart are you okay? What's wrong? Do you need me to come and get you?"

"Mommy is mad. She...she told me to leave and not come back." It was like a dam had been opened as the details





Elizabeth Lennarz

ever compare to the honey and crackling of wood as it burned in a fireplace that was her father's voice. She was brought back to memories of her life; him brushing her hair after a shower, them leaving the theater after seeing the latest Marvel movie and the ride home afterwards when they would discuss their favorite parts and theories. She loved her dad. He loved her. And yet...

"But what if I stay for a day and she doesn't let me come back?" It came out as a whisper, because throughout all of this, that was her greatest fear.

"She wouldn't do that. She's angry and upset but she still loves you. Am I happy with what

she did, what she said to you? Hell no. But if you want to go back, I will support you and I'll make sure your mother does too. And if not? Then we'll figure it out, together."

"I love you."

"I love you too, hun. It will take me 20 minutes to get to you, so just hang on a little longer."

And with that, the call ended. It hadn't even been a long conversation, just a few minutes. It gave her hope, though. She would heal. It would hurt like hell, but she would do it. How could she not? She had the best father in the world by her side. She just had to wait 20 more minutes.

started flowing in with an urgency. "She said that I was ungrateful and that if I hated her so much I should live with you. But I don't hate her! Daddy what do I do?"

There was silence for a second, although that single second seemed like twenty. It was enough for a horrid feeling to course through her, because what if he didn't want her either? *Please talk.*

"I'll come and get you. I need you to know that you didn't do a single thing wrong, your mother is the bad guy here. You can stay here with me for a day, a week, a year, however long you want to. Ok? *I love you.*"

Those words held the most beautiful sound in the world. He sounded so sure, so convinced of what he was saying. No world-renowned orchestra or singers voice would





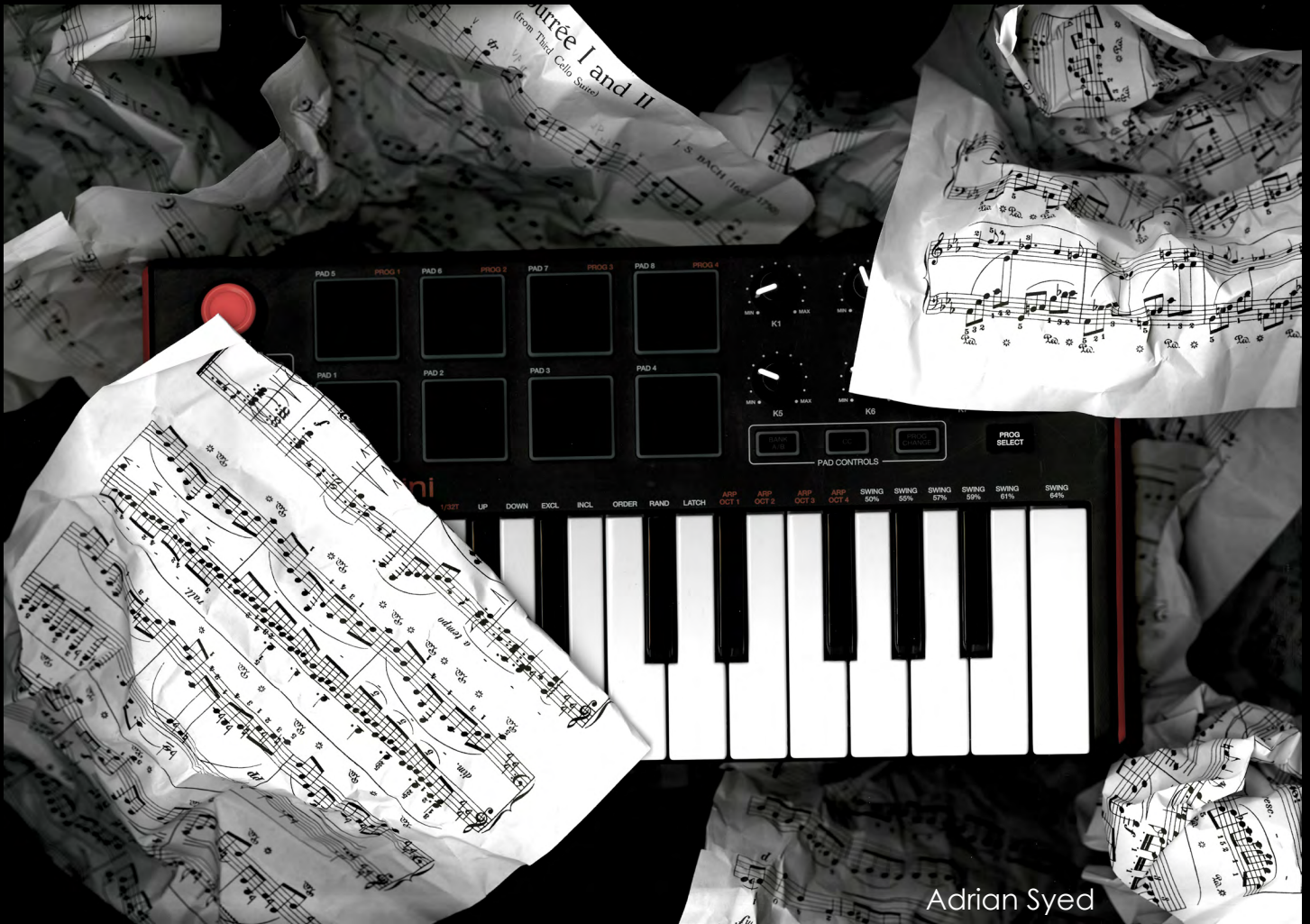
Hannah Seeger





Virginia Raffaele





Adrian Syed



Eunice Jang





Sofia Sylvestri





Erika Newcomb



Natalie Gross





Baakesan Sathiaselam



Baakesan Sathiaselam



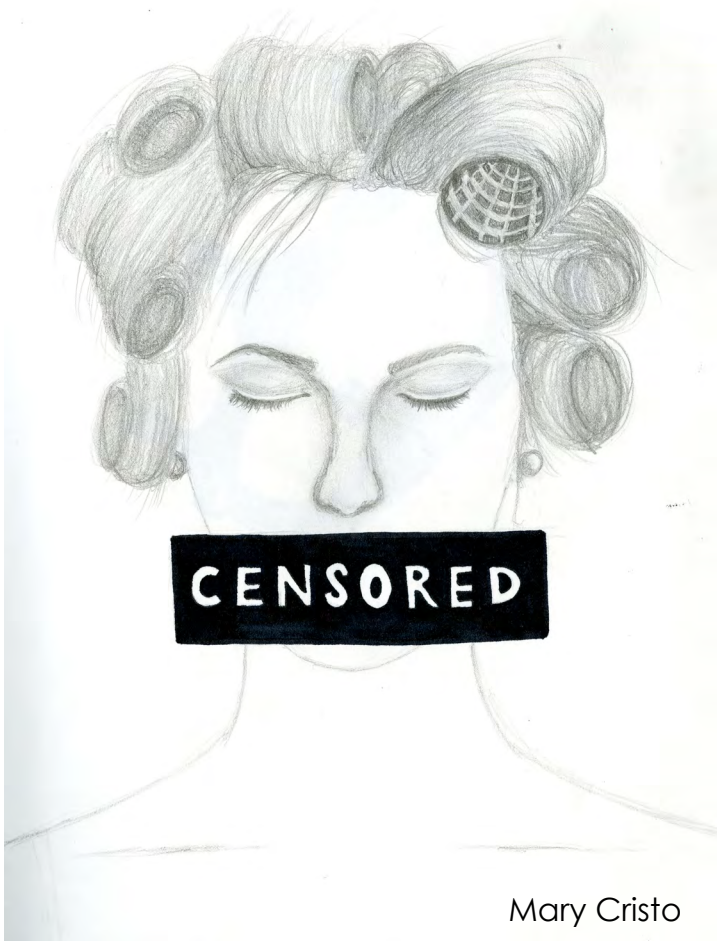


Virginia Raffaele



Eunice Jang





Mary Cristo



Mary Cristo



Mary Cristo



Grandma's Dead

Gabe Young

She should be a tree.
This can't be right; she should be a tree.
She's a piece of plastic when she should be a tree;
All the humanity gone.
She didn't look this pristine even
When she was alive!
This is just unnatural.

The casket's hard plastic.
A dull pink shine with stainless steel sides.
I must say, I'd prefer decay over this sad display.

The snow piles up,
Not a blanket, not a sheet.
Uneven,
Unsatisfying,
Gray slosh on the curb.
Doesn't pack well, doesn't matter anyways.
As heavy as the casket,
As light as a feather.
We step outside.
The bitter freeze makes not a sting;
We feel the cold.
But we aren't cold.

With twelve others lifting, it's not that bad.
Why do we carry it?
Why can't it be wood?
Not just discouraging, completely isolating so that
Nothing can penetrate its
Artificially kitschy surface.

We design our most fancy beds
For people who don't get to see them.
And,
In the spirit of Life,
It doesn't biodegrade,
Plants and worms can't get in;
It's not a bed,
It's a prison for all outside of it.
A Palace of Patience
For the decomposers.

We make our way down the frozen streets.
As dark as ash, but not as dry.
Flecks of bright snow on my black dress pants,
Fresh from the sky.

All of the people seep under the steeple.

The speeches and bible readings mean
Something if you knew her more than I did.
That's right, have the children take part.
They knew her even less,
And they sure as hell don't understand
Ezekiel 25:17.

The beautiful paned glass is not lit up.
The clouds are too dense for the day to be bright.

In the end, James makes up for it.

We call him Jim.
He's a fine uncle,
A belly and a mustache.
A jovial fellow.
Well, not right now.
He gives his speech, his voice wavers,
And my family wipes tears from their eyes.
Would you look at that,
This one practiced
Intersectionality.

The Catholic Church:
Not so welcoming to
An Agnostic like me,
but Jim makes up for it.
The semblance of a narrative creeps out;
But all things drop out when you zoom out.

Let me rephrase that.

The Church of Satan:
Not so welcoming to
A Catholic like Jim,
But we satanists can grieve too, you know.
And labels like these
Are too nebulous to be significant.

She could've been a tree.
Should've been a tree.
Would've had meaning,
More than this.

She could've given birth to new life even after her death.
Would've been more spiritual.



Tā-Hā¹

Evan Wisner

They come from Aleppo, infants from an old womb. They come from that old city and its high walls. They come from those trees which the ancient men planted, trees which now bear strange fruit. I follow behind them, like a wolf with his pack. I am the nbash alqubur², and I will dig many graves.

Upon my back, I carry the enshrouding cloth. A spool wound tightly with 85 meters of fabric. My hands wear Kevlar gloves, lifted from the militia when they took our shovels for metal—the mortar digs well enough.

Through the flying razor birds they walk until the city is a smoking, rat king heap. Perhaps that mountain will tumble into the sea and drown those who chose to stay, heedless and headless.

Light Bringers, who come at the Morning Star, do not topple the high citadel of Damascus, or drown the enslavers in plague. They bring forth flame which Assad meets with an accelerant to my people's demise: gas.

At the village they passed through last week, the people complimented them on their leather shoes, but they had sold their shoes three weeks ago for bread. Burned feet resemble tanned leather.

The children are bare. In a way, I am lucky that they grow so small because I am running out of cloth for kafan³.

In preparation for the masquerade they march towards, their porcelain masks, now worn constantly, have chipped. The vultures wear obsidian masks. They look enough like people from a distance. The vultures sniff in anticipation. They descend as the Screaming Eagles soar above.

The women who wear their hair as shawls, murmur a slow, hoarse Janazah⁴. In their arms, their babes have turned to rocks, taken and swallowed up by the fathers. The swaddling cloth is now the shroud.

If the night does not take them, if the rains do not drown them with sorrow, if the beasts do not maul them with rage, then they 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 wails seem endless. They scream Allah's name to the samaawat⁵ in the hope that they will be taken to Jannah⁶ or to Jahannam⁷—anywhere from this place.

Reflected in the sand, in the blood, is peace. Their faces do not move to grimace, their eyes do not well and close at the sight of peace, and their bodies do not heave under the sun.

I cannot dig any more graves, Allah smite me from the Ka'bah⁸ for it; the sand will bury them soon. I make my way to the sea, and it does not part for me as I had been promised. As I kneel and pray, I hope for nothing but an end to this odyssey, but, as with all other prayers, only the gentle song of the wind answers me.

1: An exodus of sorts.

2: The Ghūl, a gravedigger, the outcast; He dwells in the necropolis.

3: The enshrouding of the dead as part of the funeral rite.

4: A funeral prayer and part of the burial ritual.

5: The heavens and the earth. The whole creation of Allah.

6: Paradise.

7: The cursed place. Hell, the place where fathers murder their sons; Gehenna.

8: The house of god.



I Can't Forgive Them

Kay'ana Reaves



Act 1 Scene 1

The curtains rise and the two guys, Ronnie and Da'Vante stand at the corner in front of Da'Vante (D) for short, uncle's shop, conversing about the new girl (Sabrina — Bri for short) that just joined their school. People walk back and forth, some holding babies, couples either laughing or having heated arguments. The homeless people walking by either pushing grocery carts full of plastic bottles, their children with bags of clothes in the back or sitting on the side of the road asking on goers for change. In return they walked past them giving off looks of revulsion. Drug dealers sitting in their big shiny black escalade trucks looking out for the cops as they "discreetly" handed over drugs for money to those who stopped at their window to "talk".

DaVante - I don't know bro, she be talking to all of the weird kids, well not weird they just extremely extra, like loud and obnoxious, she don't really seem like the type of person that's all loud and crazy, more, like, quiet and to herself, maybe she just like that in public. *(Laughing at the inappropriate joke he made about her).*

Ronnie - *(Dapping a guy that walked past looking across the street at Sabrina who sat at the park bench occupied by something she was writing)* You've known her all of what? Ten days and you're already fantasizing about what she does behind closed doors? *(He said shaking his head not believing what he was hearing).*

DaVante — You know what they say, you gotta do what you gotta do -

Ronnie - *(interrupting DaVante)* Hell nah, that's not what they say, that's what you say — you can't even use that phrase in the context of our conversation. People say it as In they have nothing else so they gotta make use with what they got. For example my grandma ain't have no dish soap so she used detergent, I called her out on it and she said and I repeat 'gotta do what you gotta do'. You sexualizing Sabrina by thinking about what she do behind closed doors, two different situations, one phrase with one meaning and you just using it wrong.

DaVante - You know what, I don't care, for you to be my boy for ten years you definitely don't act like it sometimes, you always go against everything I say, you supposed to agree with me not go against me. You always find something wrong with what I say or what I do. I'm sorry I'm not as smart as you and know as much as you.

Ronnie - *(throwing his hands up in disbelief pushing himself off of the wall)* Whatever man, I'm not bout' to have this conversation with you, all I did was explain to you that you used that phrase in the wrong context, but if you gon sit here and cry about it then I'm gon' bounce.

DaVante — Ain't nobody crying first of all, second you ain't have to go into detail about what I said, it don't matter, you understood what I meant so you should've just left it at that.

Ronnie — you sexualizing a girl that you don't even know, I'm not about to just sit here and listen to you do that, especially if what you sayin' sound stupid.

DaVante - *(squeezing his eyebrows together)* now I stupid, you saying it as if you never talked about a girl sexually, I don't even see why you care, she just another girl in the streets and school.

Ronnie — Whatever DaVante, I'm not bout' to have this conversation with you, you really sound stupid right now -.

Uncle Ronnie opens the door and stands at the entrance lighting a cigarette taking a slow drag , blowing the smoke in the direction of the boys before letting out a nasty nasally cough.

Uncle Ron — What the hell yall arguing about today? I could hear y'all all the way in here. It's always something with you boys, I'm surprised you two haven't split up after ten years, yall argue enough.

Ronnie — It's hard to find somebody that you know ain't gon switch up nowadays unc, we been rocking for ten years. Too long to split up over some corny argument that we gon' be over later.

DaVante — yeah, even when they think they know it all and don't want to admit to being wrong. But yeah, ten years



strong.

Ronnie gives a hard eye roll at D's statement

Uncle Ron - *(long sigh)* That's how me and my brother was, Ron daddy *(pointing his finger at Ron while getting rid of the built up ashes hanging from the cigarette)*, was until he got locked up for the stupid stuff they doin *(Pointing a wrinkled finger at the dudes across the street)* they clearly don't have any shame in what they doing, *(taking a pause)* you know it's kids that be walking around and playing out here and they out here selling drugs and doing and saying crazy stuff. That's why these boys going to juvey and these girls getting pregnant at 15 and 16, they don't got no good example or role model to teach them the right thing. Kids moms sitting at home doing nothing to help they child do and be better about theyselves, dads out here selling drugs or going to jail, nothing, they got nobody, Ron I told ya daddy if he ain't gon quit that stuff and do better by you then he could just leave you with me and that's what he did, you remember, he brought you over to my house that night, left you and ain't ever come back to get you, come to find out he ended up going to jail getting caught with that stuff in his car. Then ya momma *(he laughed sarcastically taking another puff from his cigarette)* boy ya momma was something else, she never had no good intentions with you, right when she had you she left you with ya daddy and -

Ronnie held his hand up clearly angry

Ronnie – Alright, I don't want to hear about this, I'm about to leave because neither one of them mean anything to me

Uncle Ron – Boy that's ya momma and ya daddy you talking about, you better not say that about them, they made messed up decisions -

(Interrupting Uncle Ronnie getting noticeably upset by the minute)

Ronnie - No, I'm supposed to be they son and they deserted me and left me to be raised by someone else, you not the one who up and decided you was gon mess around and make a baby they was so they can raise me, but no they had to put they needs in front of mines so I'm not gon sit and respect them when they didn't care to respect me.

(He walked off across the street towards Sabrina who was sitting by herself)

DaVante – I mean I understand where he coming from and all but you can't tell Ron nothing -

(Uncle Ronnie looked at him with a displeased look for talking about his nephew although he was doing so in his head)

Uncle Ronnie - Don't be talking bout' my nephew in front of me.

DaVante - *(Throwing his hand up with his mouth open)* I'm not but you was just – Nevermind.

Uncle Ronnie - *(laughing while putting his cigarette out)* I'm just kidding, but I'm gonna head back inside and make sure they keeping up with my store, you better stay out of trouble boy, I don't want to see on the news another black son dead and gone because they don't know how to make smart decisions.

DaVante - I won't let you down Uncle Ron, it was good talking to you.

(They did the casual handshake and big Ron went back in the store leaving D to walk off and figure out somewhere to go since Ronnie walked off mad and was talking to Sabrina)



Act 1 Scene 2

The curtains arose and Sabrina sat at the park writing plans for the BLM (Black lives matter) movement she was doing with a few of her friends and family members, she was really into making a difference in the world and giving back to the people, Ronnie, previously very upset from the conversation with his uncle and DaVante sat at the table with Sabrina.

Sabrina – *(looking up, stopping what she was doing)* Oh hey, we go to school together, I'm Sabrina

Ronnie – Ronnie, Ron for short -

Sabrina – is this like your table or something because if it is I'll move.

(She proceeded to grab her things and started standing up but he grabbed her arm and shook his head)

Ronnie – Nah you good, this ain't my table, I just noticed you from across the street and in school, thought I would come over, say hi and formally introduce myself to you, I mean you probably heard stuff about me in school but yeah I'm Ronnie.

Sabrina - *(She shrugged smiling kindly)* Maybe I have maybe I haven't, I will tell you that I can't judge you based off of what I heard *(pausing)*, if I heard anything that is, I have to see for myself and judge for myself.



(Ronnie sat there confused, not knowing whether he should say something sarcastic or something nice in return to her comment so he just raised his eyebrows and started messing around on his phone)

Sabrina's friend enters setting the tablet she was carrying around on the table while taking a quick glance at Ronnie, she sat there for a minimum of about five minutes before walking off leaving Bri to continue writing stuff down in her book.

Ronnie – So what you working on? You seem really into it, I mean if you don't mind me asking that is.

She smiled dropping her pen and looked up at him crossing her arms

Sabrina – Do you really care or are you just bored and want something to talk about that you aren't going to remember tomorrow?

Ronnie - *(shrugging his shoulders while he thought about if he cared or just wanted something random to talk about that he wasn't in fact going to remember tomorrow)* I don't know, I guess I'll remember it.

Sabrina - *(She laughed closing her book)* Let's talk about something else because clearly you aren't at all interested in what I'm writing or doing, so how long have you been going to Westlake?

Ronnie - *(He shrugged)* Well I've been going since 9th grade

Sabrina – Is there anything that you recommend me to do that's fun? -

Ronnie – Well it's Georgia, I mean, there's a lot of fun stuff to do especially if you new and never been here before, of course not by yourself, but still.

Sabrina - *(nodding to show that she was listening to him)* Well thank you for that, anyways what made you come over?

Ronnie - *(shrugging)* I already told you I wanted to formally introduce myself to you, you don't want to talk to me or something?

Sabrina – No! I wasn't saying that, I was just asking, I didn't know if there was anything more as to why you came over- *(her phone started ringing cutting her off from what she was saying)* I'm

sorry, I have to go but I'll see you, It was nice to formally meet you Ronnie?

Ronnie - *(He nodded)* Yeah, same to you
He got up and walked off at the same time she walked off.



Act 1 Scene 3

Uncle Ron and Ronnie Jr sat in the kitchen, Uncle Ron reading a newspaper and Ronnie scrolling through the drama scene called Facebook, Uncle Ron, DaVante and him haven't talked since Monday, it was Friday afternoon. It was raining out and Ronnie had a "date" with Sabrina at the arcade and then out to lunch. He still didn't know much about her because she felt he was never fully interested in what she did.

Unc Ronnie – *(Setting the newspaper down)* Everything that happens, happens for a reason boy. Your parents are strange characters, they did what they did because they were each going through something, now I'm in no way shape and or form saying that what your parents did was right but at what point in time are you going to forgive them? Son you can't continue to hold this hatred in your heart for them because every time you take ten steps forward that same hatred you have for the two of them is going to push you fifteen more steps back so in reality where can you say you've gone in life? You going to end up in the same place you started if not further. Yeah your dad sold drugs and then used them and carried them with him and ya mom pretty much left you for dead because she knew what your dad did and the risks of leaving you with him and she did it anyways because she was selfish, but that don't mean you go out and be just like your dad because trust me, I ain't stupid, I know you doing them drugs. Ya dad did what he did for a reason, I'm not justifying it but we grew up watching our daddy beat our mom, every night he would come in drunk, if she wasn't downstairs in that kitchen making him something to eat he would hit her, he eventually left, momma got too old and worn down to -
Ronnie stood up already angry – almost as if you could see the smoke floating from his ears and started for the door.

Uncle Ron – Boy sit yo self down right now *(He took a pause and started pulling at his salt and pepper beard before coughing roughly)* I've bust my butt taking care of you because ya no good parents don't give two damns about you and if you still living and yet you still fail to respect me. I could've let yo poor innocent self struggle to make a living but being ya



uncle I took you under my wing and have raised you since and you still can't seem to get it through your thick skull that you need somebody, you gon definitely need somebody, and with that attitude of yours everyone is going to leave. When you step out that door every day you never know what lies ahead of you, you could get shot for no reason, might even just get shot cause you just another black boy that ain't about nothing. I'm trying to teach you something because that game you tryna play gon get you one or two places and that's to jail or six feet under. That dealing life ain't no joke Ronnie, you see where it got ya dad. As ya uncle I'm just saying be about something if you wanna be somebody cause you never know how long you got left on this earth. Value ya life, don't waste it doing something you gon regret later on if you even make it that far.

He didn't have anything to say to that so he left and went to go meet up with Sabrina at the arcade.

Sabrina – What's up? You've barely talked since we've gotten here, are you sure, you're okay? *(putting her food down she picked up her lemon water and took a long-exaggerated sip trying to get him to at least crack a smile but he didn't so she set her cup down with a frown).*

Ronnie - *(he looked at Sabrina for a long minute before raising his eyebrows, he dropped his head and laughed sarcastically)* How do you feel about me? -

Sabrina – well -

Ronnie - *(cutting her off he put his finger up)* Be honest, I really don't care if it's hurtful, I can handle it, I just want the truth.

Around them people talked about their problems or the new promotion that they just received. Babies cried non stop, kids running up and down the aisle with Ice cream drizzling down their chin and their parents yelling at them to stop running and sit down. Sabrina set her cup down and sat up straighter putting her thoughts into a reasonable statement.

Sabrina – Well honestly Ronnie, I

think you're very stuck up and stubborn, you care what people see of you, which is totally not a bad thing at all, but you act as if your reputation is bigger and better then everything and everyone and it makes your ego skyrocket and that there is not a good thing. You're very smart and yet I feel as if you try so hard to hide that part of you because in school you're like this big bad boy that is the 'plug' or whatever that means -

He laughed raising his eyebrows letting her continue.

Sabrina – You hide who you really are because you're afraid of being accepted, now I'm not saying that's true but that's how I feel, and I don't like that because you aren't actually being true to yourself, your pretty much lying to yourself about who you are because of the people around you. -



Ronnie – What if I don't know how to be myself.

Sabrina – You do, you're just scared of what everyone else is going to say about you, that's why you think you can't.

Ronnie – What if I don't want people to think of me differently?

Sabrina - Then you don't want to be you, you want to be someone else.

Ronnie - *(he laughed sitting back against the torn up green chair and placed his forearm on the table slapping it gently)* I honestly can't believe I'm saying this for the first time in forever but you're the realest female I've met, you don't beat around the bush or sugar coat anything.

She shrugged, shaking her head .

Sabrina – I just know from experience what it feels like to not be myself or how it feels to not feel like I'm doing right by myself. I've lived based off of how everyone else wanted me to live and what society deemed was 'normal', and I've lived up to everyone's standards that I forgot about who I am and what I wanted. At that time, I honestly didn't care about how everyone else felt because I found me and I feel as if that's what your missing, your missing that ounce of courage to finally be you and break free from the shell that everyone has molded for you because that's not you. You're only given one life and at what point are you going to choose to live it? *He looked at her and hid a smile not letting her know that what she just said made him feel somewhat better about himself even if she did insinuate that he had no courage.*

Ronnie - Do you think that I don't care about anyone?

Sabrina - *(she sighed throwing her hands up)* No comment.

Ronnie – No Sabrina please, I really need your help and I'm not going to get anywhere if I don't get any constructive criticism that I'll actually listen to and take into consideration.

Sabrina – I'm not going to go as far as to say you don't care about anyone but how you act towards people makes it seem as though you don't care for them. - *He cut her off yet again.*

Ronnie – Are you one of them?

Sabrina quickly looked up completely thrown off guard by this question, he eventually looked at her awaiting her answer and in return she sighed nodding her head.

Sabrina – Yeah -

Before she could get another answer out he had cut her off

Ronnie – Why? You know I care about you.

Sabrina - *(shaking her head)* See Ronnie, that's the thing, I don't know that, you can say it all you want but actions speak louder than words and you've shown no sign of caring for me, you'll talk to me outside of school where people are more than likely not to see us whereas in school you walk right past me as if I'm just another girl in the hall trying to get to class. That's what I mean, your ego just overpowers your true personality that you don't see the people around you that your hurting and it sucks because you don't care and as much as you say you do you don't because If you did then you would try to change that but you don't and that's what's making everyone fall back from you. I'm by no means saying change who you are but you should change how you act and go about certain things. It's not cute now, by far.



Act 1 Scene 4

Sabrina sat outside with her dad. He occupied a drink of some sort of liquor and she had her notebook in her hand thinking of new ideas to write about or new plans for the BLM movement that she was still participating in. The relationship between her and her father just recently got rocky and ever since he's never believed in her and thought her "campaigns" were pointless. The liquor kicks in and he starts with her.

James *(Her father)* - You know, you think that just because you with your momma you better than everyone else, you listen to everyone else and let them turn you against everyone on this side of the family, I thought better of you, my oldest daughter and you following behind your no - good brothers. *(looking at her shaking his head at his daughter who was clearly not looking at him)* - are you listening to me? *She continued to sit and type on her phone while her dad talked to her*

James – Sabrina Marie I'm talking to you – you know what, this is exactly what I mean, them people over there turning you against your own father, making you be all disrespectful,



you don't even talk to me, you talk back, you've gotten noticeably worse since you left with me.

Cutting him off feeling really offended and hurt by the words that left his mouth

Sabrina — Those *people* are my family, and I don't think I'm better than anyone else in this house or in general, they aren't the ones that turned me against you, you're the one that turned me against you, you put me down 24/7, you don't believe in me and those *people* do. I'm not disrespectful I just

speak up, something I didn't use to do because I was with you and cared about how you viewed me more than anything, now I just don't care. I'm tired of feeling like I have to live up to everyone's standard because that's what they want, when will it be about what I want? Oh right you don't know, or maybe you just don't care (*wiping the tears away from her face roughly while standing up*) don't bother texting me either because I won't respond, spend time with you "family" whichever one it is you decide occupy this weekend.

Before her dad could get any word or phrase out Sabrina walked off and was now walking down the sidewalk texting her mom. Every two seconds you could hear her nails slam against the screen, evidence of an attitude that her dad had acquired on her

Ronnie (*walking up beside her in his car*) - Since you new I'm only going to tell you once, it's not as safe as you think to just be walking on the sidewalks alone in East Point.

Sabrina - (*laughing*) I'm fine, just going to the park.

Ronnie - (*shaking his head pulling her into him*) Well let me join you, I mean it when I tell you it's not safe out here, especially at the park by yourself.

Sabrina - (*shrugging her shoulders*) Fine I guess, if you mean well and won't annoy me then you can join me.

He continued the way to the park with her and together they just hung out.

So what exactly is it that you do? (*setting his phone down*) I always see you writing in that book of yours, you always seem so focused.

Sabrina - (*not looking away from her notebook*) Do you actually care this time? (*glancing up at him*)

***“You know
Ronnie, you
can’t ignore me
forever. I only
told you the
truth
and if you
can’t handle
the truth then
something is
truly wrong
with you.”***

Ronnie — Yeah why not? I want to at least know something about you before I just continue to talk to you? I mean for all I know you could be a serial killer.

Sabrina — Well if you may know, for one I'm not a serial killer, I like to participate in campaigns and protest.

Ronnie - (*looking at her weirdly*) About what?

Sabrina — Social injustice, racism and other things wrong with the world today

Ronnie — You one of them people.

Sabrina — (*looking at him offended*) No, I'm someone that wants to make a difference in the world, and make it a better and safer place for people to live.

Ronnie — You do that black lives matter stuff?

Sabrina - (*Laughing quietly rolling her eyes while closing her book angrily*) First of all it's not *stuff*. It's a very smart and understandable movement, and second yes I do participate in the black lives matter movement.

Ronnie - (*rolling his eyes yet again*) That movement is so pointless and stupid, I don't even see why you sit and waste your time doing something as pointless as that, you're honestly going to get nowhere in life doing that.



Ronnie - (*Laughing*) Alright, I will try to not annoy you.



Sabrina - *(standing up highly pissed and overly offended)* You're honestly never going to get anywhere being so stuck up and stubborn, some of us like to live, and it's not pointless. If you and every other ignorant, selfish and drugged up person did right then people like me wouldn't have to protest about giving justice to black people, you guys have totally ruined our image and now every day we have to watch our back because we aren't safe and are bound to drop dead at any given minute because we can't be justified for not doing anything and being completely innocent. I'm not wasting my time but you're wasting mine, so goodbye and have a great day. *(She walked off and didn't look back).*

Ronnie - *(Throwing his hands up)* I didn't even do anything! *(standing up he followed after Sabrina to see one of the drug lords talking to her while she tried to walk away)* yo Jay leave her alone.

Jayden looked at Ronnie with a sly smile.

Jayden- *(laughing)* Yo this ya chick Ronnie?

Ronnie - *(Grabbing Sabrina)* Yeah now leave her alone and get back to ya' business.

Jayden - *(laughing and hitting his boy)* Lil' boy Ronnie don't went and got him a white girl.

Sabrina - *(pulling out of Ronnie's grip still upset)* I'm not white and stop talking about me as if I'm not even standing here. *(walking off even more upset than before)*

Ronnie – Sabrina! *(looking at Jayden)* just stay away from her and I mean that *(walking away).*

Ronnie sat in the living room watching tv while being occupied on his phone still not talking to his uncle when he came in and sat near him.

Uncle Ronnie – You know Ronnie, you can't ignore me forever, I only told you the truth and if you can't handle the truth then something is truly wrong with you.

Ronnie - Ain't none of that, you over here talking about my so called mom and dad like I care and then say respect them. I Ain't respecting nobody that don't do nothing for me.

Uncle Ronnie – So I'm assuming I don't do nothing for you either, cause you definitely don't respect me.

Ronnie - *(Throwing his hands up)* Alright, I'm not about to argue with you.

Uncle Ronnie - *(Laughing while lighting his cigarette)* exactly what I mean, go do you son, make it home safe.

Ronnie - *(walking out the door going on his phone)*



Act 1 Scene 5

Ronnie and Davante stood outside walking back to his place, Davante owed Jayden and his boys money and they were out to get him – D was asking Ronnie for the money although he continuously told him he didn't have it. Jay and his boys pull up.

Davante - *(holding his hand instantly getting nervous)* Jay I -

Jayden - *(cutting him off)* Nah where my money at? You been telling me you was gon' get it to me for two weeks, where it's at? *(he was clearly angry).*

Davante - *(shaking)* Jay, I swear, I'm gon' get it to you, I just gotta find the money fir -

Jayden pulled out a gun and Ronnie stood forward.

Ronnie - *(holding his hand out)* Jay that's not even necessary, put the gun away, he'll get you your money by tomorrow, just put the gun away.

Jayden - *(putting his hand on the trigger)* I want my money now, not in twenty-five minutes and definitely not tomorrow, right now or he's gone.

Ronnie – Nobody is dying, you just can't get your money right now, I said tomorrow, you just gon' have to wait.

Davante – Ronnie, it's cool, it is what is is, I'm good.

Ronnie – Nah, like I said you just gotta get ya money tomorrow.

Jayden - *(shaking his head)* That aint good enough for me, times up, lights out. *(pulling the trigger shooting Davante square in the chest).*

Davante yelled falling to the ground and Ronnie yelled too falling



with him holding him up by his head while blood gathered around him. Jay and his boys had already ran off.

Ronnie - (yelling) Somebody call an ambulance, get help!

Sabrina – Ronnie where are you going with that? *(She grabbed his arm trying to get him to drop the gun that he held tightly in his hand).*

Ronnie – To handle my business, Sabrina let me go, just call the cops.

Sabrina – And if they come here and find you with a gun in your hand then what?

Ronnie – Do it look like I care? They killed my boy! *(tears were continuing to fall down his face).*

Sabrina - *(looking at him with a straight face)* Yeah they killed your boy but I don't want and or need them killing you now put the gun in the back of my truck and sit down, no one else is dying, one person being dead isn't enough for you? *(pulling out her phone dialing 9-1-1).*

Ronnie - *(He put the gun in the back of her truck after making sure the safety was on and went to sit down on the curb looking at his shirt and hands that was lathered in Davante's blood)*

The cops had come and questioned both Sabrina and Ronnie. The cops informed him that they wanted to talk to Ronnie more another time.

It's been two hours since Davante died, Ronnie was still distraught and Sabrina never once left his side.

Ronnie – If I could've just gave him the money right then he wouldn't be gone, all because I didn't have the money.

Sabrina - *(grabbing his face)* Ron, it's not your fault, what happened to Davante was on him-

Ronnie - *(Throwing her hands off of him)* So you're saying what happened to him should've happened?

Sabrina – No that's not what I'm saying at all, he sh-

Ronnie - *(getting upset and cutting her off yet again)* So then

what the hell are you saying?

Sabrina - *(huffing)* If you would let me finish – no Davante shouldn't have gotten shot but there was nothing you could do, you told him to stop smoking but he chose not to listen, he chose to get those drugs not you – you can't take the blame for something he did-.

Ronnie - *(standing up)* Get out. You're trying to justify him getting shot an-

Sabrina - *(cutting him off)* I'm not trying to justify anything, I'm ju-

Ronnie – I said get out. Don't worry about me because you the last person I want to see, so I'm telling you to stay away from me.

Sabrina - *(grabbing her things getting upset)* Fine, I've done nothing but be here for you since we've met and you can say that? Because of me you're still here, If I would've let you kill Jay and his boys you would've been incarcerated for god knows how long, or let's see, dead maybe. Maybe if the cops would've been there and seen you with the gun you would've gone to jail, not only for possession of a weapon but you're black Ronnie and your friend's on the ground in front of you and you're there above him with a gun. I understand you just lost your best friend but you don't have to keep pushing everyone away. But just know you lost me for good and there's no turning back, because this time you really hurt me.



Act 1 Scene 6

It was Saturday, exactly a week after D' was shot and Ronnie was still taking it pretty bad. He pushed away all the real people in his life, he still has a chance to make things right with his uncle but not Sabrina. He pushed her away for good this time. What Ronnie didn't know was his parents were back and home for good he hoped. They released his father from jail and he went back to Ronnie's mother. They were currently in the process of getting Ronnie back and making amends.

Ronnie - *(wiping his face from the tears that fell)*

Uncle Ron – Ronnie get down here.

Ronnie - *(laying on his bed groaning once he heard his uncle calling him)* What?!?



Uncle Ron – Boy get down here

Ronnie - (*huffing he got up and started down the stairs where he heard other voices, unc stood at the bottom of the steps*) who here?

Uncle Ron – I think you should come see for yourself.

Ronnie - (*looking at him confused*) if it's those cops I don't want to talk.

Uncle Ron – Just come down here and see.

Ronnie - (*He stepped off the step with a sigh and followed his uncle*) Fine.

Elijah and Aaliyah sat in the living room with Aaliyah's 13-year-old daughter and they were conversating when, Ronnie came in they all became mute and he became angry and froze.

Ronnie – What they doing here? (*looking at uncle Ron*).

Uncle Ronnie - (*sighing while placing his hand on Ron's back*) Your dad got out a few days ago, they want to talk to you.

Ronnie - (*shaking his head, all of his previous anger returning*) No, I don't know them. They shouldn't be here and you can't make me talk to them because they don't mean nothing to me.

His parents looked at him with a hurt expression playing across his face, his dad more so than his mom.

Elijah – Ronnie we are still your parents regardless to what happened.

Ronnie – Nah, y'all not my parents, at the end of the day you left me over here and Aaliyah left me for dead with you, Pops my parents, he took care of me for fourteen years while she was out messing with every dude that entered her eyesight and you was too busy selling drugs in and out of the house and going to jail to make sure I was okay, neither one of Y'all deserve to be called a parent. If I'm being completely honest y'all could all leave because I don't want to see y'all.

Elijah - (*Standing up*) You know what, yeah Ronnie we know we made some mistake regarding raising you but you can't continue to hold a grudge on either of us because we said we're sorry. Besides it's been fourteen years, get over it.

Ronnie - (*Standing up close to his face*) Yeah fourteen years that

neither of you have been here. How you think I felt going to school hearing people talk about how much time they get to spend with their parents, how they parent's bought them new gifts. I go outside and see people playing with they parents and all this shit, how you think I'm supposed to feel knowing you was in jail and she walked out on me knowing you sold drugs?. What was I supposed to tell my teacher when it was parent meetings and y'all didn't show up? Oh yeah, my dad in jail and my mom don't care about me? (*Crying while stabbing his finger harshly (hastily?) against his dad chest*) My Uncle, (*Pointing at uncle Ron*) he did everything for me, he was my mom and my dad. He looked out for me because I had no one, he made sure I was good in school, he gave me a place to lay my head and food to put in my stomach and clothes on my back. He loved me and supported me, he went to all my basketball games cheering me on, taught me the ways of life. Every birthday and Christmas, he was the first person I saw when I woke up, not you or Aaliyah. Pop's did everything for me so don't ever tell me to get over it, y'all hurt me a hell of a lot and didn't do nothing over the years to fix it.

Uncle Ronnie got quiet and stood against the wall with tears in his eyes. Aliyah (his mom) covered Selena ears from the loud noise from him. His dad had nothing to say to what Ronnie just hit him with.

Elijah – Ron I'm sorry, you right, I could've done something about it but I didn't, I was going through something, it's not always easy to just quit the dealing like you think Ron, that's why we here, to make amends.

Ronnie – You had me! was that not enough for you to stop? Something could've happened to me but you didn't care, you kept doing what you did, you dropped me off at pops doorstep and left, I had nothing, I was 4, 4!. Drugs were more important to you, not me. I meant nothing to y'all and you think you can just come back and make amends? It's too late.

Aaliyah - (*sighing*) You are our child.

Ronnie – Shut up, no one was talking to you.

Aaliyah - Do-

Elijah – Now don't go talking out the side of ya neck to ya momma like that, have some respect.

Ronnie – Like y'all had respect for me? (*turning around to walk the opposite way*)

Elijah – You're a kid, what respect did you need. We -



Before his dad could finish his sentence Ronnie spun around and punched him in the jaw knocking him on the floor, Selena and Aaliyah gasped and his dad sat on the ground holding his bloody nose and busted lip. Ronnie shook his head running off upstairs to his room. He sat down on his bed and put his head in his hands crying. He soon got up and punched a hole in the wall scratching up his knuckles making them bleed.

Uncle Ron - (*Opening his door*) Let your anger out son.

Ronnie – Why you let them in here? They hurt me unc.

Uncle Ron - (*pulling him into a hug*) I know, I know boy, but you gotta forgive them -

Ronnie - (*pulling back*) Seriously? Forgive them? For? They left me for fourteen years, I was only four, I didn't know anything or any better.

Uncle Ron – Not for them, for you, don't continue holding a grudge on them because like I told you before it's going to get you nowhere in life, now look at you, pushed all ya close friends away and now you need them most and they not here for you. (*sighing*) You going through a lot right now and I understand that but you gotta think about what you do before you do it. Try giving them a chance, if you don't want to that's okay. They missed out, not you.

Ronnie – (*wiping his face roughly*) I can't; they hurt me too bad, I'm just about to go until they leave

Uncle Ron – That's the thing they are staying here for a while until they find a place to stay. They asked me and I would've felt bad if I said no knowing they have that girl with them.

Ronnie - (*shaking his head*) I'm just gon' leave then, I might come back later, if not I'll call you or something

Uncle Ron – Son do-

Ronnie – Nah, I'a see you unc

Ronnie walked out of the house and towards the park where he could clear his mind, too much was happening all at once and he was not coping well with it. He had no real friends close to him anymore.

He got to the park to see Sabrina sitting at the bench with another dude and they were talking and laughing, he stopped not knowing if he should continue to keep walking or stop and turn back around and find somewhere else to go. While he was stuck thinking about

what to do Sabrina sat looking at him with a straight face.

Ronnie - (*scratching his head watching as she started to walk towards him once the dude walked off*) Hey (*he said nervously*)

Sabrina - (*sticking her hands in her back pockets*) Hi (*she smiled softly*).

Ronnie – How are you?

Sabrina – I'm fine, the question is how are you?

Ronnie - (*shrugging*) You really want to know or are you still angry at me?

Sabrina - (*stepping back slightly looking away from him quickly before looking back at him*) You said what you had to say and I said what I had to say, if you meant what you said then I'll leave you alone but I didn't approach you for that, I came over to see how you were doing, coping with everything.

Ronnie - (*Sighing loudly*) Want me to be honest?

Sabrina - (*laughing quietly*) Wouldn't have it any other way Ron

Ronnie - (*glancing at her with a smile on his face, something he hasn't done in a while*) My parents are back and they want to make "amends" with me (*he said putting air quotations around amend*)

Sabrina – What did your uncle say about that?

Ronnie – He told me that I didn't have to talk to them and make anything right between us if I didn't want to and that it's their loss not mines.

Sabrina - (*raising her eyebrows*) Well I mean he's right, they hurt you not the other way around.

Ronnie – Yeah, that they did do.

Sabrina – Well are you going to forgive them?

Ronnie - (*shrugging*) No, fourteen years they were absent, they didn't even check up on me, I can't forgive them.



The ancient basalt columns vibrate and
Start the booming hymn of a grand organ,
Echoing through an empty cathedral.
As I walk along the path a cool breeze
Glides along the surface of the font and
Sends sacred droplets of holy water
Into the air. A natural blessing.
This ceremony is clearly meant
For someone far more impressive than myself.
Perhaps this divine chamber is waiting
For the return of the Widow of Windsor.

The faces I have seen

Blood.
A warmth like mum's
Beneath my wind stricken feet
Dissipates into nothing. Nothing IS.
Drying on the stones of the narrow path.

*The sorrows revealed,
I lay them at your feet*

The howls of the ancient, lonely psalm
And Fionn mac Cumhaill hums the sweet Hebrides.

The words I have spoken

Isolated from them, hidden away.
A secret society.
A password only known
To a true man of the sea.

I lay my head to rest

And the deep red melts into
The gray hues of the dull, forgotten glass.
As Fingal takes a deep breath
Calm and slow
And Gone.

Desolate

Katie Forth



Remorse

Becca Flisnik

I stood at the closed door, feet firmly planted in the spongy carpet. It was stained with the mysterious

bodily fluids of petrified children. The stories of past victims scratched at my skin, making me twitch in disgust. Because I didn't really feel the urge to stand in the dried snot any longer, I opened the door, relieved actually. That same girl from the bus this morning was there, stooped with her head hung low in front of the principal. It was probably the stale scent of Purell and copy paper that suffocated the air within Principal Miller's internment box for young children. The girl lifted her head, looking out the excuse of a window once I walked in. It was springing out there.

“Sit down, Jack,” she hissed at me, spit flying out of her teeth. I stuck my chin into the air and strolled to the weathered chair, clearly indented by the amount of people who had sat in its loveseat.

“How about I sit up instead?” I joked, in objection to her not optimal suggestion. The girl’s shoulders bounced from the slightest laughter, which she stifled when Miller’s glance met the source of the indecent behavior. Principal Miller did not budge. Clearly, we found more humor in my response than she did. Hollow woman.

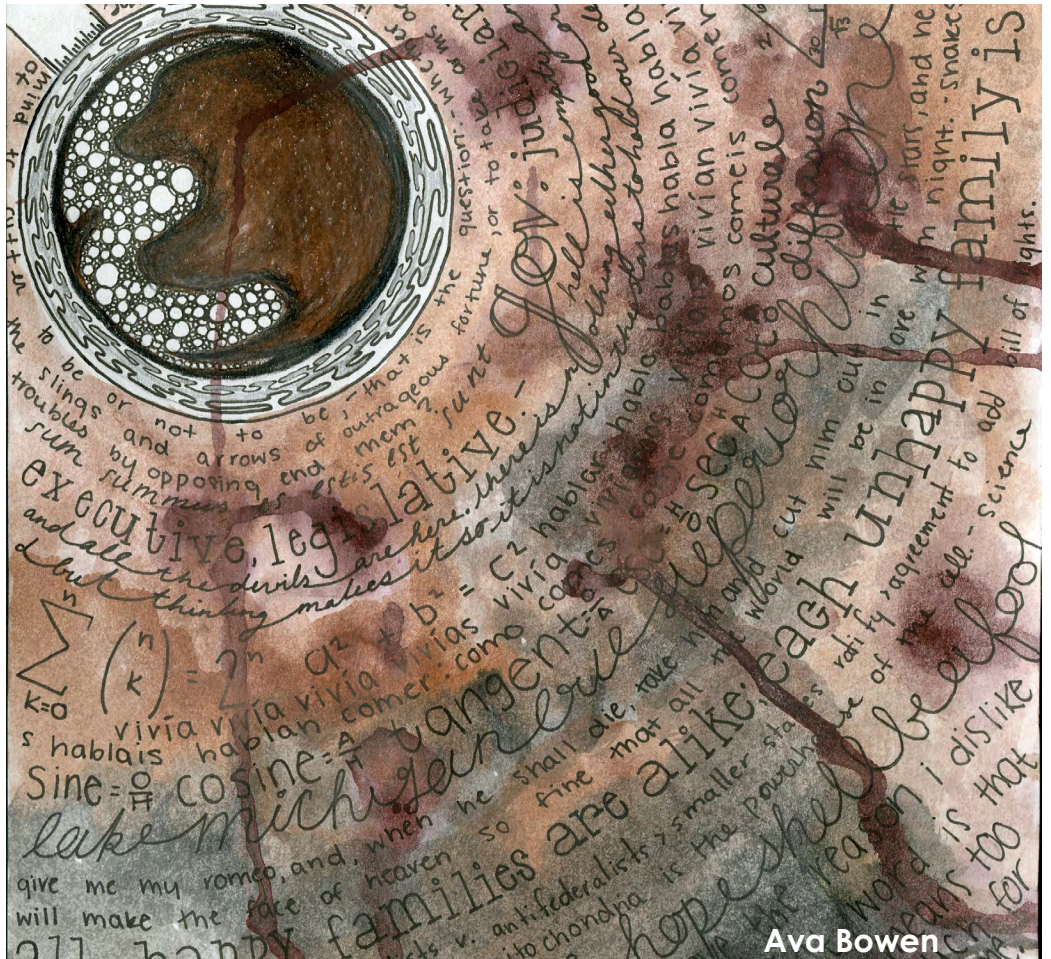
And then she tasked me with those subjective words that I seem to be faced with repeatedly— “Now, explain yourself.”

Once again Miller let another rocket of saliva loose, this time right onto my cheek. Wiping the puddle from my face, I turned to the girl from the bus. She sat there smirking at the ground where the spit had fallen.

As head of the establishment, Mrs. Baird provided my brother and me with after school “care” (if that’s what you want to call it) until our mom came home from work. Each day she ran out to the bus with her plump motherly arms outstretched. Welcoming, right? Only she hustled right past Ethan and me, so her precious “Lilly Lu” could bounce into her chest.

In the depths of the claustrophobic ranch was “Lilly’s Lair”, where no kid returned the same. No one knew of the irrational therapy that happened down there, and even her mother was too blind to see.

“Ethan, we need to improve your speech, so people don’t think you’re slow,” Lilly suggested sweetly, observ-



Ava Bowen

ing my brother with that adult-ish condescension you only get when you disappoint your parents. "Try it again for me please. Rosie really wants three horses."

“Woasie wiwee wants fwee hoses.”

Ethan was incapable of speaking. The poor kid was taken out of school to meet with a specialist, and even when my parents told administration that they wanted him to stay in class, the teacher took him out anyway. Even the English as a Second Language teacher couldn't understand the noises

Three PM was the worst time of day, always. I would have rather stayed the night in a grimy classroom than conclude my day of educational endeavors at the Baird bus stop.



coming out of his mouth. But why Lilly cared to “help” Ethan is beyond my knowledge.

“That’s sixteen black dots,” Lilly announced. “You need five stars to get a glass of water. Five more. Becca, put up another black sticker on his chart.”

I stood in place next to Lilly at her desk, seeing the desperate look on my brother’s face, sweat beading on his bangs. I wasn’t in attendance at these “sessions” out of genuine interest to listen to Ethan sputter out garbage in its purest form, but because of her threats to starve me if I didn’t drop to my knees as her “personal worker,” as she called it.

“I can take away your snack time too, Becca.” The sugared words caused me to choke on my pride. Pursing at their flavor, I walked away, stomach roaring. Snack did sound good, even if it was only a glass of water or a few saltines. I watched Ethan as he continued to sink into the cold cement.



Boarding the bus was always a chore, ordinary and dreadful. It meant succumbing to the routine lack of intelligence of those who rode it while being transported to the same rigid schedule every day. This in mind, I trudged up the stairs, making my way to the third seat on the right where I huddled up against the window. Routine. Her stop was two after mine, at the top of Highview with a few other kids, mostly younger. When the bus stopped with a puff of fumes from the exhaust, she let a little kid climb on before she did. Probably her brother, probably so she could clutch his Thomas the Tank Engine backpack to prevent him from falling back and leaking blood onto the road. That happened before.

They have never strayed from their designated seat left side, four deep. But without a second guess, she led the boy into left three as if she were programmed to break the unwritten system.

“We can’t sit hew,” he whimpered, jumbling his words into a puzzle of sounds. “Owa seat is back fare. This is Willy’s.”

I sympathized with the poor kid’s obvious love of the “w” sound. His anxiety-infected hands are stamped into my mind. I can’t forget the blue of his knuckles and the schizophrenic pulses of his fingers. And though he was about to capsize the bus with his tremors, the girl sat there poised, oblivious to the rest of the bus. *Did she even notice the game of Pokemon in the seat in front of her? Or the obnoxiously loud conversation behind their heads?* Her relaxation was astonishing considering that left three was infamous for its turbulence. It was spring, I guess. Spring fever. That’s the only thing I could have attributed to the sullen girl up the street, but even then, I’m not sure that’s what it was. Craving the warmth does not

equate to resistance.

“That’s my seat. Get up.”

Lilly rumbled down the aisle, masking the quivering coming from her left three throne. She stopped directly over their heads. She pursed her lips, predictably, and moved her hand to her hip in exasperation like some reaction to conflict she must have seen on TV.

The girl sat there and turned her head to the green outside, breathing in Lilly’s entitlement like a vapor.

“I said move. Move or else...”

I laughed in the corner of my perch. *Move or else?* What could Lilly possibly do? This is the public-school system; if you so much as breathe at the wrong time, there are consequences.

“Even if I did move, there wouldn’t be enough space for you in this seat,” the girl said casually, looking Lilly directly in the pupils, staring through her head.

A smile painted over her mouth in a toxic and syrupy manner, exuding unapologetic fakeness. I snickered, not daring to look at the erupting mountain beside me. Immediately, she pivoted in my direction, stabbing a glare between my eye sockets.

“Bite me, you cow,” I barked at her.

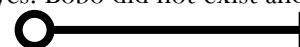
“Oh, bite *her*?”

The girl grabbed Lilly’s forearm, like a chicken leg, sinking her teeth into the well-fed flesh. Startled, Lilly clutched her wound, gaping at the girl as she scoffed down the aisle. She didn’t make it more than two rows back when the girl shouted at the fallen villain, “Hey Lilly, I prefer my meat lean,” with a wink.



I’m not a “bad” kid. I love doing homework and have excellent table manners. But when something needs to be fixed, I do it without thinking, which is why I don’t take offense to “explain yourself.” There is no harm in explaining what is right.

I just sat there smirking when the principal ordered us to recap the events on the bus this morning. Sneaking a glance over at his devious smirk, I noticed the same unaccountable demeanor that plastered his existence on the bus. Laughs boiled in my stomach and fled through my vocal chords, bellowing through the emptiness of Principal Miller’s office. In my company, the boy from the bus added by feeding Miller some forced tears regarding the death of Bobo, the family dog. Clearly Bobo was a scam due to the streams surging from the corners of his eyes. Bobo did not exist and neither did remorse.



Stuck

Hayden DeAngelis

This window contains my
escape from Hell,
This window carries me back
to Ashridge,

This window disregards the bloody stone,
This window shields my mind from the real world.

*Loud shrieks among the cold, dirty, hopeless rocks,
The silence deafens shortly after,
But nothing deafens more
Than Anne's bloody, lifeless head,
A trophy,
In where I now call Hell.*

Trophies scattered around the barren grass,
The underdog could not defeat the best,
Yet through these windows I hear whispers. Of
Hope, of peace, of London, of sweet revenge.
Or perhaps it's Death, knocking on the door.

*"I didn't receive a letter, I promise!
I didn't receive a letter, I beg!
I didn't receive a letter, if I did
Let me sit in this Hell forever.
I didn't receive the letter,
Let me leave this humid courthouse,
In Luther's name."*

The Outer Curtain tries to conceal me,
Only the fools fell in Mary's traps.
She thought I could be hidden in plain sight,
Yet through these windows I see growing crowds,
Hearing me ring like Bells stored above me,
Hearing my voice crescendo, grow, climax.

*The chains
The feast, the massive table
decorated with cloth and candles,
The smell of sweetness,
The sound of glasses colliding,
The whoops and hollers of happiness in my despair.
Whitehall has some turkey while I suffer,
Eating selections from the chef's garbage bin.
"We win!" She said.
"We win!" They chant.
"We win!"
"We win!"*

I am now powerful, limitless, proud,
I gaze through, see revolution occur,
They bombard me with questions, bring me down,
But I soar above, London wins, they lose.

*"We win!" They insist,
As they drag my shambles.
A rat peeks through the dusty, cracked stone,
Intrigued by the new sounds.
I hear her voice in the back of my head from before,
She had infiltrated my mind.
"This is the place"
"This is the place"
"This is the place of no escape".
"This is - "*

This is the place where I escape, revive,
The place where hopes and dreams had come to die
But only grew, prospered, shined in the spotlight.
These windows are the portals to fortune,
These windows irrigate the crops of hope,
Thanks to these windows, Wyatt, those below,
London is London once again.



They Told Me I Couldn't Be Deported

Becca Flisnik

You see, the funny thing is they never understood that I wanted to be deported. They thought that because the “Great USA” was the right answer for them, it must be so for the rest of us. God or whoever knows I was incapable of staying there of all places. Sure, they held me in with an adequate paycheck every other Thursday, but money couldn't afford my escape and it couldn't buy me a voice, or even equality. The amount of green they threw in my account, not even at me personally, that could reimburse the “work” I did for them. Like they assume all Latinos do, I had to hop the border before they claimed my dignity with treason charges. The only difference was I was running from my supposed safety, my forced home.

I sleep with my windows open, curtains and pulled back to let in the breeze, snowflakes, or humidity, really anything that the seasons in Maryland bring through the city of Washington. That comes with the remnants of bar brawls from O'Flannery's down the street and the morning sirens from the fire trucks going to save a few more civilians from death by flame. (If you think about it, they save a miniscule percentage of the helpless population in America, but I digress.) Back in Miami, my window opened directly Southward. Big Lu told me if I left it open as I slept, I would be able to hear my abandoned relatives in Nuevitas dancing merengue in the dark and whispering secrets over the still sea as the sun awoke. But that was a while ago, and DC was not my home.

Every American reveres the Capital with a sense of purpose and authority, as they are convinced the government functions without break. I wake up during the final moments of the bar fight before both men pass out drunk on the sidewalk, as the fire rescuers depart for their first call of the morning. The light just starts to seep into my window on the bare floor boards of my apartment, faint but noticeable. I zip into a “respectable” pencil skirt, dressing myself in perceived honor. No longer was I allowed to be a Cuban immigrant from Miami. Now I was told to be an

obedient confidant to the Federal government. And so of course, I did not have an identity anymore; I just was what they demanded of me. That's how they want it.

Seven thirty. My steps were heavy with purpose, despite the sleep still fresh in the corners of my eyes, blockading the breeze-induced tears from escaping onto my cheek. I passed Samuel's Taco Truck, as I did every day. There is no rhythm like normal routine. The whole block wreaked of preparation for the day's business: ground beef and smoked chilies. Samuel himself was about sixty-five or so and made his living selling authentic food at a despicably low price on the same block seven days each week, just to keep his landlord off his shambles of a porch.

“Hola mi amiga Cubana,” he said, craning his thin neck out of the window. “Too early for work, no?”

I stopped at the window where he handed me a cup of toxically dark Caribbean coffee, thicker than the familiar stench of taco meat. The five dollar bill I slid to him on the counter was immediately refused by his brittle brown hands. They were coated in calloused skin. As I always did, I dropped it in the tip jar.

“Catching up as usual,” I responded, immune to excess work. Somehow that response seemed to fit the situation. He nodded once and I smiled. “Have a great day, Samuel.” I said, returning to my “American” pace.

As Samuel had said, it was too early. The apartment buildings were just starting to blink, lights sporadically filling the windows. These people would take another leisurely hundred or so minutes before strolling into their leather clad offices. I gave them the benefit of the doubt; maybe they didn't have any work to do.

There were clear fingerprints on the polished mahogany door that day. I pushed open the door, wondering who could have beaten me to the task. Walking in hesitantly, assuming there was an unexpected visitor in the building, I found the answer I was looking for at the sight of the open office door in the corner of the layout of cubicles. Lamp light fled from the room, stretching across the immaculately spotless carpet.



“Marisol, where did you put my black shoes? The ones with the tassels.”

“I cleaned them last night, Mr. Keyes,” I called back. Back then, I never really enjoyed cleaning shoes. If only the Keyes' were worse to me, then I would have cause to disobey that particular task in the unwritten section of my housekeeper job description. “Here you are—is your plan to wear these with that navy suit there?”





Natalie Gross

He entered the kitchen in a deep navy set and crisp white button-down. A light blue and grey tie secured the neck of the shirt into place. “Yes, why do you ask?”

“I would go with a different pair. The dark brown, maybe?” I exited the kitchen down the hallway lined with family photos, preschool drawings, and his framed diplomas, to the “mud” room. It was larger than my parents’ restaurant, just fifteen minutes South of his spread in Coral Gables. Living in a gated development secured with a passcode affords you the ability to have a mud room that could hold a controlled mob of people. I grabbed the dark brown loafers, no tassels, returning to the kitchen. “Definitely the dark ones,” I said, holding them next to his suit.

“Good call.” He poured himself a crater-sized mug of coffee I had prepared earlier this morning. The skim milk was sitting on a saucer with two sugar cubes. That was part of my job description.

“I should think about raising my price for saving you from a dress crisis with the press,” I said, raising the intonation in my voice to clearly indicate my sarcasm.

“You name the price,” Mr. Keyes said. “Marisol, my house wouldn’t be able to run without you. I wouldn’t be able to run this campaign for Senate without all of your help. You know that. There isn’t a price that you could name that I

wouldn’t be willingly to pay. You are invaluable to this family.”

What sounded like stampede erupted from the next room over, followed by the appearance of the youngest half of the Keyes clan. They raced to the kitchen table at their usual spots, Trent facing the television broadcasting the morning news, and Emme beside him underneath the sky light. Those had been their positions ever since I began working for the Keyes family. Trent was four and Emme was just a baby then.

I made my way over to them with the pan of eggs in my hand, as they appeared to be busy in argument about who was better at touching their tongue to their nose. They demonstrated very well, contorting their face in strange shapes to outdo the other.

“Alright, alright. That’s enough of this nonsense,” I joked, spooning a healthy pile of scrambled eggs onto their plates. “Besides, I would beat both of you. No competition”

“Prove it! I don’t believe you,” Trent tried. I stuck my tongue out then mashing it into the tip of my nose, walking back to the stove with the pan. “Dad, Mi stuck her tongue up her nose!”

“Did she? I knew she was talented but that is just off the charts genius,” Mr. Keyes responded, stealing eggs right out of the pan.

Trent and Emme uncontrollably cackling at the table,



I said, "I did nothing of the sort. You didn't see anything."

It wasn't long before Mrs. Keyes entered the kitchen, finalizing the brood. Her miniature frame hustled in, leaving the rest of her person a step behind. Stopping at the counter, she poured herself coffee and sucked in the liquid, instantaneously syncing her sleep-plagued consciousness to her whirlwind of a body.

"Good morning, Marisol. T and E, I am meeting with the school board during the day, and right after school I will pick you up to go to your tennis lessons at the club. Sound good?" Mrs. Keyes imposed. She had certainty in her voice. I always envied her ability to never question. "Alright, let's get the day started, kiddos!"

Trent and Emme sprang into action, dropping their forks and hopping away from the table with their backpacks. "See you later, Mi," they said in chorus, running up and hugging be before they headed out of the kitchen, their egg bit tongues pointing at me.

I laughed, sticking my own out in reciprocation. They were followed by Mrs. Keyes corralling them together. "Have a great day at work. See you tonight for dinner," she said, kissing her husband on the way out the pristine white door. He put the mug in the sink and began to walk out of the kitchen.

"Goodbye Marisol," he said with a smirk, and walked out. They were the ideal family: wealthy, generous, charitable, and well-respected. It amazed me how perfect they were, and I never realized it until they walked out of the kitchen every morning, leaving me to clean up the remnants of their perfection. I was left alone in their home, just an imperfect me in the epicenter of their picturesque life.

"Well aren't you eager this morning," I said to the head behind the fresh polished desk. Mr. Keyes, well now Senator Keyes, lifted his head slightly with a small jolt.

"Marisol, man, you scared me. I didn't realize people actually came in this early." He removed his glasses, already slipping, from his nose, wiping the grease off from their bridge. His mouth cocked a smile over his clean-shaven face.

"Come in, come in."

"People don't come in this early, that's the point," I said, falling into the brass studded leather chair across from his desk. "No one gets work done in the daylight. Every person in this office seems to have their own agenda, but they cannot stick to their daily agendas. A bunch of salesmen."

"Stop, this is the government, you can't trash them now. We are so close, pending on this information you are receiving." He said these words with absolute faith, like there was no way that there could be any glitch in his system.

If one didn't know Mr. Keyes, they would see his tall slender frame, large eyes, ordinary haircut, and somewhat crooked smile and assume he was a man with a friendly disposition and desire to please. In some cases, a long while ago that was true. In Miami that was true. But when we got to Washington, he sucked in the ever changing seasonal air and seemed to change with it. Most of these men appear that way, popular by design, but there is no deception like federal privilege.



Ava Bowen



Cleanup in Pen 16

Thomas Pinkham

The last of the screaming children had been dragged out the gate by disgruntled parents. The parking lot was now almost empty, save the same cars always parked in the same spots. Locking the main gate, Dusty went to make her final rounds for the day. Everything was much quieter, save for the occasional whooping of a monkey. Peering briefly into the enclosures, she found the animals performing their nightly routines. The mother gorilla Boboto was grooming her child, the silverback was already asleep. The capybaras were curled up on the edge of their pool, as were the otters. The small fennec foxes were still awake, quietly inspecting the enclosure for any signs of other life. Seeing every animal accounted for, Dusty checked her clipboard off and turned towards the office. How anyone would sneak an animal out of the zoo was beyond her, but it wasn't her concern. She'd prefer to get to home and get to bed sooner rather than later. Opening the door, she placed her keys in the little box by the window and turned to leave.

"Oh, excuse me! Didn't see you there."

She was met with the warm smile of Gerry, one of the animal trainers. An aging man, just about her height, with green eyes that had never lost their spark of youth.

"Oh, Gerry! What are you doing at the office? Did you leave your glasses here? I can get them if you need them."

"Oh, no. I was just going to get your set of keys. Jameson and I have had something new in the works for a while, and we're going to start trying it out tonight. If it works, this could be a big break for us."

With that, the man passed by her and grabbed a set of keys to the ape and primate enclosures. With a wave and a brief good night, he walked out the door and turned out of sight. Shrugging, Dusty opened the door to the employee lot and walked out to her car.

The drive back to her apartment was nothing new. The call from her boss, however was certainly out of the ordinary. Apparently, she was supposed to report directly to his office tomorrow morning. An important assignment had come up. Someone else would cover her opening tasks. After making a brief note on her phone, she pulled out a pack of mac and cheese and microwaved it.

Sluggishly crawling from the covers, a hand reached out to hit the alarm. Going through the motions of a normal Tuesday morning, Dusty remembered her boss' call last night. Slipping on the uniform and grabbing her car keys on the way out the door, she was struck by an odd feeling. Not

dread, but some kind of uncertainty. Nothing of significant importance ever happened around Wild World Zoo. It was mostly just another attraction in Santa Cruz, with a few shows and experiences, but not much you couldn't find in San Francisco. But the way her boss was talking, it sounded like they had a lot of people on this job. What could warrant such seriousness?

When she got to the supervisor's office, she was surprised to see most of the experienced staff with her. The only ones who weren't present were the vendors, ticket takers, and cleanup crew. Everyone was gathered around David, who was dressed in a tie, for some reason. His face was unusually alert as he counted heads. When he spoke, it was crisp and authoritative, no slurring at all.

"Alright, everybody. As you know, I have an announcement to make. Today, and for a few weeks, we're going to have a team of biologists around the place. I expect everybody to keep up appearances, impress these folks. You are going to show them around, bring them where they need to go. Answer any questions they have, provide them with whatever they need, just make sure we look good. This is a big deal for us. Don't blow it. Alright?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Jameson, Dusty, you two come with me to the employee lot and greet them, help carry their things. Everyone else return to your normal stations. Dismissed!"

She turned around to catch up to Jameson, the tall man already on a course to the lot. He gave a brief nod of his head and let her meet his pace. Turning the keys and opening their gate, he said.

"Must be serious if Dave's sober. I suppose my usual introduction won't be okay, huh?"

"I'm not sure starting conversation by telling people you're Will Smith's poor cousin was ever a good idea to begin with."

Chuckling, he gave her a quick punch in the shoulder and sang.

"Now, this is a story all about how

My life got flipped-turned upside down"

"Stop it! I swear you're such a child sometimes."

"We work in a zoo, you've gotta have some sense of humor."

"Well, maybe some people have degrees and no time for singing."

"Biologists are just glorified vets. Studying lions ain't the same as working with them face to face. How many times do you think I'll have to save some dumb intern who gets too close to a mating pair?"



"Well, sure, Ashura gets protective of Casey sometimes."

"Exactly. Do you know how hard it is to convince a 200-pound lion not to maul somebody? I'd rather keep my job, and my life, thank you very much."

"Okay, shut up, you two. They're here."

From behind the tree line, a convoy of large vans emerged and turned through the gate. Splitting in almost perfect form, the vehicles fit into every space they could in the lot, though one truck was left outside. The doors of the lead car opened up and a balding man stepped out. He wore surprisingly casual clothes, a simple pair of khakis and sunglasses. Besides the ID card clipped to his shirt, he looked like someone you'd see along the boardwalk. Extending his hand to the boss, he introduced himself as Doctor Phillip Maxwell. He began to talk to the boss, thanking him for allowing his team to study there.

Suddenly, she found her mind stop, as she caught a glance at a young woman. The siren had raven black hair reflecting the blinding sunlight, accentuating brilliant blue

eyes and shining crimson lipstick. Dusty felt her heart start pounding in her chest as she couldn't help but watch this woman, enraptured in her beauty.

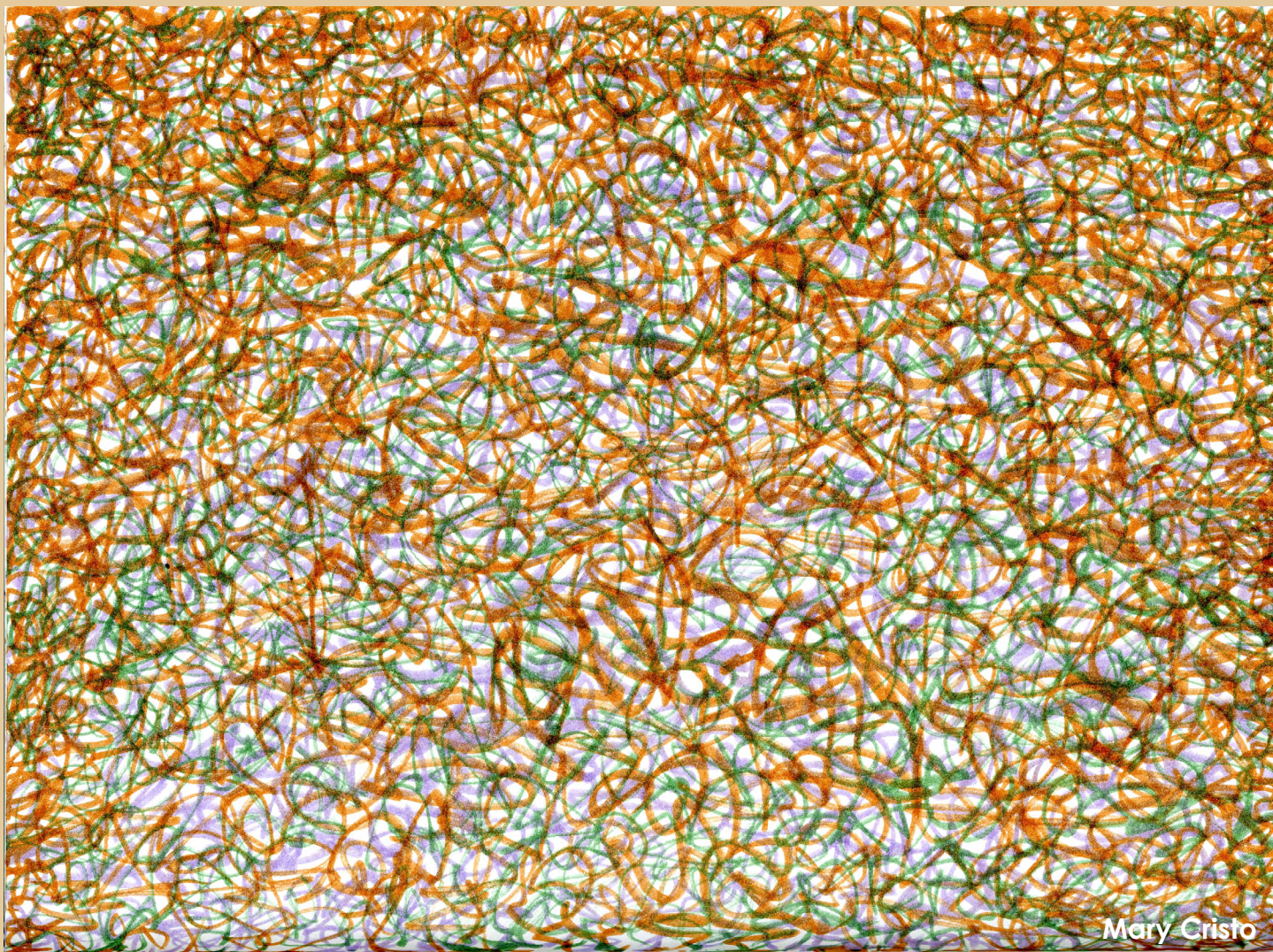
"Ah, this is my coworker, Doctor Calista Angelos. Calista, this is the man who will be hosting us, Mr. David Holton."

"Ah pleasure to meet you, sir, and thank you for allowing us to conduct our studies here."

"Of course, the pleasure is all mine. Doctor Maxwell, Doctor Angelos, this is Jameson Hayes and Dusty Smith." Jameson stepped forward and held out his hand to shake. Dusty took a second to collect herself, and did the same. The woman's hands were soft, but with a firm, professional grip. Fighting to keep herself composed, Dusty tried to talk.

"S-So, I can see you have some big things to do. Your research must be very important. Must be really stressful work, huh?"

"It is sometimes, but usually I find it quite simple. After six years of study, you find that, since many of the concepts are near universal, it isn't such a nightmare trying to remember



Mary Cristo



things.”

“Oh, uh, yeah. Of course. You’re the professional, you should know your stuff. Ah, well... so, I am in charge of the primate and small mammal enclosures, so if you need me, I have those keys. Just, let me know.”

Jameson brushed past her shoulder and, without skipping a beat, told the doctors.

“I’m in charge of the animal behavior counselors, if you have any questions or concerns about them, come see me.”

“Of course, thank you both.”

Stepping past the two, Dr. Angelos passed through the gate. Dusty had no time to watch as Dr. Maxwell immediately took her hand in his, and thanked her for being so willing to help. Dave followed the two doctors and took them for a tour of the premises. After two seconds of silence, she caught Jameson’s smirk.

“Must be really stressful, huh?”

“Okay, sure. Be that way Mr. ‘Animal Behavior Counselor’.”

“Fine, so I exaggerate, but I don’t stutter when I see a pretty lady.”

Reaching up to point in his face, she told him, “You know as well as I do that I am absolutely terrible at this. Everybody knows I can’t talk to women. At least try and let me recover a little.”

“I could do that. Or if you’d rather talk about Delilah-”

“Do NOT. That was a much different, more confused time! I’ve got dirt on you too.”

“Alright~.” Jameson pinched her cheeks and teased in a sing-song voice. “But if you need any help with the lady, I’m always here for you.”

Stepping away, Dusty turned and stormed off. She slumped onto a bench and cracked open a bottle of water. Watching the couples walk past her, she shielded her face with her cap.

Out of all times why now, can I just talk to one woman without breaking down, if I wasn’t such an idiot I’d be like them I’d at least have a girlfriend and a real job at least do something with my life but I have to spend my time fawning over a successful person who probably doesn’t think I have any clue what biology means, at least Jameson has a job that can sound interesting and he can talk to people but I just get tunnel vision and I panic and I screw it all up, then I try to fix it and I make it worse and I shouldn’t even try, why do I even think I have a shot, she’s a doctor she went to college I hold keys, I can’t even try to woo a normal girl.

She was woken from her thoughts when a gentle hand fell on her shoulder. Gerry’s voice asked softly;

“You alright, Dusty? I could use a hand.”

Lifting her hat, she replied.

“What’s wrong? Which keys do you need?”

“Pen 14. One of the capuchins stole a kazoo last night.”

She bolted upright and looked the old man in the eyes.

“They stole what?”

A long, shrill note sounded from the Primate Path. The solo was immediately followed by the chittering, yapping, and screeching of a furious audience. Apes, rodents, and other critters roused from their rest cried out at the offender. Immediately, Gerry turned back to the path, and gestured for Dusty to follow him. In the capuchin enclosure, a one of the frolicking monkeys was sitting on a branch with a bright red kazoo in his mouth.



Dylan Martin



I always look.
 Every time we stop, my eyes scurry over to the side view mirror
 When I'm in the back seat, my head swiftly swivels over my shoulders
 Quickly peaking at the cars behind
 It converted into an unexpected habit.
 From that epoch when I broke down and hid
 My head shattered against the grey driver's seat
 Our bodies lunged forward as our coupé was rammed across the intersection
 In the blink of an eye.
 My heart froze, and my stomach felt like a firm, dense rock
 My mind was empty as my glossy eyes stared into the rearview mirror
 Fragments of black and silver shiny metal, lined a trajectory
 Leading in two directions to each of our vehicles.
 In that moment, everything was utterly silent
 And it scared the hell out of me.

"I was trying to catch him. I... I didn't see you guys".
 Excuses buzzed passed my auricle, along with a high-pitched ring
 Reverberating throughout my skull
 Sirens resounded in the distance
 Crowds developed around the vacant intersection.
 My mind started to become cluttered with thoughts
 I should've gone back for the extra bag
 Going back would have just been a minute or two
 It didn't change anything.

Red indicates to stop
 Green insinuates to go
 I don't know what caused the crash
 Resting at the red fainted light.
 Laughing as we chatted about our intended destination
 Altering the radio channel
 The fluorescence of the sun's rays spilled across the sky
 The hit concealed the radio's volume.

I always glance.
 Not matter where we stop
 My heart always sojourns until I know it's not possible
 This distasteful habit lives with me.
 Day by day
 Minute by minute
 Second by second
 As the song still echoes in my memory.

Habit I Can't Shake

Rosalyn
Albarran



A Bearer of Early Drinks

Tristan Berlet

The monocled man was unsure why he had been dragged into this dark, dirty club. He coughed a little as the smoke of cheap tobacco clouded the air. This was very different indeed, from the America Lord Peter Wimsey was used to; the bright lights and grand hotels of New York were nowhere to be seen in the swamps of Southern Louisiana. While he found the place at the very least interesting, the man sitting next to him was absolutely disgusted. While his expression was blank, inside he couldn't help but lament that they had to sit in grimy chairs made of rotting wood next to a table stained by odd-colored beer and wreaking of cheap perfume. The windows were so clogged with dust that the morning light barely made it through them. As hard as he tried, he couldn't turn his thoughts to those of the pleasures of home in London. The harder he strained, the farther away they strayed.

He was so focused on these attempts that he jumped when Lord Peter broke the silence. "Well, Bunter, why don't I help to pass the time by introducing these Americans to the smell of a finer brand," he cheerfully murmured, taking his silver cigarette case out of his breast pocket. He pulled one out and put it in his mouth, returning the case to his pocket. Before he could do anything else, a gloved hand reached around him and lit the cigarette, still in his mouth. Bewildered, he wheeled around to find a woman in a glittering black dress.

"Wimsey?"

"Good evening, you must be Madame Descoteaux," he said as he stood up.

"Pierrette Descoteaux. Please, do not get up; this is not a place for formalities."

Another strike to Bunter's sanity.

"Do sit down, then," Wimsey insisted, "there you are."

Miss Descoteaux looked at Bunter, who had stood up as well. "Who is this? I asked that this matter remain confidential."

"This is my man; he always accompanies me on my travels."

Her eyes narrowed as she attempted to stare into Bunter's soul. "Servants are some of the most loose-tongued fools known to mankind. I wouldn't trust them with common gossip."

"Bunter is the most trustworthy valet in the entirety of our wonderful world."

"Dressed like that, he looks a fool."

The insult to his honesty had had no effect on him, as it was a common view for those who had never had personal servants. However, the attack upon his well-ironed and neatly pressed suit, perfectly straight Victorian tie and bright white shirt, donned in expectations of assisting his lordship inside a



Ava Bowen



luxurious and dazzling club for those of fine living, was almost too much to bear. Added onto the stress of trying to keep his sanity amidst the smoke and must of this swamp bar, it broke him. "I am dressed as suits my station and profession," He replied indignantly, "and am in no position to be criticized by one who frequents filthy establishments such as these."

"You, sir, look exactly the type of oblivious tourist who gets mugged 'round here."

"I will always do my best to protect my lordship from any threats we may befall. If that involves the giving of my own life, so be it."

"And the way you talk, you'd be shot within seconds by most people in these parts."

"I assure you..."

"Why don't you see if you can't get us something to drink?" Peter quickly interjected, "Quite parching, all this smoke is."

Bunter, who had become visibly agitated, bowed his head, his expression quickly returning to that of absolute calm, "I will certainly do my best, my lord."

Peter turned back to Pierrette. "Cigarette?" he asked casually.

"Very well, I suppose I've only had nine today."

Peter took out one of his finest, lit it using the well-melted candle on the table and handed it to her. She laughed slightly and, not bothering to take off the red satin gloves, attached it to her long cigarette holder. Her first few puffs went straight into Lord Peter's face. Neither one said anything for a little while, so Lord Peter took a little time to survey his surroundings once more. He couldn't see much, both from the smoke and lack of general lighting in the place. The only real visibility came from the candles on the tables, which only added to the smoke, and a few spotlights shining at the band on stage.

It was a perfectly normal band for the area and time, a pianist, drums, bass and trumpet. However, the bassist, who also seemed to be the leader of the band, was unique in that he only had one arm. He didn't even try to hide the fact, the right sleeve of his jacket just hung by his side, flapping about as he moved. Peter couldn't take his attention off of him, and Pierrette noticed.

"Beautiful ain't he?"

"Well his music is, certainly. I'm not so sure, though, about his appearance. I, of course, would never say anything in person to him, but he does look a bit silly, what with what appears to be tail on his side and all." Pierrette smiled as Peter continued, "But his music is indeed as touching to the ears as your pearls are to the eyes." His eyes turned to the necklace that sat somewhat loosely on her neck. "And quite a mechanical feat, too. I would very much like to find out how he does it."

"His name's Maxwell Richardson. I could take you up to meet him, if you want."

It was now Peter's turn to snigger a tad, "In your telegram you seemed extremely worried."

"I am," she replied, looking a bit shocked at the sudden turn in conversation.

"And yet you have time to focus on a club musician?"

She looked down at the table, and a slightly uneasy expression came across her face. "I suppose it keeps my focus away from my troubles."

"Well, my fair lady, it is now my duty to rid you of them. Tell them to me and I shall do whatever I can to remove them from this earth. What mind and soul remain of me in this land of swamps I shall commit totally to your problem!"

"My, you seem enthusiastic," she leaned in, "Is there a...particular reason for this?"

"Indeed, there is. The same reason I have been put on this earth. To help those in need, to bring justice to those wronged, to exonerate those who, by no reason or fault of their own, have come under legal suspicion and...and...and all the rest of it." He sighed as she chuckled, "Oh, confound it! How else am I to fight off this great sense of boredom and worthlessness that chases me wherever I go?"

"You could spend your life in saloons." Both chuckled.

"I suppose, but I'm not sure Mother would approve." They both laughed, "Maybe I could change my name and move to India or some fascinating place like that."

"Where'd you get money to live off of after you disappeared?"

Peter thought for a moment, "I know, I could become one of those traveling missionaries. Bunter here could be my assistant, writing chants and such."

Bunter had returned with three glasses of a dark



brown liquid. "If it should come to that, my lord, I should be happy to accompany you."

Peter sighed, "No, no. Sherlock Holmes could never hide himself for long, and so he is left to remain as himself. It ain't likely to come to that anyways, considering the necessities of our world," he took a sip from his glass and coughed a little, "A little strong, don't you think?"

"I regret my lord, that there was no soda available and the water I found had a color resembling that from a coal mine."

"It don't matter. Good straight scotch this is, just as I like!" Pierrette chirped as she downed a large gulp.

"Even at 11 in the morning?" Peter asked merrily.

"Who cares? Alcohol is a lip-loosener, as you detectives know, that can work at any time of day."

"And whose lips, may I ask, require loosening?" Bunter questioned sternly.

"Why, my own of course. I'm not the most articulate, but a bit of scotch allows my tongue to let loose the information that my brain attempts, in vain, to hide."

"A poet, are we?" Peter chirped.

She smiled, "See, its already working. And the looser my tongue is, the more information I can give to you to help you with your task."

"Well, then," Peter coughed, "perhaps we should focus on the task at hand. So, it was your mother you were worried about, was it?" Bunter took out a small notepad and pencil, at which Pierrette stared intensely. "Perhaps I should take the notes, Bunter, you just listen and make sure no one else is." Bunter complied, but remained upright in his seat. "So, your mother."

"Yes. She's a remarkable little lady she is, 64 but still wanders around at night like any woman a third of her age, though not interested in...well..."

"I understand. My mother is quite the same, though a year or two younger and more driven around to places than wandering, but I digress."

"Well, with the uptick in crime since prohibition..."

"Including our own," he interrupted, looking down at his glass.

"Indeed. But with that increase, I've been more and more worried about her. I've tried to keep her in the house, we live in the same house, you see, because she didn't want to be completely alone after my father died. Anyways, I've been trying to keep her in the house, but she's amazingly sneaky. I swear she climbs outta the windows sometimes, it's an amazing feat."

"And you want us to find a way to barricade her in, is that it?"

"No," she replied sternly, "I want you to find out where she goes. Ever since I started trying to keep her in, she's stopped telling me where she's been. Worried I'll stalk the place trying to kidnap her and take her home in a sack, I suppose." She leaned in close to Peter, "These last couple of nights, when she's come home, she's been real giddy. More so even than usual. I'm just worried what she might be doing, and..."

"...if it might be illegal." She nodded. "Don't worry, Madame, I understand completely. I shall find out where she goes for you with the utmost discretion."

"Thank you so much, Lord Peter." She kissed him on the cheek, "You may just save her life."

Peter smiled, "May I ask you one question, though?"

"What's that?"

"Have you tried to follow her yourself?" She tried to feign shock, but then slowly nodded her head. "I hope you haven't been injured in the attempt."

"What would make you say that?"

"You have a blood stain on your pearls."

She looked down in wild alarm. Indeed, on the pearl just left from center, there was a small red smudge. Almost undetectable to the untrained eye.

"Oh, that can't be blood, can it? I ain't a fighter...am I bleeding?"

"Allow me," Peter gently rose and inspected Pierrette's head and neck. "No, you're not bleeding. Maybe I was mistaken."

"I assure you, you are," She got up abruptly, "I hope you are able to find her for me."

"I will certainly try," Peter said as he bent down to kiss her hand. As he came back up, he looked into her eyes.



"Lillias," she said gently. Peter was a bit confused. "Her name is Lillias." He smiled in understanding and bowed his head as she walked out.

"Blood, Bunter," Peter remarked, watching the door out of which she had left. "That was blood, no doubt about it."

"Indeed, it was, my lord. I'd recognize it anywhere." Bunter sat down and revealed a newspaper he had concealed in his pocket.

"And what are the headlines today?" Peter inquired, all his previous solemnity having disappeared. It wasn't a particularly interesting day. Germany had been permitted into the League of Nations, Italy had become friends with Yemen, Spain had declared martial law, and several hundred people had been killed in a naval battle between the Chinese and British. Overall, nothing out of the ordinary, except for a story at the very back of the newspaper. It read:

LADY ATTACKED IN HOME.
BOTH ATTACKER AND VICTIM MISSING.

A pleasant Sunday morning was brutally interrupted yesterday afternoon when people began to hear 34-year-old Louisa Daphne Bernard screaming from her suburban home around 11 O'clock. Police were called, but when they arrived, all they found was an open back door and the house in complete disarray. Found by the back door was a knife covered in blood, and portions of the kitchen were also covered. The only fingerprints found on the knife were Louisa's, and it is believed that she was able to, at the very least, wound her attacker.

The only other item deemed to be missing from the house was a string of pearls, as a gift box for them was found unwrapped on a living room table. The box, which was not discovered during the first search, as the entire table was covered in bright pink envelopes, was from a prominent English firm, and police are awaiting possible identification of the buyer. More news to come.

"Another case for you, my lord?"

"No, no, Bunter. Interesting as it is, I'd prefer not to get involved with the American police. Far less welcoming."

"Very good, my lord. Pity for the poor woman, though."

"Why?"

"Well, she's been kidnapped and had expensive jewelry stolen from her, my lord. She might even be dead."

"That's only if she's the victim. The papers are quick to say that she was only defending herself, but what if she was attacking? Say, someone came over to show her their bright new pearls and she became jealous."

"Or it could be gift from a man whom she later quarreled with, or caught cheating on her."

"It needn't even be as complicated as that. Maybe she just didn't like the gift. The paper doesn't say anything about her mental state...but, again, I'd prefer not to get involved."

They sat silent for a moment. "Do you think Madame Descoteaux..." Bunter began.

Peter thought for a moment. "Could very well be. But I don't think it's quite her style. It would be worthwhile, however, to keep an eye on her pearls for her." He sighed, "Well Bunter, shall we hunt down this old lady?"

"Indeed, my lord."

Peter looked at his old assistant. Almost a decade of service had not blunted the affection he had always had for him. He remembered the many times Bunter had saved his life, both during and after the war. He only hoped that he would never be forced to repay the favor. He was always worried that, should the need arise, he would not be able to...but he would also never be able to mentally cope if he didn't. He'd probably relapse into the old shellshock...just thinking about it always risked a return of his symptoms. Therefore, Peter decided not to contemplate such a thing for a second more. "Well, come on, Bunter, let's get started." He was almost running as he left the bar, as if trying to outrun the demons that always followed him, to flee the inescapable thoughts that remained ever hidden in the dark recesses of his mind.

When they got outside, Peter called for a taxi. What he told the driver surprised Bunter just a little, "Take us to the nearest hat store, if you can."

"Lady's or men's?"

"Is there one that serves both?"

"Yessir. Daily Hats, sir, on St. Peter's St."

"Does the name refer to the frequency of new shipments or to the unfortunate epithet of the owner?"

"The frequency of the sales, sir."

Peter sighed, "Very well, take us there." They both piled into the back of the taxi and it took off...straight into a noontime traffic jam.



As they waited, Bunter turned to his lordship, "Should we not be attending to the trail of Mrs. Descoteaux, my lord?"

"We are."

"My lord?"

"We haven't even met the woman yet, and in all her talk of her mother's traits, she didn't really tell us about her physical characteristics, outside of 'little old lady.' We need to meet her, and what better way than by giving her a lavish, bright, and easily recognizable hat?"

"I see, my lord. Do you wish me to arrange a meeting with her?"

"No, no. We'll do something a little more subtle."

After quite a long while of what seemed like perpetual waiting, they finally arrived at the hat store. It was a barren little shop, but the owner was pleasant enough, and the selection was...somewhat varied. They spent almost an hour looking at blindingly bright women's hats. To make sure they were conspicuous enough, Peter had Bunter try on every single one.

Eventually, they chose a tall, wide-brimmed scarlet hat with a gigantic blue carnation on one side. While the owner was busy packaging it into a box, Peter looked around in the men's section. He pulled down a grey fedora with a black leather strap just above the brim for carrying pencils and such.

"Is that for the elderly lady as well, my lord?"

"No, no, heavens, no. It's for me!"

"My lord?"

"One cannot go around investigating things in America without a fedora. Now, would you care for one, Bunter?"

"Your lordship will excuse me if I don't partake."

Peter smiled and nodded. He went up to the counter and paid the two hats. "Do you happen to have a telephone by any chance?"

"I do sir, if you would please come back." He showed Peter to his office, which was very modern, especially for the area. Peter picked up the phone, asked for the operator, and enquired the address of the Descoteaux residence.

"127 Bear Hill Drive."

"A fascinating house indeed, my lord."

Peter and Bunter were staring at the large blue structure in front of them. It wasn't quite large enough to be a mansion, but not just a house, either.

Peter gave Bunter the hatbox. "Good Luck," he chirped as he retreated to a nearby phone box. Bunter mechanically walked up the winding drive to the front door. He pulled the rope that started the long, elaborate doorbell, and which physically resembled that which you might pull to flush a toilet. After what seemed like several hours of ringing, the door opened. Inside it was a stunned Pierrette.

"Mr. Bun- "

"Package for Mrs. Lillias Descoteaux."

"What?"

"Package for Mrs. Lillias Descoteaux."

"What is the meaning of this?! I asked you to find out where she goes, not pamper her like a..."

"Who is it?" asked a quaint little voice from inside the house.

Pierrette sighed with an angry glare at Bunter, "It's a delivery man."

"Oh, perfect, send him in; we can have him for tea!!"

Pierrette begrudgingly obliged. Bunter was led down through a series of winding corridors (nothing about this house was built for efficiency, which annoyed Bunter no end) until he arrived at a bright yellow sitting room. In the middle was a mahogany table surrounded by three light green chairs. As they entered, so did a stout little woman in her sixties from another door. She was carrying a tray with a teapot and many types of cups and saucers.

"Oh, you must be parched, having had to slog through this massive town in such heat with ALL of those packages they must make you carry, oh, please sit down, there you are, do enjoy yourself, people in America don't usually have tea, but I'm sure you'll enjoy it all the same, here, have some cakes, they're really very good, and, oh, dear, I appear to have put well too much sugar in your tea, oh, well, you'll enjoy it all the same..."

"Mother, please!"

Lillias removed a pink envelope from her chair and sat down. "Oh, I'm sorry, I do tend to go on, don't I?"

Bunter smiled just a little. He was well accustomed to



fast paced ramblings, as one usually is when having dealt with Wimsey's for so long. "Don't worry, madam, it is very nice for you to have welcomed me in like this, and the tea is perfectly fine." He was also well accustomed to hiding the wincing that always accompanied over-sweetened tea.

"Oh, so you're British, just like my jewelry, how wonderful. You'll enjoy it even more, then."

The conversation lasted about an hour, and featured such topics as the state of cats in this country, how to plant the perfect daffodil, why she thought that the minister was Jewish, the speed of growth of various bushes, why her house was blue, and, for the longest period of time, why she loved knitting so much and why Bunter should take it up. As Lillias began to introduce the topic of why the Statue of Liberty should be painted pink, Bunter broke in.

"I am terribly afraid, madam, that I must return to my employment. But first, your package, madam."

"Ah, yes, I had wondered what it was, hand it over." When she opened it, she let forth a scream of glee. She immediately put it on with a huge smile. Pierrette nearly fainted in disgust. Lillias looked at the label of the package, "'From your adoring and ever-secret lover.' Oh, how sweet. It's too bad he's 'ever-secret', I would love to meet him."

"Maybe you will," Pierrette said with a stern look at Bunter.

"Who knows? Well, thank you so much, it's been a great afternoon. If you're ever by this way again..."

"...I certainly won't hesitate to stop in," Bunter replied cheerfully as he stood up. He kissed Lillias' hand, and turned to go.

As Pierrette showed him out, he happened to look into a partially open doorway. Behind the slight crack, he saw the one-armed musician, sitting behind a desk covered in papers. He looked up, "I'm sorry, I don't have time for visitors," came a surprisingly massive voice for such a physically insignificant man.

Pierrette shut the door quickly, saying, "If you or your boss want to see him, you can arrange a meeting."

"Well, we've only been here for four hours, who knows how much longer we will be here, but there we have it, don't we, Bunter?"

Bunter nodded in vague agreement to this statement. It was meaningless the first 13 times Peter had said it, but by

now it made Bunter worried about his lordship's sanity. They had been in the bushes outside the blue house since seven, thinking the old woman would be an early bird. It was now clear that she wasn't.

"I suppose sitting in anticipation of a chase is better than sitting in anticipation of nothing."

"I wouldn't go so far as to call it a chase, my lord."

"And why would that be?"

"A chase would indicate that we intended to apprehend our victim..."

"...and we merely wish to observe her. Very well put indeed, Bunter." Peter smiled kindly. It was another half hour before a light in one of the lower windows alerted them. Shortly afterwards, the window opened, and a small figure climbed out of it. As it landed, all that was visible was a bright scarlet hat with a giant blue carnation on one side. Peter grinned as the figure traversed across the lawn towards the street. A lamp there identified Lillias, who, in addition to the hat, was wearing a purple dress and ivory heels. She paused, looked at a paper in an absurd color, and turned down the street and excitedly started walking.

"We'll use the hat, Bunter, to keep track of her from a farther distance than usual. Give her 20 seconds and we'll go." Peter donned his fedora, crouched down behind the bush and waited. "Unusually fast, for a woman her age. Where do you think she's going?"

"Probably to a nightly knitting social, my lord."

Peter smiled, "Let's hope so," and off they went. Lillias' pace was so brisk that even Peter and Bunter had trouble keeping up.

"Do you think she's worried about something, my lord?"

"No. We both saw her under that streetlamp. She seemed as giddy as a seagull who has just found an unattended picnic basket. No, no, I think she simply can't wait for her knitting."

After around 20 minutes, they had arrived at the center of town. Lillias abruptly turned into an eyeglass shop.

"Would you like me to..."

"No, Bunter, she knows you. I'll go."

Peter walked into the store, which had a sign read-



ing “O’Blinders” over the door. An attendant immediately stopped him. “Good, Evening, sir. How can I help you?”

“Oh, not in a grand way, I’m afraid the string on my monocle has started to come loose, I was wondering if you’d tighten it for me.”

“Indeed, I can sir, if you’ll just wait here.” Peter looked around the shop. Lillias was up at the counter. He wandered up and observed a few elaborate lady’s sunglasses nearby.

“I’m afraid,” Lillias was telling the woman up at the counter, “that they broke at the last one and I lost the pieces.”

“We understand ma’am; this is not an uncommon occurrence. Now, you usually like the ivory opera glasses, yes?”

“Yes, indeed, they feel and look so nice, don’t they? And they help a lot when I can’t get a close-up seat.”

“Yes, they do, ma’am. That’ll be \$63. Thank you, please come again.”

Lillias wandered quickly out of the store, and Peter, having regained his monocle, followed, thanking God that such an operation as string tightening, existed. He quickly turned right after Lillias and Bunter followed close behind.

“We seem to be headed back towards the house, my lord.”

“Indeed we do...but that can’t be the only things she does, I mean, she shouldn’t have to climb out of a window, just to get opera glasses and popcorn, and she shouldn’t have to get dressed up for it, either. This is all very peculiar.”

They had just about retraced their steps from not an hour before to the letter, and were about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way back to where they had started. Bunter was becoming somewhat agitated, angry with Pierrette for sending them on a wild goose chase after repeatedly insulting him. He was about to voice his opinion to Lord Peter when Lillias took an unexpected right turn. They followed her silently onto what quickly became a dirt path.

Deeper and deeper, she took them into the wilderness. “PRIVATE LAND—SHOVE OFF” was the last sign of civilization they saw. The only thing keeping them from drowning in the marshes all around them was an ancient, thin wooden platform that creaked with every step and had no railing. It was almost completely pitch black, so they closed the distance between them and Lillias, worried she might fall in.

After a little under half an hour of this walking, they

turned a tight corner, and were suddenly blinded by a gigantic light ahead. Bunter had to steady Peter to prevent him from falling in. It took a moment for their eyes to adjust to the light, and, fearing a watery grave, they had stopped during this time. They hurried forward, trying their best to catch up to Lillias, but she had already reached the large crowd at the end of the path.

All that Peter and Bunter could see for quite a long distance were people. A large hoard, lit by a hoard of extremely bright street lamps. They could not figure out how they were light, but a smell of burnt magnesium hung over the air. There were no trees in this mysterious area, only around them. It was as if someone had carved out a large swath of forest for no reason.

Fascinated at this hidden group of people, the two of them moved around the multitude, who were all chattering eagerly about something unknown, in an attempt to see what was in front of them. At one point, Bunter suggested that Peter climb up on his shoulders to look over the crowd, but Peter said no, fearing that a slight bump might send them both flying. His fears were verified when a large man, seemingly in an argument about beer (and smelling potently of it), was pushed into both of them, sending them tumbling down a hill.

“My lord!” Bunter cried out frantically, “My lord!” He feared that he had fallen into the swamp. He whipped around, “You imbecile, you might have killed...” He looked around, able to hear the crowd but not see it. “My lord?”

“Over here!” Peter replied from a nearby bush. He had just managed to disentangle himself when Bunter reached him, and refused help standing up. “Well, well, well, this just keeps on growing in interest. A hidden valley in a hidden clearing, what?”

“Indeed, my lord.”

“And purposely hidden as well, I believe. As far as I know, potted plants do not exist in the wild.” Peter turned around and nodded his head in the opposite direction, “Shall we?”

“My lord?”

“Well, we must be able to tell Pierrette where it is that her mother goes at night, mustn’t we?”

Bunter smiled, “Indeed, my lord.”

They followed the path that they had landed on, further down the small hill in what appeared to be a large circle.



Eventually they found themselves in another well-lit clearing. On the right was a series of dark green tents, which would have been invisible but for the lights, and on the left was an enormous amphitheater with stone seats and a dirt floor with a giant pole sticking out of the middle.

"Well, Bunter, why don't we take a look backstage before we make our grand entrance?" Peter picked up his walking stick and waved around at the tents, humming. A few seconds later, he stopped, "That one," and walked towards the middle tent, Bunter close behind.

They came up to it at a furious pace, almost falling several times in the increasingly muddy ground. Only when they were a few yards away did they stop and look around them.

"Strange, Bunter, very strange indeed. No guards anywhere to be found."

"Perhaps they're helping to control the crowd."

"Or perhaps what lies here does not require guarding. We are told, my dear Bunter, that we must tread softly, for all the Earth is holy ground. Now, I believe, would be a good moment to use that advice." They bent down cautiously, and crept up on the middle tent. Coming up to the surface of the shelter, they knelt on either side of the flap. Peter gingerly stuck his stick through the opening, and peeled it aside. He pulled out his flashlight, took a deep breath, and crept in.

An excruciating moment passed, while Bunter contemplated whether he would be better served following his lordship in or waiting outside. If he followed, did he risk the both of them being kidnapped, and if he stayed, did he risk failing to rescue him from something terrible within. This train of thought was abruptly severed by a cacophony of barks and growls from inside the tent.

"MY LORD!!!" Bunter cried, fearing that he had made the wrong decision. He picked up his walking stick and prepared to rush in and defend his lordship. However, this was not necessary as Peter came rushing out, disheveled, but unscathed.

"It's alright, Bunter, they're all in cages, they can't get out."

"Thank god, my lord."

"At least a hundred of 'em in there, fighting dogs or some such horror. No wonder they didn't need any guards, anyone mad enough to try and steal them would be mince-

meat in seconds."

"Should we report them, my lord, for dog fighting?"

"I wish, Bunter, I wish. The problem is that it's not illegal in America. These supposedly civilized westerners still find it fun to watch two furry beasts hack at each other til one is no more than a bally puddle." The profundity of the statement was slightly undercut by the continued barking behind them, but it still stuck with Bunter. "Come on, let's try another tent...see if there is anything to be redeemed about this place." He was clearly shaken.

"Are you sure..."

"Pierrette wanted to know where her mother went at night and she is going to get a full report, no matter what. Come on." He strode forward with renewed purpose. What was once a small side adventure had become a much more significant mission. Bunter didn't quite understand what Peter was intending, but he would assist in any endeavor for his lordship.

They arrived at the tent to their left, and, before he could be stopped, Peter marched straight into it. Bunter followed, and was greeted by a large roar directly into his face. Inside the tent were three enormous cages that rattled and shook, barely holding the grizzly bears trapped inside them. The animals were badly beaten, with many scars and missing large tufts of fur here and there. They resembled teddy bears after years of hard use, one missing an ear, another missing a tail, the third missing a few claws. Each had a metal clamp around its neck, with a long chain leading from it.

"That's what the pole is for."

"My lord?"

"When we looked at the arena, there was a large pole in the middle of it. I'm betting that, if we ever got a closer look, we'd see a place to attach the end of a chain to it."

"The thrill of seeing a bear try to escape, my lord?"

"No. The thrill of seeing it fend off an attack from hordes of dogs. Each dog cage had two numbers separated by a dash. I'm guessing they're numbered individually and in batches. This is a most horrid affair."

"An American invention?"

"No, an English export. Bear Baiting. Dozens of rabid dogs vs. One chained up bear. Place your bets! Place your bets! Which one do you think will be sent off to the fiery un-



derworld first if you don't get there beforehand? The Empire outlawed it while our grandparents were still in their cradles, but it must have escaped here in the intervening years."

"And there aren't any laws against animal cruelty in America, your mother was very clear about that indeed; it's why she won't come here. She is very afraid that Ahasuerus might get trodden on without any repercussion."

Peter smiled a touch. "That's mother for you... Bunter, what did you say might happen to the cat?"

"I'm sorry for the odd turn of phrase, my lord; I was quoting your mother directly..."

"Fine, what did *she* say, then?"

"That it might get trodden on."

"Trodden on...oh, mother you are a genius, I shall have to kiss her when I return! And Bunter, you too...well, the genius part anyways."

"What, my lord?"

"Do you remember, as we were coming up the path, the very last piece of civilization we saw before arriving here at this...this pit?"

Bunter thought for a second, "A sign, my lord, which rudely told us that this was private land."

"Indeed."

"Surely it was referring to the owners of the amphitheater, my lord."

"But what if it wasn't? I know it's a long shot Bunter, but it's still worth a try. We must end this foul game, if not for anything else to stop some poorly trained imbecile getting himself killed."

Bunter nodded in agreement. "I'm with you, my lord."

"Good. But first, let's get out of this tent, I think the bears are getting ravenous." An additional growl agreed. They left through the back of the tent, so as to limit the chances of being spotted by anyone coming down the hill. The mud was even deeper here, but the two men still pressed on.

Only a few yards in, however, Bunter fell straight into a bog. The gigantic puddle of mud was well concealed by surrounding bushes, and neither of the two men had seen it.

"Bunter!!" Now it was Peter's turn to utter a frantic

cry, "Bunter!!"

"Down in here, my lord!"

"Are you alright?"

"For the moment, I am in good health, my lord, but I am afraid that the mud is slowly consuming me."

"Bunter!! Do you still have your stick with you?"

"It's a little far away, but I can still try to reach it!"

An anxious moment, then another, Peter's mind was racing but nothing was being produced. His cries were now even more frantic. "Bunter!"

"I've got it, my lord!"

He had an idea, but he didn't know how wide the bog was, and didn't dare come any closer, lest he should become enveloped himself. "Good, good. Now, wave it in the air, it's the only way I'll be able to see you!"

"Very good, my lord!" He did so, and it turned out that he was not nearly as far away as he once thought. Just through the bushes, that was all.

"Bunter, I going to put my stick through the bushes. Just grab on, and I'll try to pull you out." He crouched down and made sure he was in a strong position, and stretched out his cane. There was soon a slight tug from the other end, but not nearly enough. Suddenly, another stick came flying through the air, over his head, and the pressure on his cane disappeared.

This was only for a moment, however, as a mighty heave came from the bushes, nearly pulling Peter into the bog. The bushes rustled as a head began to slowly appear through them. One mighty tug from Wimsey was all that was needed, and his faithful servant came flying out, covered in mud from head to toe.

They both sat on the ground for a moment, trying to catch their breath. "Well, I guess the war did something for me, eh?"

"Indeed, my lord."

"And now I've repaid you for Peter's Pot. What does that leave me with, two more times that I have to save your life?"

"If you must keep track, my lord, I believe it does."

"Oh, well. Hopefully that won't happen again for a



while. Come on, no time for loafing about, all that shouting has to have aroused someone.”

They pressed forward with a bit more caution this time, sweeping along the outside of the clearing. People were now starting to enter in the amphitheater. It was only a matter of time before whatever staff that worked here would be coming down to retrieve the beasts for the show.

Peter stopped suddenly, and crouched down. “There,” he indicated with his cane through the bushes, “Do you see that?”

Bunter stared into where his lordship had pointed. There was a shimmering white light coming through from the other side. Peter didn’t wait for his companion to respond before he charged through the shrubbery. Bunter tried to follow as best as he could. It was like struggling through the barbed wire strewn across the battlefields of France. Thankfully, it was only a small length, but it still required immense strength to power through.

When they reached the other side they were met by a small RV, permanently parked in the middle of a small clearing of its own.

“I always thought these things were meant for easy camping holidays, not for Jungle survival.”

“Indeed, my lord.”

“No matter, it must be related to what’s out there, otherwise I’m sure it would have been removed a long time ago.”

“Perhaps it is an office, my lord, since it has the ability, better than some form of tent, to keep any papers one might require dry.”

Peter nodded in agreement, and slowly came close to the front door. There didn’t appear to be windows, so no one could see their approach, but noise was still a factor. He carefully put his ear against the door, and listened for any movement inside. After a moment, he took the lock picking kit from his jacket pocket, and began to work on the simple padlock preventing their entrance.

That part was easy, and it was removed in a matter of seconds. The real trick was trying to open the door itself. Despite clear signs of continual use, no one had properly maintained it, and it was practically rusted permanently into its place. Peter pulled on it. Bunter pulled on it. They both heaved with all their might, but nothing would rip that

wretched thing open. It was utterly possible, probable even, that one of the bears would not be able to get it open.

After the last attempt, Bunter slipped on the muddy step leading up to the door, and fell practically underneath the RV. “My lord,” came a calm shout a moment later.

“Yes, Bunter? Are you alright?”

“Serviceable, certainly, my lord. Indeed, I believe that I have found the solution to our problems relating to the door.”

“What’s that?”

“There appears to be a stick stuck in the bottom of the doorway itself, I shall endeavor to remove it.” He was already on his back, underneath the RV, so he simply placed his feet on the bottom on either side of the stick, and used both hands to pull. After several attempts, he built up all of the strength that he could, and gave one large heave. The stick came flying out, and landed extremely close to a very vulnerable part of Bunter, who quickly rolled out in case there was any further debris.

There wasn’t, and after a bit more heaving, they managed to open the door at last. Peter headed straight in, but Bunter stopped just before proceeding in. A voice had started to speak over the microphone at the amphitheater, and it could be clearly heard for a long way around.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, take your seats; tonight’s entertainment will begin shortly.” The comment itself was innocuous enough, but the voice threw Bunter back through the events of the day. It was booming, almost to the point of being unintelligible, from the sheer vibrato of the machinery being mixed with such a massive voice.

Inside the RV, Peter had stumbled into a room no better furnished than that of a caveman. There was a desk with a rotting wooden chair and an oil lamp on top of the desk. That was it. He struck a match from his coat pocket, and lit the lamp with ease. This revealed the entire RV to be rotting, as one might have expected from the outside. And so Peter quickly turned his attention to the desk. It was a simple piece of furniture, with three drawers on each side and one long one in the middle. As he came around it, he just about cut his hand on one of the corners, which was jagged, some part of it having clearly been broken off, violently. He would not have been the first, as it appeared that someone else had left his or her blood behind on the wood. Peter stared at it for a good while. The wet of the mud was starting to seep in all the way to his bones. “Even in Louisiana, one can still manage to freeze,” he



thought to himself wistfully.

There was no need to pick the lock of the thin drawer, as it had also started to rot. Inside, however, there were a few papers that were still relatively intact. He pulled one out and began to read it as Bunter finally entered.

“My lord...” Peter held up his hand.

“Listen to this, Bunter. ‘To My Absent Minded Offspring,’ a mother if I ever heard one.” Peter looked up and smiled.

Bunter did as well.

“Let’s hope she’s kindly left her name. ‘I am an old woman, and have become extremely bored living at home without anyone around me. You are always going off to work, and leaving me behind, and I have nothing to do...’ She goes on quite a while about that, let’s see, ‘...it is with all this in mind that I wish to visit your place of work in order to add an extra experience to my life...’ I must say Bunter, I wish your mater would express a similar idea, I would love to have the pleasure of meeting her.”

Bunter blushed at this.

“...I don’t know what or where it is, but please take along someday. It is a pity that I must express this in a letter addressed to your office, but I never seem to be able to talk to you in person long enough to express all of this. Sincerely, and, Despite All of this, With Love...” Peter’s face suddenly turned to ice, “...Lillias Descoteaux.” He set the letter down on the desk and crossed to the other side of the trailer. “I always thought that mothers were supposed to know everything about their children.”

“They both thought the other as innocent and harmless, and yet...”

Even for men who had survived the Great War plus several years of detective work, this was hard to take. Absent minded, Peter wandered back to the desk and looked through the top drawer again. His hand brushed up against a cool, heavy metal object. In any other state of mind, he might have picked it up and examined it, but he could hardly focus. His hand was trembling a bit, and he could feel a remission of the shell shock coming on.

Then, his eyes fell upon another piece of paper. When he pulled it out, it was actually an envelope. Both of the addresses had been whited out, but a couple of letters could still be seen from the receiving address. There was a capital L, a

ph, and an rd. It clearly hadn’t been opened, and he could feel something in side of it. Without hesitation, he whipped out his penknife and opened it. The envelope was thrust aside as he eagerly looked at its contents. “Dear Miss Descoteaux, I must inform you that this is my last warning. You have not even responded to my cease and desist letter; much less stopped the activities to which it pertains. I have been very lenient. I am, at heart, a kind man, and understand that, as a woman, you will almost certainly not fully understand how business and property law function. However, I have given you more than enough time to learn. If you have not ceased the illegal use of my property by the end of this month of September 1926, I shall come down on you with the full force of the law. Signed, Gerald T. Abernathy.”

“The end of September, my lord, that’s...”

“...less than two weeks away.”

“Animal abuse, trespassing, what will come next?”

“Hopefully nothing more if we have anything to do with it. Perhaps we should cash in on kind Mr. Abernathy’s threat a little early.”

“Indeed, my lord,” Bunter replied, beaming.

Peter quickly handed the letter and the envelope to Bunter, and hurried back to the desk. “You go on ahead, Bunter, and bring that to the nearest police station that you can find. I dare say it will be a bit of a long walk, but you must endeavor to complete it in the shortest possible time.”

“And you, my lord?”

“I’m going to stay back here a while, see if I can find anything else. Also make sure that it doesn’t look like we planted the evidence.”

“Very good, my lord.”

Bunter rushed out quickly but quietly, closing the door behind him. After finding nothing else of note, Peter restored the desk to order, and put away the first letter. He looked around to the back of the trailer to make sure that nothing else was left behind. AS he did so, something glinted out to him. He bent down to take a closer look, and found it to be a pearl necklace with small red specks on one of the pearls. He crouched to get a better view. Then a pang and darkness.

The metal bars surrounding Lord Peter caused him to panic as soon as his vision returned. He was indeed inside one of the bear cages, but he was the only occupant. His captor



was more civilized than that. It was quite a striking image, the young woman in a glittering black dress and sparkling pearls sitting quietly atop a giant metal cage holding a relatively short but soaked man in muddy clothing. Peter tried to stand up, but his legs hadn't quite reconnected with his brain yet.

"I was under the impression that you were supposed to be investigating my mother," came a calm yet slightly annoyed voice from above.

"So was I. Funny how things always tend to come together in the end."

"And people, evidently."

"Indeed."

A moment of silence followed, as Peter pulled out a cigarette and lit it. It gave him a little warmth, though none could ever really be achieved in an environment such as this.

"So, did you do it?"

"Hm?"

"Did you follow my mother?"

"Yes. Incredible speed for a woman of her age, much like my old mater."

"Where did she lead you?"

He looked up once again at Pierrette, "I would have thought that a woman of your intelligence would have figured that out by now."

She sighed heavily. "I had guessed quite a while ago, whenever I saw the group of old women in the stands every week. It's always surprised me, how violent the older generations can be...I never thought of her as one of them, though."

"It's always the people we know the best who surprise us the most." Peter sighed, thinking about what his sister had just been through.

"Don't worry

"But let's talk about something else. You, perhaps."

"Me?" He looked up with a smile. "And why do I deserve to be a topic of idle chat?"

Pierrette stood up and very carefully walked across the barred top of the cage to the side. Peter averted his gaze. "Because, Lord Peter, you have been snooping around and possibly even committing theft, we'll sort that out later, and

other very naughty things indeed. You must be punished, and the way that is to be dealt out is a very interesting topic indeed." She reached a darkened ladder at the edge of the cage and began to descend.

Peter made a more concentrated effort to stand up this time, and managed to do so, although he needed to lean against a bar for support. "I do apologize for the snooping; it was very rude of me. I'm afraid I just can't help it. As for the theft, any search carried out on me, and I have no doubt that one has, would reveal that I dutifully returned anything I tampered with to its proper place. I'm sure anything else can be properly dealt with before the police."

"Oh, there's no need to trouble them, is there? We have the perfect way to dispose of waste right here."

The smile, which was already a fragile one, dropped from Peter's lips.

"It is a shame that we have to destroy such an amazing brain, but, as we cannot detach memories from it, I'm afraid it's going to have to with the rest of you."

"So, you wish to add a human murder to the long list of beast homicides you have already perpetrated."

"Two, actually," came a new voice, from what was presumably the entrance to the tent. It was hard to see, but Peter knew the silhouette. It was the same one that had stood on stage, playing bass at the club he had visited the previous morning. At least, he hoped that that was still the previous morning. He wore another shirt meant for those with two arms, but instead of an instrument of beauty, he was holding an instrument of death, in the form of a shotgun.

"So I am not the first to discover your pit. Pity, I had hoped to be famous for something."

"No, you are the first, Lord Peter. It's just that we've killed someone else before you this morning, haven't we?"

"Yes, ma'am. Got him as he was trying to run down the path. I remembered him from when he visited your house yesterday, except this time he was covered in mud. The lights allowed me to make short work of him."

Peter attempted to struggle to the front of the cage, but found a chain around his ankle restrained him. He fell to his knees and leaned against a bar. His position gave him, for the first time, a very clear view of Pierrette's hands. The right was perfectly fine, but left appeared to be slightly deformed.

"I'm afraid it'll take a little while before we can dispose of



you, though. The bears that are left won't be hungry again for a few days, and we want to see how you would deal with one alive, so we are sadly left with the prospect of having to keep you around for a little while." She walked up to the bars of the cage and looked down at Wimsey, "Poor little creature, he looks so defeated. And here I was, thinking I might fall in love with you, but one can never fall in love with someone who is nosy, it would explode in less than a year." She paused. "You know, if you can forgive me for shooting your friend, and agree to help me with the business, I might be able to get you out of this. What do you say?"

Peter wasn't listening. He was waiting, and at the opportune moment, he snatched the glove off of Pierrette's left hand in one quick move. What was revealed at least used to be a hand. There were several massive gashes, most of which had not been treated by any professional doctor. He couldn't quite understand how she was still able to use it.

When this happened, Pierrette gasped and tried to smack Wimsey through the bars, but Maxwell held her back to prevent any damage. "How dare you!!"

"How did you obtain those pretty scars?"

"One of our bears. They're not the friendliest creatures in the world, you know." Her answer seemed instant, but there was a slight pause, only detectable by a trained ear.

"That's not true; those cuts are far too clean to be from an animal. More like a knife, I would say."

"Fine. It was a nasty cooking accident in my kitchen..."

Peter didn't listen to the rest of this excuse. The word kitchen had sent his mind running. The letters on the envelope...

"Who is Louisa Daphne Bernard?" He asked suddenly.

"What?" A sense of terror flew into her eyes before she could conceal them. For what little it was worth, Peter knew he had her.

"Louisa Daphne Bernard. Someone tried to blot out her name on a letter found in your office, but failed miserably. Who is she?"

"She was my business partner. We made a lot of money together, that's all there is to it."

"Was."

"Yes, she left to go to England a while ago. Wanted to get out of the business and felt that that was the best way to do it. However, I didn't want us to be discovered, so I just kept

everything in her name."

"Then why were her fingerprints found on a knife in her house a few days ago?"

"What?"

"It's all over the news, didn't you see?"

"No. I haven't had time to read the news lately."

"The blood on your pearls, are they yours or hers?"

"I thought I wanted to marry you, but you're raving mad. Have fun with the animals." She quickly turned to walk away.

"Shall I tell the story or do you want to?"

She stopped, turned around and brought up a chair next to the cage. "Maxwell, go and guard the tent." He did so. "Go on, It'll help to pass the time."

Peter laughed. "I feel like Poirot. Anyways, in your rather un-stately panic just there, you admitted that she wanted to leave the business. While it was part of some lie about leaving for England, I believe that that part was true. You don't seem like the type of woman to kill over a man or for a bit of petty cash. No, it would require more than that. While most of this is conjecture, I have a lot of time to think, and therefore can correct if needed. Miss Bernard wanted to leave the business when this Abernathy fellow comes along and starts making trouble about his land. No one's ever made a fuss before; it's a swamp, who would want it? Indeed, I can only imagine why he would want it, but that didn't matter. The fact is he wanted it and was going to have it, no matter what. Since Miss Bernard was leaving, she didn't want to have any trouble, and probably suggested that it all be shut down, and the land returned to Abernathy before there was any legal trouble. However, you wanted to keep going. You saw big bucks, and, more importantly, freedom. Oh, yes, I can sense your style. So you bought some very expensive pearls from England of all places, and tried to bribe her off. Now is when I need a little bit of help from you, Madame, was it she that attacked you," he paused, "or you that attacked her?" He saw her look away slightly, and knew which one was correct. "Yu jumped on her and tried to strangle her, or break her neck, or maybe you brought a club of some sort, I don't know, it doesn't really matter. The point is she escaped and ran for the kitchen. She grabbed a knife and struck back, doing quite a bit of damage to you, even going as far as cutting a main artery. However, it was in vain, as somehow you overpowered her and killed her. Bleeding profusely, you probably used a napkin or dishtowel of some sort to try to hold off the bleeding until you could get proper help. Being



a strong woman, you dragged her to your car, grabbed the pearls because, after all, they were expensive, and drove off. That is how the blood got onto them. Miss Bernard presumably ended up being disposed of in the same manner in which you mean to do away with me.”

Pierrette sighed, “I suppose there’s no harm in giving a dead man some satisfaction. I loaded my purse with several pounds of granite, and aimed to do away with her that way, and did.”

“Indeed, but that wasn’t the last of your troubles, as you recognized the envelopes on her living room table as the same ones your mother had been receiving.”

“How...”

“Bunter saw one and told me.” He swallowed painfully, “That’s why you had us follow her. You wanted to make sure your partner had not been planning anything.”

“She was always girlish like that. If she wasn’t leaving us, she was sure as hell to give us away with her brightly colored invitations. A stupid idea all around, wasn’t it?”

“Not as stupid as killing her.”

“To the contrary. In fact, I’ve probably lengthened the lifetime of our work here by several years without her silliness.”

“How do you plan to deal with Mr. Abernathy?”

“Same way as I deal with you. After he’s given me the land, of course.”

Peter looked down at his feet. “All this killing, just to allow even more killing. Immoral and risky. What if you’ve made a mistake? Not only will the ‘business’ go down the drain, but you will most certainly hang.”

“Well, thankfully, I haven’t made any.”

“FREEZE!!” Came a cry from the other side of tent. Several American Police Officers stood aiming revolvers at Pierrette. Standing with them, at the head of the group was Bunter, arm covered in a red bandage.

Despite the clear instruction given to her, Pierrette still turned and ran out of the back entrance of the tent. The police followed, while Bunter ran over to his lordship.

“Well, Bunter, I suppose we are back up to three now, aren’t we?”

“Indeed, my lord.”

“Maxwell had been silently captured and kindly provided the keys to the cages. Once Bunter had let Peter out, they

joined the chase after Pierrette. She had run to one of the dog tents and was trying to release them. However, the police were hot on her tail, and she didn’t have time. Instead, she pushed a few of the cages, dogs an all, into the policemen’s way, causing chaos. After several minutes, she rushed to what seemed like the edge of the forest.

“Stop now, before we fill you up with lead!!” Shouted the leader.

“That’s supposed to be worse than breaking my neck, is it?” Retorted the fugitive.

“Either are preferable to starving to death in that jungle!” Cried Peter.

“Who says I’ll starve?”

“Please. You have a much better chance of surviving this with us! Come on, they won’t hurt you, so long as you come quietly. If you’re innocent, the jury will find you as such.”

“Ha! As if I could ever fool them.”

“All they can prove so far is that you trespass and kill bears. Horrible as that is, you’ll still get off lightly.”

“You think the jury will treat me kindly after I’m forced to testify how much I love seeing bears beautifully torn apart by sporting dogs while the crowds cheer? No, no. I’ll decide my own fate, thank you, as I always have.” And without another word, she ran off into the jungle.

The police followed, with Peter at the lead. They struggled through dense shrubbery, trying to get through to her. Most ended up with holes in various parts of their clothing, and they could see bits of Pierrette’s dress, strewn about as well. It truly felt like barbed wire. Eventually, however, they arrived at a clearing with a small RV in the middle. They were just in time to see Pierrette flip them off before running into the RV and shutting the door.

Peter wondered what was to be gained by holing herself up in there when he suddenly remembered the metal object he had felt in the desk drawer, and what it was. He released a huge sigh. “Come along, Bunter; better leave this to the police. We can give them a statement when we’ve had a good rest.”

“My lord?” Bunter attempted to ask why, but Peter had already turned to leave. He looked back at the trailer, trying to figure out what had changed. Then a gunshot rang out from within.



The Flannel

Noor Lima Boudakian

I am still.

As I look down and see it's just you and me-

We are in this ballroom scene,

Time and time again.

And eyes tell too much so we only speak

In hushed voices but never quietly-

Of how you smell like dark roast coffee- but only on the weekends

And how it seems I'm only capable of giggling and flowers and stammering and hands.

And time and time again,

Your shoulders don the desperate thought of oxygen

And the newly born daffodils screaming their opinions that I

Twisted tight around my finger.

And they stayed, of course, like your hair and sometimes mine.

How is your heart,

My dear my dear my dear

And between the two of us,

Silence doesn't exist anymore, because

Before you I had only ever met writeable people

And that silence will have buried our independence,

You say as you put yards and acres between our standing feet.

I tell too much though only you speak, I think as

She stretches her fingers and wakes up the trees.

Myrrh blooms through her belly button,

As if late July Ixora was growing in her midwinter eyes,

As if she knew my name.



William the Destroyer

Tristan Berlet

Harold Godwinson lay dead on the field along with his army. The Duke of Normandy was king of England in all but name. He had fought viciously for the crown, but in reality, knew very little of the people he had come to rule. And so, a Saxon scop was brought forward. His face covered in mud and hair matted from sweat, he was thrown before the temporary throne of the now permanent king. William observed his new informant with great interest, and nonchalantly tossed a sack of gold to the soldiers that had brought him.

The scop stood up before the new king, and made a great show of bowing deeply before him, almost to the point of falling over. Bent over thus, he payed the proper homage to the Great Conqueror. William was slightly bewildered at this great display of fealty to a foreign invader. The only thing he truly knew about the Saxon people was that they were some of the most loyal people in the known world, as had been proven earlier that day.

After this grand display, the scop begged his liege's indulgence, and asked for a cup of wine to refresh the desert of his throat and awaken his mind to answer any questions the king might put to him. Shocked and enraged, William's barons raised their broadswords, prepared to chop this idiot to pieces and feed him to their hunting dogs. But William raised one hand to stop them, and the other to wave a servant to fulfill the request.

When it arrived, the scop placed his hand over the cup, and prayed for the forgiveness of his lords, heavenly and mortal. He then took a large gulp and set the cup down on a nearby rock. The action had left a small drop on the scop's chin, which caused the king much internal amusement. He smiled a touch, almost unnoticeably, at the slovenly way in which this Saxon animal inhaled his finest vintage.

"Tell me a tale, and thus teach me of your culture, so that I might better govern my rightfully attained lands," were the first words uttered by William to the Saxon, whom he looked down upon from what was effectively a large wooden box upon which his throne was placed. Without another word, the scop recounted a harsh story of the unforgiving sea. Of men hardened by ice and wave, who have suffered all their lives. Men who are, in the Saxon mind, superior to all others.

Mystified by the story, and gaining a hint of respect for the Saxon people, William asked him about the true meaning behind the tale. To this, the Saxon took a deep breath to gather what strength he had left. The battle had taken a grueling toll on this young poet warrior, but containing his anger against the man that had wronged him and his people was even worse to this honor bound man. And yet, he attempted to persevere.

It was at this moment, however, that Harold's body, mutilated beyond recognition was dragged into William's camp. The only thing that could allow anyone to identify the body was the heap of loot being dragged behind it, which included Harold's personal shield. It was painted with the coat of arms of the House of Godwin in bright Red and Yellow, instantly recognizable. What was presumably his head followed close behind, dangling from a pole.

This great affront to his illustrious sovereign was too much for the scop to handle. He snapped, liberating his wit to sink its gnarly teeth into William's honor, a task which he cherished. All signs of respect, which were false in nature to begin with, drained from his face, and were replaced with a sizeable grimace. He took a step towards the throne and stared bitterly into the king's eyes.

"My liege has fallen, and though my people shall remain true to their banner, I must, in my horrid captivity, bow to you, my liege, my most noble liege.

"Congratulations, truly, my wine soaked liege, for you have beaten the hardest, strongest, bravest men in all of Christendom here today. Any man who can best the Saxon shield wall is surely deserving of praise. However, your men have not done that, the swamps did it for you. But you, most noble liege, will take the credit anyhow, so praise to you, my liege!

"I see you sailed to this great land, my liege, my stranded liege, in a grand fleet of inferior vessels. Oh, my wonderful liege, if you had faced even one Saxon ship, you would have drowned in the vast channel that separates your land from mine. You wouldn't have lasted an hour. But no fleet sailed, and you escaped unharmed, my noble liege, and are merely left to sit here and soil yourself at the terrible tales told by an actual Englishman.

"You call yourself a nobleman, and you are a most noble liege, and yet look at the body of the late king, now being transported to your camp. Where are his legs, his head? An unfortunate accident, you'll say, my liege, and it'll be counted as true, because you are a most noble liege. You



will show your mercy to the late king at some point; you'll let him return to his throne...his head tied around your neck.

"You may call us animals and fiends, no better than the devil himself. In reality, we are made tough by our way of life. While you are hidden away in your castles, drunk on wine, we are out in the countryside, improving our towns and doing the lord's work. My good nobleman, are we really animals, when we sail across Christendom, and you sit in your lairs doing nothing, because it is too cold to step away from the fire?" The scop suddenly dropped to one knee and grimaced.

"I am a true Saxon. My father died fighting Harold Hardrada, and my mother will no doubt be killed by you. I have been loyal to my rightfully elected king, while you have been unfaithful to the customs of the land you want to rule. I know my death will come at some point, and I have faith that Christ will lead me to heaven, and I will live in paradise. However, this heaven is only for Christians... not you!"

At this final insult, William, livid that a lowly serf from an animal culture would dare insult a king, leaped down from his throne, drew his sword, and touched its point to the scop's neck.

"What right have you to question your liege's faith. Is this the forgiveness you asked of me?" he growled.

The scop smiled, "I asked for forgiveness from my lords, heavenly and mortal. God... and Harold, King of England." He looked up at the Duke of Normandy, who was barely controlling his hand, and smiled even more. "You want to kill me. You want to kill me!! Ha. You are too late, death has beaten you." At this, his smile turned into a grimace, and he keeled over. William kicked the Saxon, but there was no reaction. The scop was dead. William stood speechless over the body of the brave Saxon for several hours, unable to speak.

Eventually, he turned around and walked swiftly to his horse at the temporary stables and rode off into the night. He would not be seen for several days afterwards. Soon after he left, however, his servants began searching the body, hoping to find gold or other loot. There was a small pouch on his belt. Inside it was over a pound of ground hemlock.



The nameless thief

A desolate field lives where flowers once grew in abundance

A hollow echo rushes through the marrow in my bones

How do you expect me to put on a pretty dress

Pretending as if the room is not on fire

Amber and ash fill my lungs

A Fibonacci sequence of ink spirals from my pen

Blooming into a collection of metaphors

The thief is back

Forcing my head under the waves

A battle fit for the Coliseum

The lion and the thief

Two mighty beasts

Released from their chambers to put on a show

Time begins to move like melting wax

The sound of the crowd is a muffled rupture of noise

Claws tearing into soft flesh

Teeth ripping away at the throat

The mighty lion stands proudly

Towering over the thief's bones

Hollow

Katelyn Oleck



Mary Cristo



Eventually

Evan Wisner

away. I hope she drowns sometimes, too.” from “Simply Being Alive” by Katherine Flanigen, my best friend.

I don’t think I ever really liked anyone until I met Katherine. We’d talk, before she left, and sometimes now, too, when she is so many hours away. She left on that September Saturday. I didn’t realize until then just how much I hate airports. There’s a glass window in the airport. It separates home and alone. It’s so silent to be there, hand pressed against hand pressed against glass. It’s cold, too.

We talked so much before she left; our essays to each other documenting our lives for the past five years. They’re like the rings of a tree. Sometimes I look at them to remember when we were in love, and to remember when I was and she was not, and when she was and I was not. She is my best friend.

She once walked to my house in the warm summer rain to leave brownies and drawings on my doorstep. How she bore the rain and unlit streets to come in total darkness I did not know. Her house became my destination often

“Eventually, I can swim to the surface, and the burning summer air evaporates the water

this summer, flashlight guiding me there. The streets are now lit but the lights in her house are off.

Rochester, New York winters are an odd mix because newly laid snow melts on the following day and re-freezes into black ice. It’s so easy to slip without realizing it; one doesn’t know they’ve started to fall until the ground presses against their sore back, like a hand pressed against a hand pressed against cold glass. Black ice.



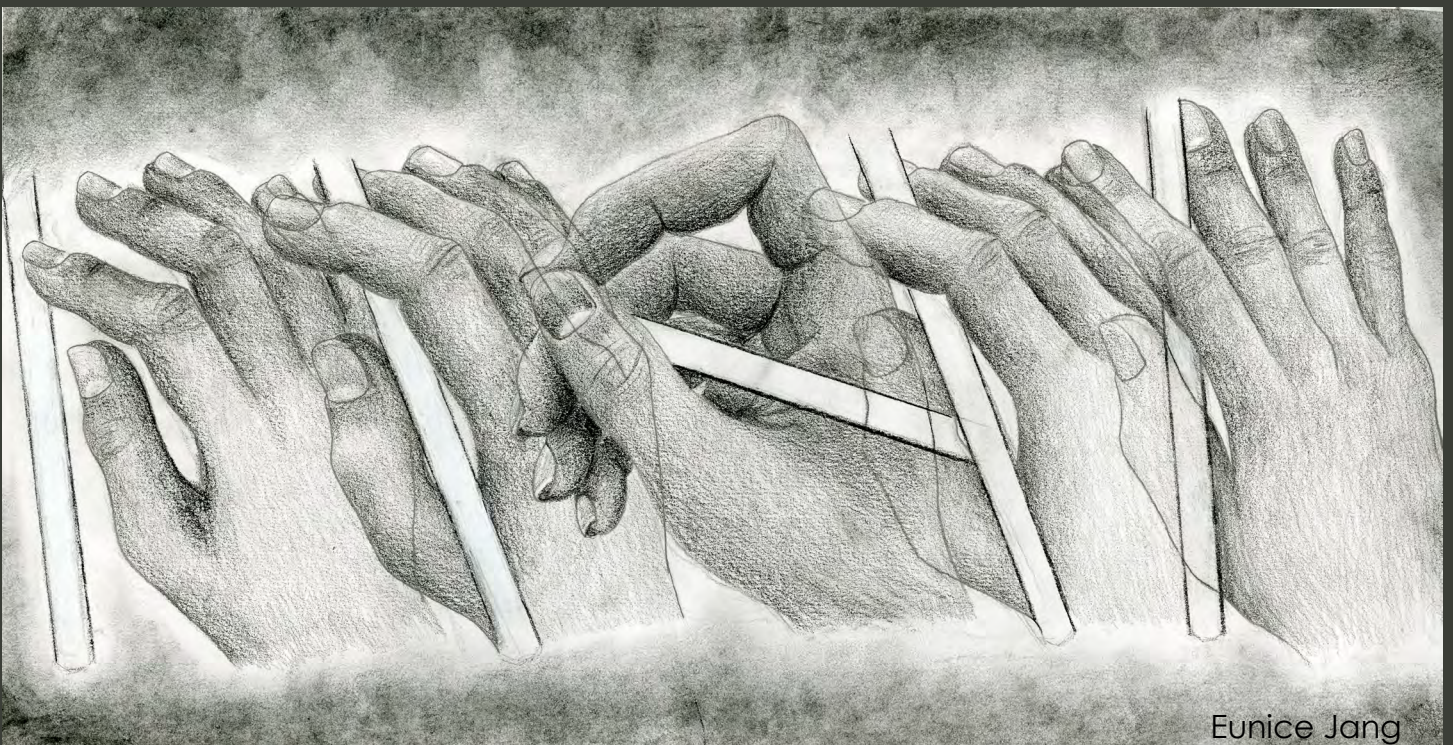
And now there is silence
It prances from your hands to mine
To the window where
Just outside the same
Christmas lights have hung for
Two years now

She

Noor Lima Boudakian

Where I got buried in snow and dug myself out with just my toes that always seem a little cold
Some days I have to warm them up in the bathtub so I can fall asleep (right after you do)
You wiggle yours and ask me to braid your hair for our self proclaimed special occasion
It's what I will remember

Like your scrunched up nose when we giggled at finger dancing and
Laughed softly watching people's futures that would too soon be ours
And you tell me that all you want is flowers
And to watch them grow while living their lives as I live mine with my feet crossed at the ankle
And my hair slicked back to hide a smile that's always there behind my eyebrow (the right one).
Time doesn't last while we share our fables of just last week in a room lit from the walls
I won't miss you until we walk to my front door because it's snowing and my nose is turning pinker than yours
I will go to wash the cups of water we sipped the last drops from and I will be there to hug you with goodbye



The Professor

Maggie Lu

For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to write a book. A fascinating, best-selling book that would top charts and bring me fame and fortune. Yet, whenever I would make an attempt to record one of the stray thoughts that swirled in the chaos of my mind, the paper would end up a crumpled mass in my hands. Nothing ever worked. This made me very prone to loss of motivation and determination. If only I had a good story. Something dramatic. Something alluring. A charismatic, heroic character. A corrupt, malicious villain. Conflict. Plot. Everything. If only I had a good story. I decided to ask my mother, who shared the same interest in literature as I did.

"Hey mom, what do you think would make an amazing story? Nothing cliché please. Oh, and romance isn't really my thing either. That's too hard to make original."

Humming in agreement, my mother tapped a finger against her chin in an almost comical way, considering the question I had presented. A slow smile broke out across her face.

"What about writing the story of your great-grandfather? That'd be quite the adventure novel. Have I ever told you about it?"

"All I know about our family is that most of them still live in China. Oh, we have that cousin out in Boston too. Weird." I couldn't help but shake my head, but I was curious. Who was my great-grandfather? Was he some kind of ancient Chinese hero? Maybe we were actually related to one of the emperors—

"He was a professor."

"...Seriously? What was his big adventure then? Did he get into a fight with another teacher over the Pythagorean theorem or something?"

My mother's lips pulled into a scowl, and I flinched. I hated that expression.

"It would just be easier to me to tell and you to listen, don't you think? So, hush."

The professor was used to people knocking on the door of his classroom. Students usually tapped lightly on the wood, the sound quiet and shy. Fellow staff members only ever knocked curtly, then marched right in to announce their business. This was different. The door shuddered at the heavy fist which pounded against it. All he

could hear on the other side were footsteps and a great deal of shouting. Then, out of the commotion rose a single voice, like a beam of light that led to the sky in one of those movies. Yet light was a symbol of hope and salvation. Whatever was on the other side was the complete opposite.

*“Yet light
was a symbol
of hope and
salvation.”*

“Open this door now! We will use force if necessary! Hurry up and open it before we break the whole thing down!”

Gracefully navigating the aisles he had walked through for the past 16 years of his life, he opened the door to face the wave of soldiers waiting outside.

“There was no need to be so rude. The door was unlocked. Now, how about some tea?”

“He didn't do anything *wrong*, did he?” I couldn't believe that my great-grandfather had the military after his head. What could've happened. Could it be that he was part of a dangerous organization? A spy for the enemy? My mother only shook her head.

“Of course he didn't do anything wrong. He just wasn't teaching the way the government wanted him to.”

“...Wow. How exciting.”

My mom rolled her eyes as she proceeded to hit the back of my head playfully.

“Remember, this was during the revolution. The government was switching from capitalism to communism. Great-grandpa refused to teach the communist way and was happy with what he had been doing. That's why they came for him.”

“So then...what happened next?”

My mom smiled a sad smile. For some reason, this terrified me.



The classroom wasn't large enough to accommodate all the soldiers they had brought. Instead, the general, and a few of his most trusted sat in a circle. Their large bodies awkwardly squished into the students' desks. The tea the professor had brewed still sat at the center untouched, steam rising from each cup and filling the room with its herbal aroma. It was dead silent. Eyes glared into eyes. Finally, the professor decided to speak up.

"What is it you needed, gentlemen?"

All he got in return was a sneer.

"Don't play dumb. You know exactly why we're here. All we're asking is that you do what we ask you to. Considering you're a teacher, I would think you were smart enough to understand something simple like this. It isn't too hard, is it sir?" This earned snickers for the arrogant general. The professor merely chuckled along with

"Your son. Or should I say sons. The oldest two. Say someone were to... take them away. Of course I would never, but let's say someone did. Would you still wear that same cocky expression on your face? I wonder..."

"You wouldn't dare." The professor was now on his feet, body trembling and voice shaking. "I know you're bluffing. You wouldn't. You can't change my mind with some fake threat." The soldier merely smiled a smug smile as he picked up a now cold cup from the table.

"This is fantastic tea, sir."

The professor didn't even hear the compliment. The soldiers had never seen someone run so fast.

"...and that's how your grandfather ended up in Taiwan." I sat in shock, my brain unable to process what I had just heard.



"What? Why?"

That's so unfair! How could they threaten his sons? How would they feel if someone did that to their family? That's just—" My mom nodded and pat the top of my head quietly.

"I know it's sad, but things happen for a reason. Taiwan was where he met grandma, and where he had me. So technically, you exist because grandpa was sent to that island. I told you it was an interesting story."

"I guess so...but now I feel sad. I wonder how great-grandfather must've felt. Having to send his family to live on a

the others.

"Sorry, it seems as if I am too stupid for change. So I'll just keep doing what I'm doing and you can be on your way. I believe you've overstayed your welcome." The professor smiled smugly as he made eye contact with the young man in front of him, expecting him to be fuming. His expression faltered when he saw him laughing darkly.

"We expected you to respond this way, of course, but... I wish you hadn't. What a shame. Your son probably had a bright future ahead of him."

"...Excuse me?"

strange island and not be able to watch them grow up, or even know how they're doing."

"You're only making it more depressing for yourself. You know, there is always reincarnation. Maybe your great-grandfather is living a better life as someone or something else now. And you can make my life better by finishing your homework."

I nodded absentmindedly, but I knew I wouldn't be able to focus on the homework. Who would, after hearing about the family you never had the chance to meet? I couldn't help but smile. Time to write a story.



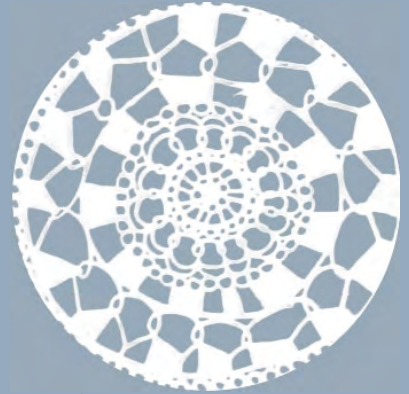
Flashback

Elise
McCamant

We were corrupted by oil paint and achromatic films,
Made pretentious by cigar smoke
That had been sinking into our brains since the '90s.
It was impossible to see the truth sober
So we fell from the graces of heaven,
Into cathedrals of burning ice and slicing feathered winds,
Tearing frescoes off the molded walls while sad blue rhythms
Echoed hollowly on the pews.
Arthritic hands creaked in the nursing home next door,
Where I talked with old ladies
To rid my hair of the smell of clubs and your piano,
Or maybe the cruelly inauspicious moonlight
That ricocheted off benches by the pale water.

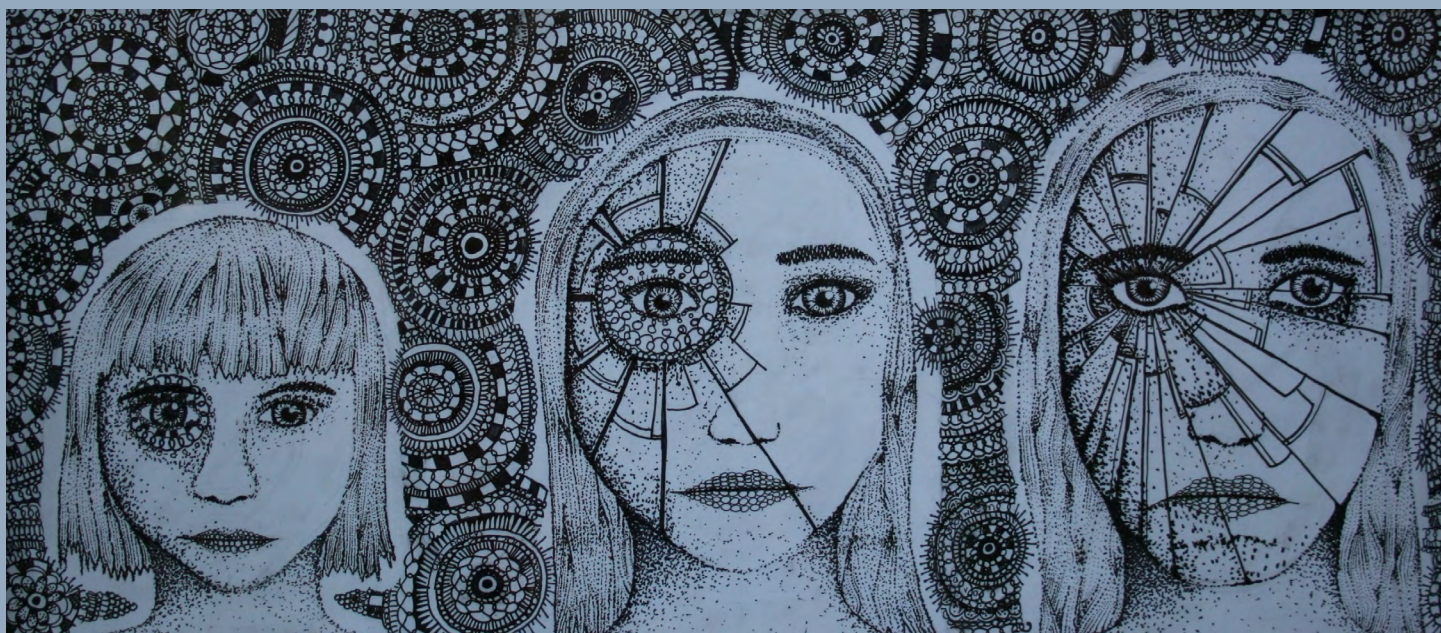
I was driving down the road,
Listening to Bach and a little Tchaikovsky,
When suddenly the earth slipped away,
And perhaps it was chance that kept the notes from dissolving,
Even when your music was fated to catastrophe

And mine to silence,
But for once in my life
I didn't want the shower to burn away my skin.
Rain fell like a purgatory upon the children
Who would have played soldiers in the streets,
Shot each other with cardboard rifles
And scribbled your body red with crayon.
My little sisters' tiny pink toes slipped down the stairs at home,
Her laugh less like a gunshot and more like shattering glass
When your ratty yellow converse slid by,
Your pinky toe protruding from a ragged tear in the side
To help you feel the air when the air conditioning shut down.



(continued)





We gave up on this forsaken place
Of prolific drinkers and crackhead cello players.
Your eyes started to open too wide to see,
Irises tattooed with pink veins,
A startled gasp clutched between your thumb and forefinger.
We cracked the window open to stop the smoke detector
From detecting the deceit and nicotine,
To let the sunrise pierce into my disheveled towels
While we took shelter behind the shower curtains.
Yet, there is no hiding between grace notes,
That is a truth I can give freely.

Your music always left too much to be desired,
The flitting stuff of bird wings was unwilling to hide
From the harmonies skirting the ground like a parchment petticoat,
Breathing in the wind for us
In case we were too drunk on ichor to hear it.
Perhaps it was unfair of me
To weave daisies into the wheels of your bicycle,
But I think it tangled up your chords quite tolerably.

“I didn’t want the shower to burn away my skin.”



Galatean

by Evan Wisner

You consume my dreams and waking thoughts,
Green Light, from across the bay.
I'll be sitting in the morning sun
On my lonely, rotting dock
As I dip my hands, repeatedly, into Lethe waters
So I might forget to long for you as much
As I do now, pruning in the dark
While my thoughts run amuck
Just as that face paint, remember,
We wore it in the garden, remember,
You were Io and I was Morpho.
And She took pictures of Us
Kissing and entangled with all those paper wings.
I'm waiting for you, Honey
My love dripping from the lips
Of Iluvian you.
Please don't evaporate.
Your sweet laughs still ring in my ears.
I read that men were molded from clay,
Pulled from the silt
And shaped with the hands of some god
Who left them to toil in the birth mud,
Let them grind each other into sand.
And when the seas of humanity would evaporate,
The life blood drained forever from the earth,
That singular beach would turn completely to glass,
And shatter into dust for that god to remake and remold
Again and again
Through every eternity.
But you, my dear, were carved from a stone,
Not by a lonely god
But by innumerable masons:
The celestials, the seas,
The winds
Who sung together the melody
Which allowed your tender body to take shape.
I see you in everyone, all of them fractals
Distorted in the poor imitations
Evoked by clay.



