

Reflection

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Reflection

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Reflection submissions are evaluated and selected anonymously.

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The cover art was done by Tom Hoag, Gonzaga student and artist.

“The tragedy of modern man is not that he knows less and less about the meaning of his own life, but that it bothers him less and less.”

—Vaclav Havel

letter from the editor //

On a warm evening last March, I was walking past the Jesuit building and nearing St. Al's at golden hour when a funny thought came to mind. Watching the other students around me, ambling along the path in the unusually mild weather, I was struck by our relative smallness and peculiarity. How wholesome and humbling, I thought: from afar, we're all just specks amidst other human specks, tottering around with backpacks and mostly unsure of what the future holds. I've continued to reflect on that startling-yet-obvious recognition of just how precious, ridiculous, often clueless, and endearingly small we all are.

And here we all are: darting around campus with giant bags strapped to our backs, attuned to the ticking of time rather than the stirrings of our souls (save for those precious sunny weeks toward the end of spring semester). Most days, we carry textbooks we may or may not even read, possibly a bruised piece of fruit, and heavily stickered blackboxes (a.k.a. our laptops), the mechanics of which we are unlikely to ever understand. On that March evening, I was momentarily aware of how little we know, and yet how much we do despite our minimal understanding of anything: we love deeply, we dance wildly, we sing terribly, we participate blindly, we propose theories, we write manifestos, and - most radical of all - we create art.

To me, creative expression is the recognition and occasional expression of this bizarre, chaotic, often nonsensical, and overwhelmingly unknown world. We tend to walk around this world as though we vaguely understand it: at least on this campus, we often stride around with purpose, our backs bent by bags holding unread textbooks, blackboxes, and browning bananas. Our lives are scheduled as though we can entrust the world with the responsibility to maintain human order and sanity. Yet I am regularly reminded of the silliness of my "four-year plans" and

new year's resolutions when I walk through campus, downtown Spokane, or my hometown, and witness the wholly unpredictable flood of faces around me.

When we take a break from striding about with purpose and instead sit down to write, paint, or enter into a space where we can move our bodies in a way that defies routine, we implicitly acknowledge how little we know: about ourselves, other people, and the world that holds us all. We cast away our schedules and instead surrender ourselves to the material world, responding solely to the unpredictable nature of our bodies melded with physical materials.

Reflecting on the innumerable media used to create art (paint, ink, charcoal, metal, human bodies in dance, finicky tools on Photoshop, collage, one's own brain), these materials are often unruly, messy, disorganized, and, in all honesty, incredibly frustrating. Yet perhaps this is the "point" of the otherwise irrational act of art-making: it is an exercise in responding to frustration, to uncertainty, to self-doubt, and to the capricious nature of physical materials, our relationships, and ourselves.

The prose, poetry, and artwork in this journal are the collective product of this exercise. For many of the authors and artists, these pieces emerge from a place of appreciation for the finite, tiny things that both enrich and complicate the daily experience of being human. These pieces speak to the unspoken beauty of the mundane, and to the strength and wonder that can result from the recognition of vulnerability, cruelty, weirdness, and smallness. In lieu of absolute knowledge, there is a sort of knowledge gained in recognizing one's lack of knowledge, yet continuing to attack life with an unabated desire for connection, beauty, and love.

This March, at golden hour, I implore you to walk toward the sun with a backpack, your laptop, and a bruised piece of fruit, and to simply acknowledge your smallness.

Thank you for picking up this journal.

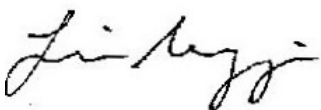
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lizzy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and a trailing flourish.

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Brianna Covert

Snoqualmie in the Rain

In the playground at Torguson Park,
I think of the children waiting for the bell to ring,
And the clerk bagging canned corn at Yeeles,
And the tired employees of Cennox leaving
In the rain.

All the squeaking brakes,
Their drivers pinching the wheel
Dying to get out.

Slowly,
All the children wish to go
As the clouds converge,
But instead, they tiddle on a swing set
And think of the children waiting for the bell to ring.



Spider Lily

Morgan Wald

Myonne Davis- Nicholson

Divine

A soul handcrafted by the artist,
Who broke their back and fingers bled
But smiled wide
As they were making a gift.

You know a soul is beautiful
When the air gives thanks
For carrying her voice.

When music and beauty
Reveal themselves at the order
Of her fingers.

When delight flourishes,
And joy becomes infectious
At her smile.

A soul out of my reach and she,
The artist
Allowed me to touch it
How lucky I am.

Sarah McCarthy

Living with Earthquakes

Gurian Nonfiction Honorable Mention Recipient

The boys above me move like tectonic plates. I can hear them now through the five feet of air and two feet of building that separates us. Whenever they move from point A to point B, whether it be from the living room to their bedroom or to the bathroom or to the door, I feel them.

They move quickly for a natural disaster. And make no mistake; they are a natural disaster. Just yesterday, I was having afternoon tea with the new prime minister of the termite colonies. He said last night's quake buried eight hundred termites when three tunnels caved in, and their capital building caught fire. I tried to console him the best I could. I told him it was out of their control, they're too easily squished. He shook his head and stared into his tea, which started trembling along with everything else because the earthshakers were back from lunch.

I feel them when they move like landslides, tumbling into beds the way rocks plunge down a mountain. Their feet are hammers striking a floor they have yet to realize isn't an anvil. They walk like the sound of dead bodies dropping to the floor. Every breath, belch, shout, swallow, knuckle crack, and ankle pop sends the Richter scale into a frenzy and me running for the closest doorway.

I repeat: I live in the middle of a natural disaster. I live in an apartment that is trembling like a sick child going through growing pains. That's all earthquakes are, growing pains. The tectonic plates above me are going through the type of pain that comes from your limbs fluctuating between calcium and titanium. This is the kind of change that is destroying termite populations and simultaneously giving me a heart attack. I often wonder if I should go up there with a glass of water and some Advil, but then the shaking starts, and I have to run for cover again.

The world's longest earthquake is happening seven feet above my head. The cabinets are clutching their hinges. The floor dares not creak. Tables and chairs draw their legs in. Everything is silent and still, everything except these mobile mountains, these dealers of decibels, these freaking tectonic titans.

I live here, and every time a pipe tries to unhinge itself from the wall, my life flashes before my eyes. Little moments come

to me, stupid memories. I remember when I was fourteen, my cynical English teacher showed us a picture of the San Andreas fault line.

“Look at that,” he laughed, tracing a finger along the land pinched in some places stretched in others like a surgical scar that dipped and swelled through California. “Look at how screwed they are,” he said, picking up *Romeo and Juliet* once again, oblivious to the fact that he had lost his entire class to visions of collapsed concrete, fires, and tsunamis.

For months, I was plagued by images of the earth coming apart at the seams. I tortured myself with news articles foretelling an earthquake that will have everyone sitting down, even the buildings. They call it “The Big One,” and it can happen right now or now or now.

At night I would close my eyes to find that angry land waiting behind my eyelids. I would watch the San Andreas split open like a lip, knocking California out in one sucker punch to the face. I saw tree roots rupture from the ground. I tasted dirt. Overpasses were stacked on top of each other, so close, I couldn’t breathe, like a collapsed vein. The land had people gushing out of office buildings, only to clot on streets when they didn’t know where to go.

I imagine the destruction in California the way I imagine the destruction above me. I’m telling you, send someone up there, and they will find the floor to be nothing but slabs of crushed linoleum. Water will be streaming from broken pipes, and sparks will fly from frayed wires. Seven feet above me, termite mothers and fathers bend their heads over the tiny graves of their termite children then return home to make love through the aftershocks. Go up there, and I guarantee you will see dust hanging stagnant in the air and freshly carved fault lines as angry as the San Andreas.

We lived in California until I was five. I felt the earthquakes only when I was rubbing the sleep from my eyes and squinting at my silhouetted mother and father, standing in the doorway.

“Did you feel it?” they’d ask.

“Feel what?” I’d always murmur, already curling up again.

My clouded mind running back to a place that had no earthquakes or shaky legged parents stumbling into my room, trying to comfort a daughter that just wanted to rest.

If the earthquakes had wanted me to feel them, then they would have happened when I was awake. My parents heard them before they felt them. My dad told me they sound like a semi-truck the second before it hits you, which is fucking terrifying.

It was a reoccurring scene of my childhood: my parents sitting on the couch in the middle of a natural disaster. The TV droning on, Simon Cowell continuing to criticize, unaware that California, hysterical, frantic California was on the rail of the balcony preparing to leap into the sea. The North American and Pacific plates rubbed together like the hands of a maniacal earth that did not care that my parents first and possibly only child slept soundly in the next room.

I can't tell you how the house groaned, laboring to keep itself together, but my father can. He grew up listening to buildings fall apart. He was only four when California had yet another breakdown. That night, he tore through the house, finally finding shelter in his parents' room, where he immediately hauled the comforter over his body to shield him in case the roof caved in.

My mom sat there, remembering that one time back in '89 when buildings swayed like blades of grass and elevators plunged to their ground floors. Broken glass crunched underfoot and glistened like jewels set in asphalt. She walked lightly upon the sensitive skin of the Conqueror of California. As the sun went down, people were left to explore this new place where there was no power, and the Marina was on fire. Some went to see if their apartments were still there. Others scrambled to payphones and landlines calling out to each other from across the city.

“Who's alive?”

“Whose funeral do we have to plan?”

“Can I sleep on your couch?”

Firefighters put on helmets. Looters put on ski masks. Store owners put on tough faces and stood outside with baseball bats. My mother fell asleep to a city whose only sign of life was the beat of helicopter blades flying above the broken Bay Bridge, peering into the sea.

My parents sat there, begging for it not to fall apart this time. They pleaded to a thing that didn't even know of their existence, but they pleaded nonetheless. Then, when everything was still and intact, they would get up to see if their daughter had felt it. She never did.

Fact: fire can smell fear, which is why flames that ate houses whole and made ash out of everything dogged me day and night. Back then, I couldn't be bothered by earthquakes tearing California apart; I was more concerned with the fires eating her alive. I would close my eyes to find trees curled like used matchsticks that crumbled at a sneeze. Houses became wooden cages where if people were lucky, they'd pass out from smoke inhalation before the fire began nibbling on their toes.

When I was four, and there was an earthquake, I didn't tear through the halls like my father. I lay sleeping, where I always slept, dreaming of fire. I would wake just as the aftershock finished. My shadowed parents would slip into the room, ready to save me (from the earthquake, not the fire). After a brief conversation that proved neither of us were on the same page, I would drift off to the flames again, and they would go back to sitting through California's manic episodes.

I sit through them now. It took me sixteen years, but I finally feel them, aftershocks and all. I fall asleep to them, working their floor into submission. I fall asleep wondering if I'm going to wake up tomorrow with a ceiling on top of me. I lie there with my legs curled under me, hands overhead, waiting for their limbs to snap them out of bed after minutes of debating with themselves whether or not they really need to pee or get a glass of water.

I know it took me a while, but I'm awake now. I feel them now. Their migrations bring migraines to my head. My heart palpitates. Blood cells trip over themselves for air. The ceiling warps! Warps! I tell you as if it was as malleable as flesh. The apartment and I both hold our breaths. Then comes the sound of inevitability. The termites start screaming. It sounds like a semi-truck is about to hit us. Then, it hits us.

Yet, I know that this is nothing. The 'Big One' is much more terrible. It begins with the epicenter for destruction giving

the middle finger and shifting into a 7.8 magnitude beast that moves earth and isn't interested in taking California prisoner. When it hits, we'll all sit down, even the buildings. And all the little girls in California will wake from their dreams of forest fires and angry land to a place that is angry and is on fire. And despite the recommendation that people should remain seated while an earthquake is in progress, all of the parents in California will rush into their children's rooms, because that's what parents do. And from there, earthquakes will do what they do best.

First, it will rain ceiling and glass. Buildings will buckle, blocks of them, entire districts. Think Monet, but if he worked with blending oak beams and clay tile rather than oils. Then the Marina and a lot of other things are going to catch on fire. But there's no need to fear because from the west, the ocean will come to swallow burning California whole.

I'd take my tectonic titans any day over the monster that slumbers beneath the Golden State. I'm glad my parents scooped my brother and me up and ran and ran and ran all the way to the heart of Oregon. I'm even happier that I picked up my suitcase and ran even further north, where the only thing that can get me is the cold. The snow is a cruel force, but not a terrifying one. And the titans are a personified natural disaster, but their bones will eventually settle. Unlike the earth, they will eventually settle. And like all men, they will eventually sleep.

Judge Thomas Kearns

Star-filled Soul

Alone I drive out through the night,
with purpose, and escape from sight.
No matter where such darkness lays,
in that dark ocean, music plays.

I held my body and my mind
together with orgasmic truth.
A sooth beyond the night's serene
as life breathes out existence.
Now drowning me thus yielding.

Then stop and think for once,
among the dead of night.
No one in sight and none to see.
Complete enshrouding is a blessing.

Escape toward clouds of timeless beauty.
Now shield the eyes while knowing so, embracing in, and letting go.

Alex Weaver

Emergence

Beneath the bridge connecting here to there,
My eyes drift back to me reflected by
A stream so crystalline yet still moving.
The features of the rougher sex still look
Quite soft to me. So, what am I supposed
To be? The autumn winds sing melodies
Not far from those that momma hummed those nights
When consciousness, like hell, had turned the key.
When sleep was nothing less than spiting me.
The side effects of growing up a boy
Raised by a single mother undisclosed
And somehow never written on the box.
It took me tears and years but now I know:
At first, you're guaranteed to feel alone.
You may begin to grow resentful of
The man who left you and men who act like him, men who say
words they never mean.
You'll learn to entertain yourself for hours
And wonder how a family dinner feels.
You're bound to ponder what it means to be
A man. And one day realize there's no worth
In it at all. The traits worth having don't
Discriminate. Behind my eye a breath,
A bubble breaks my rambling thoughts
And spills a puddle on my cheek that's brushed
Away by mother's independence, as
I find I've emerged as who I'm meant to be.

**“Jax”
Jacqueline
Viteznik**

We Speak Slovene

Gurian Nonfiction Honorable Mention Recipient

I recently visited and surrendered myself to my family in Slovenia. Most of them spoke English perfectly, even as good as mine. Many didn't, forcing me into a perpetual triangle of translations and approximations. Slovene sounds as foreign of a language as Japanese or Swahili. The sounds are impossible to distinguish and there are so many accents and dialects. My only way to describe it is that it is like a mix of Russian and German with an Italian accent or Austrian accent depending on the area. My Aunt Ida is actually an English teacher and happy to be the link between me and everyone else, especially her husband, Miro. I was related to him the most as he was my American Grandfather's Slovene cousin, with whom he enjoyed a friendship despite being separated by land, water, culture, and war.

At one point, I was left alone with Miro. He didn't know a single phrase in English besides "Hello." But he knew that I had been studying and living in Italy. He started speaking to me in Italian. It was more than reasonable to believe that I had picked up the language, yet it was a challenge to understand his sentences, even harder to form my own. He turned to me. "Parli Italiano?"

"Si!" I smiled too much. "Um, un piccolo. Studio italiano per Universitat."

"Bene," then Miro burst into a flurry of vocabulary and conjugations I had no idea even existed. My face immediately portrayed that confusion with terrified eyes. I managed to figure out he was asking about my travels.

"Oh yeah! Il mio viaggio preferito e' Parigi o Lisboa." He laughed at my American accent and told me I could rilassarsi. He did it with a big smile, a rare thing in this part of the world, and patted my leg as he got up to relax as well. It was a very meager conversation but formed a connection without the use of a translator. But it was artificial to speak in Italian.

I was excited that my Italian could pay off, to see how study abroad really could benefit me and my relationships. But here with Miro, I had a sinking feeling in my gut. I had guilt because I didn't know Slovene filled me, and sadness of knowing I could never learn it on the other side of the world followed in

suit. Mostly, it felt wrong that Italian was the only language I could speak to Miro, a language his country was forced to learn and favor.

Italians prior to and during WWII, conquered the region and imposed their language. Slovene was banned. Slovenes were chased out by fire and violence from Trieste, just a thirty minute drive from Ida and Miro's home, yet across the border that, before the fall of Yugoslavia, took more time than the drive itself to cross. The Italian Fascists saw something that needed to be eradicated. How could a country bordering them, sharing land with them, be so uncivilized, so Slavic, so ugly. She explained to me that it was here, in her village of Sezana, where the pain of the Italian control was not a distant family memory. Her mother was forced to learn the language in school because her teacher was not her countryman, but an invader sent into the countryside to correct her.

When I was 18 and visiting for the first time, she and several older relatives from the Klancar side of the family pulled me aside from the party held in the garden. I was so young and innocent then, on the cusp of university which promised independence and adulthood. We stood in front of the humble church in that small village, where everyone at the party could trace their families. The church was so small it should be called a chapel. The courtyard my families stood in had a stone fence encircling everyone as they drank wine and nibbled on homemade pastries. But the fence was falling apart and the wooden archway was rotting.

One of the old women held my hands, her soft wrinkled fingers clasping over mine. She started speaking to me in that language that had been lost to me, pausing so Ida could translate. One of my grandfather's cousins, at the same very young age of 17, tried to be outspoken about the changes she was seeing in her country. She saw the eradication already in action. One of her siblings was going through a sacrament at the local church. I imagine her sitting in the back of the small chapel that I had visited earlier that day. She stared at her younger sibling walking up to the altar decorated in fake gold. As they were expecting the

priest to ask them the key vows of the sacrament so the child could assent to their faith and grow up even more, a garbled mess came out of the priest's mouth. Maybe a few key words could be understood by the sibling and the crowd, but the comprehension wasn't the point. Yes, the monumental marker of becoming an adult was indecipherable to the sibling - but why should this be taken from the sibling, with everyone there reminded they are not free to be themselves. So this teenage girl stood up in the church, pointed at the priest, and yelled: "We don't speak Italian; we are Slovene!"

This is where the story became cloudy in the family's collective memory. The old woman insisted that the cousin was taken by the Italian soldiers, was for sure beaten and likely more than that, and went crazy from the trauma. She was only just a shell of the person. Ida explained to me that she had heard that the story was that the cousin was beaten, but she had pretended to be crazy before the outburst so that nothing more would be done to her. She died soon after, no matter the version that was told. Each interpretation of the same story struck me but varied with each one. One was purely and entirely tragic. A girl my very own age had everything taken from her just for standing up against the cultural genocide that was more than just a threat; it was real and in effect. The other story was still tragic but contained the ingenuity and bravery only a teenage girl could have in those dire circumstances.

She was so small compared to Ida and me, so old and grey that she could blend into the stone fence of the courtyard. Yet she would not let me budge until she looked into my eyes, similar to her own, and saw that I would never forget this story she passed down to me. Ida gave nothing away with no reaction to the story, true to the Slovene stoicism pervading the country and the family.

When the old woman let go of my hands and permitted me to return the party, I realized that they were desperate to pass on a history to all of us so we could go away understanding how lucky we are and how much my great-grandparents overcame to live in America. This was all we could think about as I spent those

three days with my relatives in Sezana, with so much history and tragedy I could absorb without both parties being completely overwhelmed.

But I accepted the blow of each tragic story anyway. Stories are the only way to capture the pain of having your language stolen from you and destroyed before your very eyes. It is the only way to record your language, no matter how many dialects you have. It's a way to preserve the memories of lost loved ones that were taken in circumstances that could only be called evil.

But stories are some of the only ways to preserve these memories, no matter how tragic they are. Especially in times of war, occupation, and tyranny, the constant state of Slovenia in the 20th century, records can be destroyed and people can disappear, whether by the Italians or even later by the communist officials. Stories of these individuals, of these tragedies, may be all that we have left. On a lighter note, it may be what brings us closer together. It's just a shame, maybe even a tragedy, that I can't share these stories myself, bring them back to America, in the language that they need to be told in.



Sophia Maggio

Anonymous

Evelyn Elston

Daytime and the In-betweens

the intimacy of plucking sweet plums from your wallpaper,
planting paper garlands on your balcony
waiting for them to take root,
humming tunes and melodies
that make bread out of our cushioned seats;
If words could be ballroom dancers,
could be sandy beaches,
could be curving paths across the Spokane river,
then I could maybe learn to touch softly with my lips to yours
to lean into easy recipes.
before I was well, I never noticed the stars
but next to you on your porch I can take tally
even as the sun turns the sky bright blue.
you hold them all in your palms with such care,
as if you're still tinkering with them,
still turning screws to make them rounder or brighter.
it's sacred to watch them turn around you;
it is holy to be yours.
while I've always found pleasure in the afternoon,
it is your shadow that strikes me. even 0.2 miles away
I still hear you crooning to make sure I'm warm enough,
fed enough, safe alongside myself
more repaired than leaky.
So when I meet you again,
up stepping stones and on skylines,
I'm a little taller than I used to be.
there's a few more stars that I didn't always see,
you're standing beside me,
draped in honey, that soft cotton dress,
seeking that gentle gaze we found with such fondness.

M. Dobner

In days when hours felt like years

In days when hours felt like years,
I could watch in wonder of
airplanes overhead, craning my neck to see
the model of a jet on descent, or
even magnificent white streaks crisscrossed on
azure canvas; that which enlightened
imagination laying on grassy blankets.

Or sitting on the freight dock, waiting
for the train to pass, hoping for the
low rumble that would make my legs quake, longing
to hear metal wheels on rail screeking to my covered ears, or
whistle so loud it would pierce my soul
and I'd jump a foot in the air.

These noises eternal, though sentiment
changed, what once was sacred now profane -
Sometimes my ear will catch the whine of a plane, I'll turn my head
— a search in vain —
Or while lying in bed wrestling problems of days ahead
the echo'd railroad whistle will cut the night.
I'll stop thinking, angry at my sleepless plight
all renege'd soon, slipped to memories of life.

Nora El Naby

Remainder

Gurian Nonfiction Prize Winner

It was sometime in January of 2013. The winter that I learned that when you divided a family of 5, it had a remainder of 4. At least, when you factored in the apartment. So, while the nicely divided 1 enjoyed its cozy abode and adjusted to the quiet, the rest of us had finally landed in a homeless shelter, after months of couch surfing and motel hopping.

It was a family shelter, so thankfully my family had our own room. It was a small and crowded, with triple bunk beds, and a single to the side. I don't remember how we all kept our clothes, but I remember a single dresser, coated in a peeling white paint, that had been decorated with painted flowers. It looked like it had been picked up in an estate sale. Like us, it was unwanted. Displaced.

I mostly kept my head down and stayed in our room. I had a DS that I would use to console my brother whenever he gave in to fits of crying. It was probably every other night. I didn't get to know any of the other residents, and as a result, they didn't get to know me. I was a year too young to go into the communal kitchen, but no one would bat an eye when I helped my mother prepare the communal dinner.

The other residents of the shelter would ask my mom what to make for dinner, and whose turn it was to cook. She would always tell them to make whatever they knew how to make, insisting that she wasn't in charge. Still, every other day, someone would come to ask her for help. She was the one with the schedule, after all, and she would help as best as she could.

The few times I did venture out was to organize the big bags in the donation room after the monthly clothing drives. It seemed like different organizations in the city would pass the duty back and forth. One month it was the high school. The next it was the library.

I would find my peace among the other unwanted items. We had a whole room of cabinets dedicated to housing them, and every cabinet had a label, and I would spend hours folding each item. Sorting them into their respective cupboards. Women's shirts, men's pants, sweaters, ugly sweaters. Every unwanted boot had a place. It was the room where remainders could become a

quotient. I loved it. I would spend hours humming to myself and quietly folding, sorting, and organizing. If I saw something I liked, I would put it in a small pile out of the way. Everything had a place here.

That was, until the Fleemans found themselves in need of Sunday clothes. Within an hour of leaving the donation room, having everything as neat and in place as possible, the donation room looked as though a tornado had moved through it. Pants deemed below standards were scattered around the floor, shoes were scrambled, cabinets left open.

I would walk in after they had left for the service, and take it all in. Too tired to start the process again. Weakly, I'd put some of the shoes back together. Maybe fold a pair of pants. And then I'd head back up into the room and wait for them to get back. They were a perfect, united family. Indivisible. I hated them for it. But they were the only family with kids my age, so I would take it.

On my way up to go complain to my sister, I found myself avoiding a certain room down the hall. Pam's room. I remember her with a shark's teeth and a snake's smile, though I suppose she may only have had one of those. I had been in that room the night before, with Joanie Fleeman, the social butterfly of the family.

Pam's room seemed bigger than everyone else's, even mine. She had a couch and a flat screen TV. She had a small laptop that Joanie had used to show off her 300+ Facebook friends. From a table in the corner, a router spewed out light that bounced off the walls and covered the room. Wi-Fi blue. I sat on the couch, staring up at the webpage. I tried to read the names of all her friends on the sidebar. Watched the number fluctuate from 300 to the high 200s. Tried to imagine having that many friends. She opened a conversation with someone. Started laughing about it, before floating her responses with someone else in the room. I can't remember who.

Pam walked in a little later. The two other girls didn't notice, but I couldn't help but watch her. She sat in the back of the room, watching the others scroll down their feed as she folded laundry. Towels, blouses, baby clothes. I had forgotten that

she had a kid. She kept her son in daycare all day long. It was a rarity that he was ever in the shelter. I doubt he even slept there. If it weren't for the expensive snacks she kept her shelf of the fridge loaded with, I would have assumed she was on her own in the world. She kept watching them, and I kept watching her.

Eventually, Pam jumped into the conversation. Scolding them. Or rather, us. I was pinned on the couch with the others as she warned Joanie that her computer time would be cut short if she kept doing whatever inappropriate thing had gotten her attention in the first place. She treated all three of us as a unit. The other two responded with a simple "Yes, ma'am." I stared straight forward. Thinking.

Ma'am was the part that got me. We weren't in the South, and none of us, not even Pam, was even mildly southern. It was seen as a slur that my grade school teachers had spent careful attention correcting. Ma'am, I had been told, was short for Madam. Like a prostitute.

Pam stared at me, noticing my silence. I hadn't participated. I stared back at her. Joanie and her friend nudged me.

"Yeah, I guess."

Pam scowled. I blinked. "It's yes, ma'am."

"Okay."

That was the last time Joanie invited me to scroll through Facebook with her.

It only took a few days before everyone in the shelter started using that word, too. Ma'am. Kids started using it with their parents. Parents, with their peers. Everywhere. Will dinner be ready soon, Ma'am? Yes, Ma'am. Can I go play outside, Ma'am? No, Ma'am. It was like everyone, at the same time, all developed a bad cough. Some of the adults probably walked around hiccupping the word to themselves as they went about their day. Ma'am. Ma'am. Ma'am.

I went snooping. Asked around. Everyone in the shelter had been affected, except for my family. Needless to say, it started with Pam. First, she had gone to the Fleemans, the largest family there at the time, and offered them the deal. Wi-Fi for a few rules. The first of which was the use of the most infamous 'Ma'am.' The

second, was that her word was law. Follow her command, and the blue light was yours. Stray, and be shunned.

Next, she went door to door. Extending her proposition. And one by one they all agreed. They nodded their heads and covered her chores while she wrote down the password for them. The shelter staff had been looking into her, and she had leveraged her deal once again. Suddenly, she had well over 30 people vouching for her. Countless families, all desperate for a little access to Wi-Fi.

We all knew something was up. She had more than enough to rent an apartment with her shiny gadgets. She had just bought a new phone and liked to brag about the price of it. The cost of all the Motts she had in her fridge alone was more than what my mom made in a week.

Eventually, people started to see her as the authority, and she dictated everything she could. Communal dinners stopped because they weren't to her taste. Anyone that made a mistake was shunned to the point of social isolation. Removed from the equation. And everyone, regardless of their standing with Pam, was shorter with the staff, whether they were simply checking in or actively helping them find jobs. Everything was to be sacrificed for the sake of pleasing Pam.

In a twisted way, it was unifying. The people in the shelter became cogs in a machine designed to protect Pam. The kids stopped talking to me, and soon everyone in my family began receiving glances and disapproving looks in the halls. The donation room was locked outside of business hours at Pam's request, to stop it from being raided by children. Even within business hours, children weren't allowed in without a parent.

Finding myself cut off from my only form of relief, I began spending more and more time curled up on my family's three-tiered bunk bed. It was so tall I couldn't sit up straight. I would lie down, taking turns passing my DS back and forth with my little brother and hugging the giant, disgusting blanket that had been donated to us. Every time it moved, feathers floated out from a tear in the corner and into the air.

They would catch the light for a brief moment. Every gentle

strand, every fiber that dangled off them would be illuminated, accentuated, as they lay suspended in the air. I would watch them, transfixed, as they fell from grace. Out of the sunlight, they were just feathers. Pieces of a blanket that was littered with suspicious stains, and an even more questionable smell. They were forgotten. Just like us.

Whenever another fell out of sight, I would shift again, imagining myself as one of them. I could see myself for the briefest moments floating weightless with them. Beautiful, and shining, and whole. No longer the forgotten part of a family. Thinking about it made me move again, and again I would watch the feathers fall. Repeat the cycle.

I started losing track of everything that happened outside of our little room, though there were never any new faces. The adults, like the feathers, began to stagnate. I saw the same people every day. Joanie would mention some boy. I would nod and smile. We just stopped talking.

New donations arrived, and a task force was created to organize them. It went directly above my head. Though, the adults that went in after weren't much better than the Fleeman children. They would go in, several toddlers in tow, and emerge victorious with a small collection of dinosaur onesies, the donation room left a battlefield ridden with clothes that hadn't made the cut. Then the next family would go in a few hours later, snippy that nothing was organized, and repeat the process. Women's shirts, men's pants, sweaters, ugly sweaters. Everything was a giant, amorphous whole. Worth less than the sum of its parts.

Within the short time of Pam's rule, everyone had forgotten how it had been kept clean. And I stood on the outside, watching my small haven crumble. Unable to do anything. Relief came in March, when my mom announced that we had made it into transitional housing, and it was only a matter of days before the paperwork would be done. The few people in the shelter who would still talk to us at all congratulated us. They would count down the days with us, and the Fleemans even helped us move in.

It didn't take long to get reacquainted with having our own

place. We had hit the jackpot. For the next two years, we could live in a house, with a backyard and enough rooms for everyone. It was the first time I ever had, though just being able to sit up in my own bed was enough to celebrate.

I never talked to anyone from the shelter again. Joanie and I remained Facebook friends, though not a single message was ever sent. There were no comments, no likes, no 'Happy Birthday's.' Even now, there are a handful of names I can remember. The Fleemans are the only family that remains distinct.

My mother must have kept in touch with someone there, if just for a short while. She has never told me whom, and we have never spoken of it since. She told me enough to know that the evidence against Pam had finally been found, and that she had been thrown out. All traces to her were cut, and the attitude towards the staff had vastly improved. She could tell me nothing else.

And, it seemed, just like that we had become a whole again. The darkness of the shelter began to melt, and the days following seem to float in my mind, as if carried on a feather. The memories of the names and faces began to haze. We became the brand new number that happens when fractions add up, to a complete, indivisible, whole.



I saw God

Chelsie Sunde

I Saw God

Kaitlyn Johnson

in the garden

gazing into the bough of the cherrywood
is like staring into the whorls of beloved hands
I don't care if the tomatoes remain green
forever; only let the thrum of hungry ghosts
shimmer deeply in my brain like some
primordial secret.

let me bear witness to the blushing throat
of wing-ed creatures, the swelling blooms
their brilliant tongues; the fruiting vine
strangling the trellis;
the orb weaver, woozy in her den
unraveling like a madwoman

Sophia Bohley

Untitled



Kylie Urbanek

Möhn, kenne ich dich?

Möhn,
There is a likeness that I seek in you.
More than in any river,
More than any song,
More than any polished trophy.

From you I've come,
And to you,
I thought I'd return.

But when you, Möhn,
joined the zeitgeist,
I lost it all.

And now,
all I know are nicknames,
and reductionist patisseries
And those pictures.

I remember that one of you.
Standing in the field,
With this homemade wool coat.
It was so faded that I could barely make out
How rosy your nose was.

I took that picture with me.
For days when ice burned my face,
So I could see,
How rosy my nose was.

But Möhn.
I've been carrying around that picture of you since I was 17.
It's been almost 4 years.

Everything I know about you, could fit into the palm of my hand.
Replacing the image I have of you, tucked neatly in the lining of
my favorite, grey coat.

We have similar smile lines.
When we speak,
We move our words to the front of our mouths.
Like our people do.

Vader,
That's all I know.

And there's this vinegar.
I can feel it pooling
As I run my fingers

Through the pages of your
Old birdwatching guide.
The one titled, "österreich offizieller vogelbeobachtung."

I felt the vinegar pour over
Realizing that these words meant nothing to me.

And Vader,
There's this word,
Liebe,
This one word I know you'd understand.
More than most.

And I need to hear it.
I need to hear it in the country
That gave me my drive,
That gave me my isolation,
That gave me my independence.

But I can't.

Because the only word,
I know,
Without consultation,
doubt,
or spite,
is Möhn.

Garrick Bateman

Fuel

Gurian Fiction Prize Winner

We'd been throwing buckets of water out of the basement when someone yelled down the stairs and said a shuttle had landed. The rain had eeked to a halt for now, but the water that had soaked into the earth above was still coursing down the basement's concrete walls, collecting in brown puddles on the floor. Ben had set out sponges and towels, but they were getting soaked through so fast he was already sending some of the kids to take the used ones out to the clothesline to dry. Three days it had been storming hard without sign of improvement. Only this morning, rather unexpectedly, had the clouds cleared long enough to even bother trying and reclaim the basement's water-damaged interior. Even then, it seemed to be only an exercise in futility. Some of the locals thought there were three more days on the sky's brow and the basement would soon be in need of another deep cleanse.

That was, if they were there long enough to even wait the storm out.

If a shuttle had landed, it meant the execs were here. They'd called ahead some time ago.

"Mama." One of the kids had come down the basement stairs and was leaning over the railing. She was twenty but they all called me Mama. "Mama, should we send someone out to meet them?"

I turned to Ben.

He pretended not to mind and kept to wringing his towel.

"Give Marco a call," I told the kid. She went up the stairs two at a time. The steps banged as she went and when she reached the landing above, I heard her through the thin floorboards punching numbers into the satellite phone. It was that sound and the sound of the water running into the basement that I heard. I organized some buckets, threw a mop in one before I went upstairs to listen in to her conversation with Marco. She was saying something in Spanish. I didn't speak. All the kids who worked in the mines did, but I didn't.

She looked nervous when she was me watching. I wasn't trying to make her nervous, I was just curious. Then she hung up. "What did he say?"

"Executives," the girl said. "He says they want to meet in

town.”

“Okay,” I said. The girl waited for more. I only said, “Go on. Go help Ben in the basement. We need to clean the water.”

It was busy work. Ben and I knew it. The kids didn’t. Company executives were always talking about budget cuts, but only last month had they ever made good on all their talk. Someone named Chris had called the house and said they were working on phasing out manual labor, introducing something called automatic mining. It was a nice way of saying everyone was fired. We didn’t tell the kids. If we didn’t have any good news to pair with the bad, we’d keep it to ourselves.

They were deadbeats, the kids. Most of them had been let off by penal colonies in the outer rim as some kind of alternative reform program. The company was hungry to pick them up from parole them ‘cause they made good workers. People who had already spent years getting whipped into shape by prison guards took orders well. Well, that was why the company liked them at least. I liked them because they wanted to be here. Penal colonies were just about the dead end of the universe and even if the work here was dirty and grimy and dangerous, at least it was work that got you out in the fringes of space, dirtying your hands in the stuff that no one else in the whole universe got to dirty their hands in.

The kids seemed to respect that.

Not many people were eager to be out here, doing the shit we did for the money we did it for, but the kids didn’t say jack about it. Ben did. Ben was different though. He’d been here ten years past his time and he was getting jaded. But I got where the kids were coming from. I’d never been to a penal colony. My brother had been in one once. He and a few other kids had hitched a ride on some kind of corporate shipping craft and bunked themselves away in the cargo area. They found them on the landing pad and they all got put away for a couple of years.

He was out working somewhere now. I couldn’t remember.

I mostly got on with the kids ‘cause we were just the same. The mines were the best opportunity we got. Mum hadn’t had the funds to put me through any kind of schooling that would’a got me off the planet. And the only jobs left back on Earth was the

sort of shit that had you sifting through scrap metal in junkyards and coughing through machine smoke in factories. That was the sort of shit that gave you cancer by the time you were only ten years on your own and killed you by the time you'd hit fifty.

If you were someone wanting to get your ass off the planet before the whole thing caved in on yourself, but you didn't have the money or the classes to make that happen, there were only a couple things you could do. Some people made like my brother and shipped out hiding in cargo bunkers on spacecrafts headed offworld and others, people more like myself, took jobs with no pay at the end of the universe just so you had something new to look at every morning.

I guessed even a penal colony was better than a factory, though.

I went to the stove and looked out the window that sat over it. I could still make out the impressions of clouds in the sky, but the forest was mostly calm now. The wind had steadied long enough to let the great canopy branches rest. I poured flat coffee into a paper cup and dumped sugar into it. I killed time waiting for Ben to get ready by cleaning out the microwave and sweeping the floors. The kids weren't good at keeping their dirty shoes off of the hardwood.

Someone had left the radio on.

It was some sort of big band swing music, but it kept cutting out every couple of seconds. Only a few minutes went by before it tired me out. I turned the volume knob all the way to the left and let myself listen to the animals outside. It'd gotten warmer recently and even with all the rain, the animals had come back. They made noise night and day. There were things that hooted and things that howled and things that whistled like birds. You never saw any of them. They hid themselves far too well in the jungle for that, but it was impossible not to hear them.

Ben found it tiresome. That's why there was always a radio on. Or the television. Or something. He liked that noise far better. It freaked him out less, I suspect. I preferred the animal sounds. It made me feel less like I was trapped in a house, kept me grounded in where I actually was. In the forest, surrounded

by the mines, somewhere in space, utterly on my own. And well...I guess those were the exact same reasons Ben kept the radio on instead of off.

Just as I was thinking of him, looking at the knob on the radio, Ben came up the stairs, out of breath and sweaty. He had a wet rag over his shoulder. He went straight to the sink to wash his hands. "Maggie says we've got to go meet the suits in town."

I came forward from the window. "That's right. Coffee?"

"Thanks," he said. I poured him a paper cup and put it in his hands. They were still damp. "You ready to ship out, then?"

I didn't pretend. "Not really."

Ben didn't pretend either. "Hell, I am."

"How's that?" I said.

"I'm all cooped up here." He started to pace about the kitchen with his coffee held too tight in one hand. He always did that when he got anxious about something, which was often. "I need to get my head somewhere different or the thing's gonna pop, I think." He looked around a bit. Something was wrong and he was practically sniffing the air trying to figure out what. Finally, "You turn the radio off?"

"It was shorting out," I said.

"Oh."

Ben filled his cup with coffee and put his tongue at the corner of his lips. He was younger than me by ten years at least (we never really discussed our ages, but he at least looked it), but he was my senior at the mines. They'd left him in charge after the last supervisor had gotten caved in during an inspection. Ben and I were both here for that, but he'd been here longer. He'd gotten the gig as an internship when he was still in school. Way he said it was that it was just supposed to be the first steppingstone, but he'd gotten caught and well...here he was. Regardless of that, thing for Ben was he was young still, young enough to have a Plan B. My Plan B didn't exist if the mines were closed. This had been the Plan B. From the moment I'd shuttled away from home. It was one of the few jobs that would have taken an aging woman with no degree to her name away from the dying planet and that was only because no one else wanted it anyway. It was

hard. It was intensive. It was sweating on your hands and knees and coughing up your lungs because sometimes the machines smoked out the halls and plumed big and black up into the sky. It wasn't the sort of thing anyone else would have wanted to do, but I would've done anything to have gotten out of the townhouse in the city where Mum wasted away drinking beers and the cousins came to crash when they were out of a gig and needed a couch.

They'd send me back and I knew it.

Maybe they'd pay me something to keep me on my feet. I didn't care if they did. I'd still have to go back to that house, money or not. I wouldn't be here anymore, out in the shit where it was hard work every day. There was nowhere else to go and even now that Mum was ten years in the grave and the cousins had all quit and left somewhere nobody knew where, I'd still be back in that house, only this time it would be empty and I'd be too old to go anywhere besides.

Ben had been talking. He was throwing things in the dishwasher now. "You think the company needs anyone to pilot shuttles or something like that? You know? Maybe I could do that. I almost went to flight school, you know."

I'd been quiet too long. "Why didn't you?"

Ben frowned. "It makes me sound awful if I say it."

"Try me."

He finished putting things in the washer. Even then, he had to think about it before he said anything. "Well," he said. "I was all planned on going and everything. I was even willing to pay for it and all but then...well, that was when my mom got sick. My funds were shot. A few years later and I was thinking about it again and just when I thought maybe I was ready, Cara passed. And then the execs offered me the job and good money is good money wherever you can find it, I guess. And then I kept on saying that next year would be the year. Next year, I'll go to flight school. Next year...but, well...you know how that goes. Every year I found a new reason to stay behind." He started twisting his empty paper cup in his hands before dumping it in the bins. "Now mom's sick again. Guess if they bin me, I'll just go back home. Be with her."

I thought about it some. He was too young to be having thoughts of quitting it all and letting it be. He should still be dreaming of flight school. I didn't say any of it yet. If they binned us, we'd both go back home anyhow and that was all that could be done. "Well," I said when I figured there was nothing to be said about it. "Should we head to town?"

--

It was near an hour's worth of walking even when it was dry. And it hadn't been dry for the past week. Until a year ago, we had had to make do hitching it out on our feet, but after a horrid wet season, the company had finally coughed up the loose change to send us an ATV. We laughed about it when we got the thing in our garage. It must have cost as much as all the boots people had lost going into town when the trails were running wet.

We always told people to walk along the roots of the canopy trees. The things ran like veins through the roads. And they were thick and good enough to support you. Most people didn't listen their first time through and lost their boots to over-eager steps. It was a somewhat humorous sight, coming up through those trees, counting the tongues of lost boots poking out from where they had been swallowed by the earth as you went.

When people first arrived, they usually were quick to ask why it was such a long walk from the landing pad to the mines. Simple answer was there wasn't room to land any kind of aircraft in the valley. Everything surrounding the area was elevated. It was one big hill and the valley was the nook where you could get to all of the good stuff from. The good stuff was stuff that powered the engines for spacecraft. It was organic fuel, they had said when we first set up shop, the kind of fuel that you can make from the stuff dead things leave behind.

Whatever sort of dead things made the fuel, this place was a hotspot for it.

Some people thought there had been a mass extinction event here. The more superstitious types believe it was the planet itself, decaying as it aged. Whatever it was, it was cheap to find,

cheaper to dig, and found in excess all around. All we knew was that whenever things decomposed, they became fuel too. It was what the locals called reentrance. Once someone passed on, they'd bury them in hollowed out corridors where streams ran, carried off their bodies into the stomach of the hills so they could become fuel too.

The first time I heard of it was when Cara died.

She got caved in so deep in the mines, no rescue team had even gone to try and retrieve the body. Years later, we reached that part of the mines again. It was a place we'd always joked had been barren, the one spot in the mines that seemed to have been left blank by the Creator. But when we returned, it was richer in fuel than any other part of the mine ever had been. The walls were glowing with the stuff. And we never used a drop of it. Ben and I told the excavation team to seal off the corridor. We let her stay there. We let her rest.

--

We ordered drinks from the bar and waited for them to arrive at a picnic table outside. There were a pair of them, the executives. One of them was Chris, who looked just like he had sounded on the phone. He had a round, nice seeming face and hair that was plastered on his forehead through the rain. He was wearing a yellow slicker and some loose slacks. Everything about him smelled like coffee from a can. His friend was a woman. Her name was Jane. She was plain looking and was also wearing a rain jacket.

When they got there and we told them we had already put in an order for drinks, they offered to pay.

We let them. They were letting us off anyway. They could spring for a couple beers.

"This place is really something, huh," Chris said when he finished wiping the rainwater off his seat. "It's so green."

Ben squinted and looked at the bar. "It's been raining recently."

"Very beautiful," Chris said.

I smiled. I felt some kind of pride. The place was beautiful, wasn't it? "We're very happy here."

"We were noticing how beautiful it was on the shuttle in," Chris said. "Neither of us have been before."

Ben was getting tired. He turned over his shoulder to the bar. A couple sat there, chewing the ear off the bartender. "Where are those drinks, huh?"

"Look," Jane, the plain woman, said, "before you both get worried, we want you to rest assured that nobody is going to be left uncared for. We have open positions available for all of the workers here."

"They're good kids," I said.

"We were thinking some of them could work in mechanics," Chris said. "Seeing that everything is automated now, there are lots of jobs in that field. It's fun too. Very hands on. Lots of people like working in mechanics."

Ben scratched his temple. "Why automate?"

Chris laughed like Ben had said a joke, then he realized that the question had been genuine. "Well, you have to understand that operating mines like this one...so remote. It's somewhat of a safety concern. The company doesn't want to be at risk of being liable for any—" The drinks came. A waiter brought them in on a silver tray. "Oh, thank you. Thank you. Where was I?"

"We haven't had an accident in years," I said.

Ben shifted.

"I understand that's the case," Chris said. "The thing is that some of our other mining operations have not had similar experiences. Many of them have been quite hazardous and it made more sense to automate all of our operations rather than pick and choose which ones we left as manual labor. One clean sweep. That's what we said." He paused as if he expected us to understand all at once. "Didn't we tell you all this on the phone?"

"No," Ben shook his head. "Just said we got binned."

"I'm confused," I said. "I signed papers. The kids all signed papers. You're not liable for anything."

"It's bad press."

"It'll save in the long run anyhow," Jane added. She was giving me a look like I was a child who didn't understand just

yet. Like I was being taught arithmetic. She was my kindergarten teacher. “If we invest now in something good like automation, we can save a lot later. It’s a good thing. We promise.”

Ben looked into the bottom of his glass. There was a little beer left in the bottom, but he was turning sour just looking at it, or so it seemed. After some time spent thumbing about for the right words, he spewed up with, “And uh...what about us? What about Ginger and I? Are we just...well, what kind of positions do you have for people like....like us? There are things we could still do for the company, yeah? I mean...more experienced things.”

“Fortunately, for you two,” Chris smiled, “you don’t have to worry about that.”

Ben swallowed another drink despite himself. He was practically sweating. “Yeah. How come?”

I got the impression Chris was excited to say what he said next. “Well, even with automation, there is error. We need someone to stay here...at the mines. Overseers of sorts. You would get housing, of course. A nice villa we were thinking. And your job would be just performing routine maintenance on the devices, doing inspections, or any...any sort of manual labor we might need really.”

That moment, the exact same moment I felt a weight lifted from my chest, the moment I realized I was going to get to stay, was the same moment Ben felt a weight placed upon his own chest.

“Oh,” he said. “That’s us then, is it?”

“Well, we’d like to offer the position to the senior members of this team,” Chris said. His smile was still there, but it seemed like a cheat now. “Which is you two, is it not?”

Ben looked up from his drink. “Yeah. Thank you. Yeah, thank you. That’s great.”

He looked back down again. I could tell he was hearing noise now, terrible crushing noise that hit him from all sides and told him he was stuck. Trapped here now. I could tell he was hearing the sounds of the animals outside that kept him up at night, hearing the sound of the music he was gonna have to be facing all his hours, the sound of the radio he’d use to numb his mind like novacaine.

“Well,” I said. “Doesn’t that sound a little below his paygrade?”

Ben looked up.

The suit frowned. “How do you mean?”

“Ben’s worked here since the day these mines opened,” I said. “Don’t you think...well, don’t you think maybe he should be doing something different? I mean...he does more now than he’d do fixing up some robots every now and again, I’d think. That sounds like a demotion. He’s worked hard. Aren’t there any other jobs he could do for you?”

Chris began speaking once, then twice, then the third time around, let himself flounder and stop. When he finally spoke again, he didn’t sound the same. His voice was lower, more imperfect. Less showman-like. “Look, I went over your guys’ papers before I came here. I did. And...the people we need right now, the people we need to hire aren’t...they aren’t people like you. We need people with specialized training. We need degrees. I want to help you guys out. Honestly, I mean it. I can only offer what I can offer. And what I can offer is this job here.”

The waiter came by to take our drinks.

“I’ll pick up the tab,” Chris said. “I’m sorry. Both of you. But that’s the offer I can make. Take it or leave it.”

—

Chris and Jane stayed in lofts Marco had set up for them in town. They’d given us the night to rest, to think it over. Ben, the eternal conversationalist, took the ATV back home in silence. It was dark by the time we got back to the garage. The kids had gotten into the habit of setting a fire nightly. By the time we’d arrived back to the house sat in the valley, the embers were already burnt out and were only being breathed into occasional life by the sigh of the breeze. “Damned thing’s gonna light again,” Ben said when he spotted it. He took a water jug and spritzed it on the coals. It went dark and sizzled and then was out.

Then we were left by the light of the stars.

For only a moment, and then the embers seared again.

“Shit,” Ben said. “Shit shit.”

He stood there with his hands pressed inwards to his hips and with his gut hanging just out over his belt. God, he was even old enough to have a gut now. A gust of wind took some of the dust from the fire and blew it across his face. He didn't blink. "Shit," he said again. I had never noticed that he looked older than I thought until now, till I saw him stood against the wind with his belly hanging out and his eyes sad and sunken in his face up until they were nearly swallowed by the bags of his skin.

"Everything all right?"

"Every night," he moaned through his seared teeth. "These kids do this every night. They light the fire and they...every night the embers are still burning. And I have to put it out. I've spent fifteen fucking years now taking care of this mine and of these kids and now...now it's not even over. Now, I have to take care of a fucking robot and...every night, Ginger. Every night they leave this fire on."

He doused it again.

The embers continued to fizzle.

Ben let out a long, singularly staccato whistle. All of the energy, the anger, had gone with him on that exhale. It was somewhere in the mountains now. Maybe it too, would become fuel. "Hey, Ginger...you should on ahead. There's some coffee left, I think. Tea maybe. I'll be just a moment. I'll put it out. Don't worry." He gave me a look. "I'll put it out."

I went inside. There was a fan going in the living room. A couple of the kids had passed out in front of the television, cuddling. They were barefoot and bare chested, pooling sweat into the rug. The television set was still going. It was playing a children's program now, something I hadn't seen since Earth. I set it on mute but let it play out anyhow. I watched the light from its screen dance on the kids' faces for a moment, then went to the kitchen. Ben was right. There was still coffee left, but two hours left soaking in a sunlight bathed tin had only wasted it away. I washed it down the drain and rinsed the mugs out, set them in the drying rack.

And I waited.

I had waited for some time, had listened to the animal noises for some time, had paced the room for some time, waiting

for the door to throw itself open, for Ben to march himself in, glum, before I grew impatient. I was prepared to console him. But nothing happened. And after some more time had drawn by, nothing happened. And after some time long enough, still nothing happened and soon, enough time had come and gone on that night that I had begun to feel ragged.

All the waiting turned my mind to the thought of fuel.

I'd seen the fuel before, as a miner. I'd worked on the ground, in the tunnels, digging the stuff with tools the company supplied, with my hands when the tools would not suffice. But the first time I really thought the stuff was beautiful was later. It was a mother. She'd died in childbirth in town. Marco had called on Ben and I to attend the funeral. Since the two of us had become supervisors, it was the first funeral service he had held.

We went.

And stood far enough back so we didn't stand out. This was, after all, a woman neither of us had known. She had a slight frame, with thin cheekbones and skin that was too tight for her bone-strung body. The undertaker had done well to her body. Some of the color had returned to the bags of flesh underneath her eyes, but even in the dim light, it was easy to tell she was gone. Whatever remnant of life was lasting in her body was only a result of trickery.

As we watched some of Marco's workers tie twine around her ankles and her wrists to board her to a plank of wood, Ben nodded his head across the crowd. It was a child, the dead woman's child, sucking on the breast of a wet nurse who stood by the riverbank swaddled in white cloth. The babe was healthy and fat, something that—at the time—had felt like a slap in the face to the memory of the mother. The babe hardly even seemed to notice when its mother was placed, strapped to a weightless piece of board, into a pool of slowly streaming water and was carried away, down a half-pipe concrete tube, into the mountainside.

At first, that moment had proved unspectacular, unremarkable. The woman's body, slight and frightful in death, had disappeared without a trace under the water and was suckered away into the caverned halls and nothing else had happened. But, as the night passed timidly and Marco and

the others who had led the burial, lighted a fire and smoked, something spectacular began to happen.

The water began to glow.

It was the fuel, the stuff I had only ever seen on cave walls. But here...

Here the water *glowed*.

Some folks came by with receptacles, collected the fuel in tins and packaged it away in boxes. But for a moment, not a long moment but a moment that'd be stuck in my memory, stuck behind my eyes long after they had stopped working, the water had glowed, had glowed like it did in fantasy visions, in motion pictures. The surface of the water in that grimy half-piped stream had teemed with a multitude of shining stars, as though a thousand tiny living things had, in perfect unison, illuminated themselves just for us.

That pale dead woman, watched over by her healthy, fat-rolled baby, was frozen now in fuel.

By the time I had thoroughly dissected that memory in my mind, the house was still quiet. The front door was still left with its latch undone. The wind was still coming through the open window. And when I went to that open window to check if anything was the matter, Ben was still outside, sat absently by the fireside.

Damned thing's gonna light again.

And he had been right. The embers were still going on in light. And as the wind commenced to coughing, they glowed orange and spat themselves over the yard. The jug of water Ben held in his hands sat idle by his hip, looped over a purpling thumb, which was now swollen stiff from the stress of burdening such a weight for a time too overdrawn. How long that might have been, how long he might have been holding that unused jug of water, prepared to extinguish the embers but not quite ready to watch them die, I did not know. All that I did know was that he was there now, frozen in space with that water jug in hand, looking into those fizzling embers as if he might have been there forever.

I watched Ben for some time.

He did not extinguish the embers.

Sarah Kersey

December, 2018

I.

The pigeon shitting on the hood of a not-so-gently used station wagon seems undisturbed by how we are breathing into each other's ears. He is choking down half a hot dog, though, so I can't blame him.

I am trying to listen to a boy begging me to revive our rotting love, but I am too busy imagining that this pigeon has flown cross country to witness my breakup. I imagine this pigeon fathers tinier, baby pigeons that can't control their bladders and shit on people's heads like bad dye jobs. I imagine Father Pigeon apologizes to every person who has to clean Pigeon Children shit out of their hair.

I, too, would rather be eating hot dogs than tell the person I've fallen out of love with after three years he repulses me more than Father Pigeon rolling a hot dog in his own shit, like panko bread crumbs.

II.

Hours have passed. I am on the verge of calling the police on Father Pigeon for loitering when I understand how I have to end this. I have to make the silence operate alone: I learned this from my father. It is the most crippling weapon I know to use.

It only takes eighteen minutes, afterwards. In the silence following, I wonder if the Pigeon Children have noticed Father Pigeon's absence. I wonder if they know Father Pigeon isn't home because he is busy slamming his shit-covered beak into a paraplegic's dress shoe.

Father Pigeon stops harassing the fine leather when he feels the static leave. There is a mutual understanding of endings. Our worlds fracture as Father Pigeon goes home to the Pigeon Children, and I go home alone.

Maya Coseo

Milk

They were out of milk.

She had dropped the bottle earlier and spilled it. Harold—he wouldn't like it. Her husband always took milk, just a spoonful, with his morning coffee. It was one of his many quirks. Marguerite had memorized Harold's likes and dislikes soon after their marriage; it made things easier. *I'll have to go to the store*, she thought. Then she blinked. *What had she been looking in the fridge for again?* Right—the milk. It was hard to think through her drowsiness. She made a mental note to buy some chicken breasts for dinner tonight too.

Marguerite closed the refrigerator door and took a step back. A surprised yelp escaped her lips as she stepped on something sharp—the pain acute enough to dispel her mental fog. The white pool of liquid at her feet was now slowly turning pink, as blood mixed with the spilled milk. Marguerite swallowed, feeling almost overcome by nausea for a moment. *To think that pink had once been her favorite color.*

As she snapped out of her stupor, she came to the unpleasant realization that she was soaked. God knew how long she'd been absent-mindedly standing in her negligee, in front of the open fridge. And covered in milk too—though she was not usually this clumsy; only when she was nervous. Or when Harold was upset.

The pain radiating from her foot was quite distracting, and only heightened her sense of vertigo. It may not have been a good idea to start her diet that morning after all (she'd only had a small cup of coffee, and toasted bread—without butter—for breakfast). But it would be worth it when Harold complimented her on her girlish figure. He had always liked Marguerite's girlish figure. Perhaps then he would—but *no*. That was of no importance at the moment.

She hobbled over to the sink, slid to the floor, fished the first aid kit from inside the sink cabinet, and popped it open. Hesitantly, Marguerite inspected her foot. The chunk of glass—as far as chunks of glass went—was a large one, and simple enough to remove. Although the cut was deep, it was easy to clean as well. As she sat there, Marguerite noticed the blood spatter staining her negligee, but concluded that it was unimportant; she'd already decided to toss the garment out.

Marguerite finished bandaging her wound, and used the counter to pull herself up. Yes, perhaps now she could finally rid herself of her wet clothing, and clean the blood from the kitchen floor before Harold came downstairs. He hated messes. But a flash of motion caught her eye, and stopped Marguerite. The *Wigomat* coffee machine was still on, and she'd neglected to put the coffee pot underneath it! *It must be the Nembutal*. Dr. Post had warned her about its many possible side effects.

On Harold's recommendation, Marguerite had started seeing a psychotherapist twice a month for her nervous disposition— or “god-damned hysteria,” as her husband called it, when he was angry. But before her first session, Harold had reassured her, gently, “You'll be happier this way. *We both will.*” And, like with most other things, she let him think he was right. It was easier that way. Besides, the pills did help with her anxiety, most of the time.

The coffee machine, which was still plugged in, kept brewing. She watched the scalding liquid drip steadily across the counter and onto the floor. Soon it would reach the pool of blood, and after that, it would mingle with the pinkish puddle which Marguerite stood by. She sighed, and a scowl briefly crossed her face before she forcefully smoothed it over. Somewhat awkwardly, Marguerite side-stepped the mess on the floor and unplugged the machine. The little red light flickered, and died.

Marguerite released a shaky breath. *Now where was that*

run-away coffee pot? After looking around the cabinets by the coffee machine for a few minutes, she was about to give into her frustration and go change out of her uncomfortable clothing. But she couldn't. Harold was always insufferable if he did not have his morning coffee. She ran a hand through her disheveled hair in frustration, and glanced back at the pink puddle of mingled blood and milk. Then she noticed the disparate drops of duller, mostly dried blood. *When exactly had she gone to that part of the kitchen?*

Her gaze followed the mysterious trail of blood to the trash can, where the black plastic handle of the coffee pot peeked out. So uncared for was she, as she stepped eagerly towards it, that she tripped— as if there were some large obstacle in her way. Marguerite only managed to keep from slipping in the blood by catching herself against the counter. “Damn it,” she hissed. Marguerite looked at her arm, and noticed another bruise, which had hit the counter. With a grimace, she stood and hobbled over to the trash.

Unthinkingly, she reached into it, and grasped the plastic handle of the apparently broken coffee pot. Its sharp ends were spotted with ruby liquid and coffee. *Funny, she didn't remember cutting herself on the coffee pot.* But perhaps she'd dropped it after she'd dropped the milk while preparing Harold's cup of coffee— that *would* explain why she'd forgotten to turn off the coffee machine, too. Yes, that must be it. The evidence of spilled milk, and her own injury, were undeniable. So that must have been what happened.

After glancing around the kitchen again, Marguerite thought, *I really must clean all this mess up before Harold sees it.* And buy some milk— she needed to do that as well. The chicken breasts needed purchasing, too. She shouldn't forget either of these things— especially the milk. Harold *had* to have a spoonful of milk in his morning coffee. Just milk, and no sugar. Absolutely no sugar, for either of them. “It's bad for the heart,” he'd told

Marguerite, seriously.

Soon after this, she had begun planning her diet. Harold was right about sugar, and its insidiousness. Unfortunately, Marguerite had always had a taste for sweet things, and may have gained a few pounds since the beginning of their marriage. And that couldn't be appealing for Harold — no, not at all. To have a *fat* wife would not do, not for him. Yes, it was best to remember how Harold liked things, or he would be cross with her. Marguerite did not like it when Harold was cross with her; even through the artificial calm of the pills it always made her nervous.

She took a half-step toward the backdoor— but, oh! How silly of her: in all the chaos, Marguerite had quite forgotten that she was still in her dirty and torn negligee. And her bruises were exposed, too. She couldn't run out like this. What would the neighbors say? "I'd better dress first. Then go to the store. For milk— and chicken breasts," Marguerite murmured to herself. She sidestepped the blood drops, then the bloody spilled milk, and made her way, slowly, to the bedroom.

At the source of the pool of blood, which covered most of the linoleum floor, lay Harold. There was a large gash in his neck, and his shirt was dark with coffee and blood. Yet it was Harold's slack, pallid face that was the most disturbing. One cheek was an angry shade of pink, where he'd been burned by hot liquid, and his once-spiteful eyes were glassy— forever blind now. But then, had he ever really seen Marguerite at all?



Henry

Anna Sherwood

M. Dobner

Now

In a moment unbound by growth or death
I ponder the clouds, watching my breath
Condense in the cold winter. In this single
Moment, the world of living things
Inextricably linked: trees bare, frozen
Branches sleeping like an old man in a chair;
Grassy hillside, depressed by snow piled three feet high,
Unable to see the faintest ray of sunlight- those
Seeds hide, biding their time; when their strength returns,
They will grow high; I stand awake
Above the snowbank where children play,
Sledding free, joyously, infinitely repeating
Their slippery track; A smile tugs at my face,
That painted gold by the sun's final embrace,
Giving way to the instant unbound:

Dynamic clouds, tall and proud in live dance,
A churning unique form in every stance; my eyes strain in
Awe to watch these heavenly forms as they
Flourish, forming in the winter air
They coalesce, never quite the same at each moment's glance
Edges torn and tossed to the breath of the west
Unchained they relent their bodies to the chaos of life
Beautiful, wild, shamelessly free
They wander, racing and rolling through the sky
Across the horizon and the verdant ridgeline
Bathed in the fading purple and orange light
See how they've given their will to now
Galloping toward the darkness, fearless of night
As galaxies appear above their eastward flight

Maya Coseo

Am I Okay?

You ask me if I'm okay. What if I'm not? The Maraschino cherries for our sundaes were left out of the fridge and they've rotted. I read Chanel Miller's victim's survivor's letter depicting her reaction to her sexual assault by a to-be unnamed former college swimmer. In the mail was an unmarked key attached to an advertisement, which proclaimed: 'bring to X car lot & see what opens!' I read a Twitter thread started by Joanna Chiu about how to intervene if you suspect someone is being a creep on public transportation, and in it countless women recounted their own I-was-almost-raped-but-I-got-lucky stories. It is 351.9 miles from Portland to Spokane and I worry about having cell service during the drive. In her letter, Miller said she kept spoons in the fridge to cool her crying-enflamed eyes. I realized that I have no pocketknife, no taser, no pepper spray, only my keys.

I read an article about how scowling is really the best line of defense for warding off unwanted interactions (with men). Eyes, groin, nose, throat. My mother always warned me not to say my hotel room number too loudly. Our gate scrapes against the ground and creaks when it closes— I am glad for the noisiness of the stairs— I check for extra shadows when I walk home. Steve King said, and I quote: "What if we went back through all the family trees and just pulled those people out that were products of rape and incest? Would there be any population of the world left if we did that?" Touchable Bubbles never pop. Supposedly. But exert enough pressure, and...

But what do Maraschino cherries and spoons and Touchable Bubbles and keys and pocketknives and shadows and 351.9 miles and Twitter threads have to do with the question: Am I okay? Everything. And nothing. They are symptoms of the larger problem— the problem of not listening. The fear I feel when driving those miles, when I walk without a pocketknife, the way women feel it necessary to share tips for not getting assaulted while traveling.

The problem is that I cannot exist safely in the world while being alone.

The problem is also that no one is listening.

A woman could do everything 'right' and still be raped. Then be blamed for her rape.

Questions will be asked. Was she drunk? Was she 'leading him on?' Did she get into the wrong car? What was she wearing? Something is wrong when women bear the burden of protecting themselves. We should not need protection just to exist.

The answer is No. I am not alright. I am angry. I sometimes think we're past understanding, past the limits of what language can do. I think there's a fundamental miscommunication about what 'respect' and 'dignity' are. Respect is recognizing: 'I'm alive, I'm human, that means something' and dignity is asking each other to do more than the bare fucking minimum. I'm not really sure what else we can try. Respecting someone's autonomy is actually pretty basic — and yet, we have failed to ingrain even *that* into our collective heads.

Because when has society ever really listened when a woman says, 'No?'



Chelsie Sunde

What God Sees

Natalie Marssdorf

Submission

My mind was buzzing, and each thought thumped in tandem to the steadily increasing rhythm of my caffeinated heart, like a hummingbird propelling itself into flight. I told myself that the shot of espresso in my hand was meant to calm me down, but I was just an addict in denial, continuing to fuel the anxiety that I had worked so hard throughout my life to control. Every blood cell in my body vibrated simultaneously in response to the pure coffee bean concentrate, creating a tsunami of energy that was familiar and therefore calming. As shaky as I was, at least I knew what to expect from myself. As I stared out the window aimlessly and waited for the caffeine to kick in, I ran through my ritualistic pep talk in my head: I can do this, I am confident, I am beautiful.

The act of modeling never phased me. Contouring my body back and forth and in between the streaked fluidity of Van Gogh's *Scream* and the stern gaze of Davinci's *Mona Lisa* empowered me. It allowed me to further connect with my body and supported my tendency to overanalyze situations. There was a relieving headrush that could only be achieved by boring my line of sight past a photographer's skull and into the jumbled clump of SATA cables beyond, then plucking the string of thought needed to maneuver myself into position before I even received instruction. The power I felt when the photographers raised their eyebrows and parted their lips in a slow smile, signifying their satisfaction with my movements, was unmatched. Being in front of the camera made me feel unstoppable.

—

I leaned against a beige brick building with paint chips strewn like confetti around its base. As I shifted my weight further into the mortar, a trim, olive-skinned man turned around the corner and into my line of sight. With him was my roommate, Marija. Her shoulders were hunched, her upper chest collapsing so much so that her pale, ivory bones gasped for air through her wafer-thin, translucent skin. A small smudge of peony-tinted lipstick budded beneath her lower lip, and as

we locked eyes, she gave a slight nod of hello. Our exchange of nods was merely a twitch that lasted the length of a blink; I could tell that the photoshoot had sucked the life out of her, a liveliness I had witnessed only earlier that morning. Her shoulder brushed against mine as she passed, and I settled my focus on who I now assumed was Marco, the photographer listed on my call sheet of the day. He wore tight, faded, smoke-grey jeans, the kind that hug the hips and accentuate the walk of the wearer, and a white V-neck t-shirt that stretched taut across his inked biceps. When he shook my hand, his face leaned in close enough to mine that I could almost feel the molasses-thick Italian accent that dripped off his words of greeting, each syllabic dollop nearly getting caught in the thicket of his pristinely groomed, char-black beard and moustache. He suggested that we grab an espresso over at the coffee shop. I bared my teeth to mask the hesitation I felt and agreed that an espresso would be nice.

As we sat down in the shop with our shot glass-sized cups of coffee, I provided my matte black book of laminated pictures on the table upon Marco's request. His left hand cupped his chin while the right fingered each page. He would comment on the length and muscularity of my legs while the calloused pad of his index finger traced over the two-dimensional versions of my thighs. His compliments provided only a false sense of comfort, and the longer I was in his presence, the more I came to the unsettling realization that I knew men like him: the photographers whose direct messages on Instagram will be deleted by any respectable model. His syncopated walk could only be considered a mockery of swagger; his praise-ridden comments were tinged with a hint of underlying lust, and the slow drawl of his voice all pointed to the characteristics of a predator. He seduced the unsuspecting and the desperate—I was neither. A blind trust in my agency kept me intrigued enough to hush the mixture of fight-or-flight that was brewing within me. As we finished our espresso, we chatted about how my first few days in Milan had been, how he loved the city and was positive that I would also love it. He asked me

how old I was and the corners of his peachy lips downturned as he scrunched his brows together, visibly disappointed with my answer.

“17? Shit, you would look wonderful topless.”

I had never heard such words outright, spoken directly to my face, without sarcasm or remorse. He moved on as if he'd never said anything at all and stood to leave. He patted the side of his thigh like the owner of a dog and beckoned me to join him—the devil with his inky facial hair and his sly grin, returning to his infernal abode.

The apartment space was large and open, but a musty smell of stale smoke made the room feel suffocating. On a small couch, I laid out my clothes. He rifled through them, tossing some aside, selecting others.

“Are these all you have?” His tone was neutral.

I nodded.

“Shit.” The profanity was quick, hardly weighted—it was becoming clear that this vocabulary was central in his everyday life. Muttering to himself like a bass being tuned, he walked over to a clothing rack in the corner and produced a pair of indigo denim bell-bottom overalls, a feathery coat, a thin denim button up, a trench coat, and a thinly knit tunic sweater. I had seen each of the items earlier that morning while investigating his Instagram.

Changing in his bathroom, I considered the possibility of the mirror being a two-way, with a camera behind it. Thoughts of him surveying the space before nestling a camera in an obscure corner made me change faster, making sure to stay covered for as long as possible.

My mind brought me back to the fourth grade. On a soccer field on a crisp Saturday morning in September, I had to change into a different colored jersey in front of my team and the parents that had begun to gather on the sidelines. Body confidence was hardly a concept to my sporadic ten-year-old brain, and I would've taken off my shirt then and there if I needed to. But the girls around me had discovered a more discreet way of transitioning from one article of clothing to

another, seeming to know about a womanly secret that I had yet to discover. Imitating them out of sheer confusion, I slipped my arms inside the sleeves and became cocooned by the jersey. I fought the bubbling amusement of having no limbs to stick through the droopy shirt sleeves. Reaching my hands through the neck of my shirt to imitate the arms of a T-Rex, I pulled the new jersey over my head and shimmied it beneath my armless shirt. Modestly, I was able to metamorphose my shirt from a muddy orange to a deep, royal blue. This delicate, precise dance carried me through every subsequent soccer season.

But the modeling world, I discovered, was staunchly different. Shooting on location meant that cars were the only refuge, and sometimes the hassle simply wasn't worth it. Cocoonless, I grew accustomed to bearing my body during two-minute change times backstage, and being half-naked in front of other young women in the industry eventually ceased to phase me. The secret we had all been keeping under our soccer jerseys was out. But even with growing confidence, I was often guarded and watched over by the female makeup artists on-set. It made everything more comfortable knowing that a solidarity existed between myself and the women around me—an unspoken pact of protection.

The button-up fell just below my upper thighs, like a night shirt that had shrunk significantly in the wash and acted as a last resort option in a sleepwear drawer. As I emerged from the bathroom, Marco made it clear with his gaze that my bra had to come off for the look to be “complete,” ironic considering how little fabric covered my body. If a shirt and underwear made a complete outfit, I was terrified to uncover his definition of a perfect one.

Plush Persian rugs blanketed the cool concrete, a welcome feeling against my bare feet. Marco's camera was perched on a table next to a golden dish that was flat and pronounced around the edges. The dish was his interpretation of an ashtray, the bowels of it filled with cigarette butts nestled into a pile of ash and chemical residue.

He worked around me, changing the background paper

and syncing the camera flash to his lighting set up. We made small talk, but my limbs were frozen out of fear. The dead of July and I felt numb with frostbite, unable to remove myself from the tensed position in which I stood. He picked up his instrument and I was instantly thawed, thrust into work mode. The camera clicked. At some points he would saunter over and manually move me into a position, akin to a grumpy man adjusting his television antenna, unsatisfied with the fuzzy signals that kept interrupting his attempts to watch the game. He repeatedly released and reconnected the top three buttons of the denim button-up, an excuse for his eyes to glance down across the curvature of my breasts.

Back at his camera, he flipped through the set of photos to ensure that his visions had been achieved, and when he seemed satisfied with what he saw, he violently whisked the feather-laden coat from its hibernation on the coat rack. Though I felt a magnetic connection with the bathroom, it was clear that he expected me to change in the open. He dragged a stool across the rug and draped the coat over it before retreating to the kitchen for a cigarette. Not wanting to label myself a prude, I shed the button-up and transitioned into the coat with expert precision. It was weighted like a blanket, warm and slightly itchy as though ants had colonized its lining, but it was a barrier that separated us. I hugged it tighter around me.

Fresh wisps of smoke curled from Marco's cigarette, tickling my nose as he returned from the kitchen and moved the stool into place. Conservatively, with my knees kissing and my hands clasped in my lap, I sat. He mused aloud about my hair in a tight, low bun and I appeased him. Whatever I did, though, it wasn't enough. Shortly following my attempt, his palms pressed against my skull, forcing my hair into submission, cramming product between every wisp of hair that had the audacity to stage an escape. I distracted myself from his pushes and pulls by studying the assorted skulls and flowers that nestled themselves on the stretch of skin between his elbow and his wrist. To my left, thick grey curtains stretched from floor to ceiling, covering the windows and preventing any attempt to

signal an onlooker, on the off chance they'd even be willing to help.

Pleased with his handiwork, he stepped away and started shooting once more. I gripped the sides of the coat in a vain attempt to feel secure. The seat of the stool was frigid on my bare thighs and intensified the goosebumps I'd developed as Marco harassed my hair. The high beep of the automatic flash had ceased. His eyes flared like a kiln, smoke billowing from his lips with such force that he had to clench down further on the cigarette that dangled precariously from his bottom lip: a skydiver hesitant to make the jump. He had paused to think.

"Open your legs, let go of the coat. I want more movement, more feeling. Make it sexier."

I obeyed. My stomach filled with a sloshing sensation of dread, weighing me down to the stool as I forced my leaden limbs apart. Through the murky sea of my thoughts, an ethereal feeling dredged to my core, counterpoised by the migration of the coat off of my shoulders. My soul floated from the body it had worked so hard to guard against men like this, stolen away by the drill of another's greed and desire. With nothing left in me, I set aside my morals and my pride, and did what I was told.

Abigail Kirsten

Boxed In



**kristy
maría
montoya**

On a Sunday Night

The laundromat owner's son told me he was planning to go to California.

Lately estaba bien enfadado with his dad's plans, he said. What was the point of leaving him in charge, when he didn't intend to own or even care about the laundromat in the future, when he wanted to do something more? When more, he told me, was waiting up in the United States. California was a good place to grow crops and dreams. Some primos of his and others were planning to leave in a few weeks to pick grapes and they were asking around to see who else would be interested in going with them, so long as they had money for the bus and ganas de ir. The offer was open to anyone in town.

Anyone.

Papi was in California. Nos mandaba postcards printed with *Greetings from Fresno!* in big letters that acted like windows into the sunny palm tree, grape-growing paradise. If I went with the owner's son and his group, then I could find Papi and stay with him. Then my aunt and cousin could learn how to take care of the house. Mamá never asked them to do anything for some reason, as if they didn't live in the house too, as if they were not just as capable of *barriando* and *trapiando* as I was. No, it was always just me. Ya era muchacha grande, I needed to know how to take care of the house.

"Where are you going?" Mamá asked when I was heading out the door, not even turning around from her position at the stove.

"To the laundromat. Es día." I held up the box of detergent to her back.

"What? No te oigo."

It seemed like Mamá had two ears and one of them was for decoration nada más. I repeated myself, louder.

"Callejera." Mamá grabbed a wooden spoon and moved around the chiles she was cooking in a pan. They popped and sizzled, the spicy scent of them scratching at my throat and eyes. "You didn't mop."

It was her way of saying I needed to have asked permission

before deciding to go out. “You didn’t tell me to,” I said.

She did tell me, Mamá said, and she added that she shouldn’t have to anyway. I should just know when something needed to be done, que no me haga. I bit my tongue to avoid saying that no one can ever know what she wants done because she has a million things on her mind constantly, and if someone went ahead and did something anyway she would never like how they did it so why bother.

Instead, I stared at her lecturing me until she turned her back again and told me to just go, desgraciada. And turn off the lights on your way out, I can’t stand them right now.

Tuesday and Friday were always reserved for laundry. Whether Mamá remembered or not, at least I always remembered to throw my family’s clothes into the big white baskets that would line the back of Papi’s green truck, the one that was older than him and more temperamental. He hadn’t driven it for months, but his smell, one like soil and sweat and the pumpkin seeds that he was always eating, was still pressed deep into the seats and the knitted tapetitos that covered them.

The washing machine had already eaten too many of my pesos, but I still slipped in more to accommodate another load. The coins clattered somewhere deep inside the washer’s belly. I piled clothes into the open mouth at its front, and after slamming it closed I watched through the little window as water filled the basin and swallowed up everything inside. The buzz that started the cycle was more like a shout.

They were lazy, the way the clothes moved at first, but soon their dance would become hypnotic. Around, around, around. It was tempting enough to draw you in closer, and I wondered if I could climb in there too and be clean. Mamá always said my hair was a dirty color, my eyes dirty to match—but they were the color of Papi’s eyes.

In his truck, Papi had a picture of Mamá, and it was the only thing left to tell us that she used to be beautiful. In it, her hair, short around her shoulders, was a rich black and her skin a smooth gray. Her eyes were black too, but it was because they were also that color in real life and not just on film.

I always checked the back of the picture, which said *Ximena 11 abril* in scrawled writing, to see if maybe one day it would go away, maybe say a different name and finally prove that the beautiful young woman in the photo was anyone but my mother. There were times I was tempted to take a pen and scratch it out myself, but even if I was able to somehow make it disappear, the image itself could never lie. I never liked when people said I was her twin, because I couldn't understand how I could ever resemble someone who never smiled. My perpetually curved mouth and soft cheeks couldn't possibly be any match for the straight, hardened planes of Mamá's face, but the picture showed that at one point, it was uncanny. I was my mother's daughter whether I liked it or not.

What could have happened in the 18 years since that photo was taken, I used to wonder, to strike lightning between Mamá's brows and carve treacherous paths along the sides of her mouth, but then I remembered my age and of course, it all made sense.

The washer shouted again. I moved the clothes into a dryer and pretended not to notice the laundromat owner's son watching me from the dry cleaning counter as he always did. Any time I caught him, I'd roll my eyes and turn my head away, leaning my cheek in my palm to hide a stupid smile. I knew that he also pretended not to notice when it was me staring at him from my usual chair next to the vending machine. His preferred method was to point his eyes very obviously at the ceiling, looking too interested in the spiderwebs that gathered in the corners where the walls met. If he was so fixated, why didn't he ever knock them down?

In my attempt to seem oblivious, I noticed that the vending machine was out of Japanese peanuts. Mamá's favorites. When I was younger and would come with Papi to the laundromat, he'd always make sure to buy a bag for her before we left.

Mamá might not have loved me but she loved Papi. How could she not, when he was everything the two of us weren't? He shone like the sun, piercing even our most overcast parts. When I thought of Papi, I thought of the flowers that seemed to

turn towards him wherever he went, of the tears drying on my cheeks when he told me Mamá is just like that and to be sure to listen when she told me something. When Mamá thought of Papi, I wondered if she thought of the taste of instant coffee that only he could make delicious and the bracelets he wove for her from dried palm leaves.

If I had not been born, then he would not have had to leave us for work in the States, visiting sparingly, and leaving me, a daughter that could barely do anything, as the only reminder of him for her. No wonder she could not look me in the eyes. It was easier to just spew fire. Maybe if her words burned hot enough they would make me unrecognizable, turn me to ash just like all those palm-leaf bracelets she lit with a match.

The noises from the dryer were not as startling as the washer. Rather than shouting, it would just hum, minding its own business instead of loudly announcing itself as it worked. People worked like that too.

The son was more like the dryer, moving quietly, but not silently. No matter how many times I came into the laundromat I could never quite get used to the surprise of him at my side while I waited for the clothes to be clean. Sometimes it took the knock of his fingers against mine to let me know, and other times it was a little tug at the short hairs along the nape of my neck.

That day I only had two baskets instead of three, and he pointed it out to me. I told him it was because mi tía had washed her own clothes this week, for once, and he laughed at that. He knew how she was because some days it was all I talked about. In turn, he would tell me about his own family's irritating habits: little siblings who screamed and cried when they were told no you cannot jump off the roof onto the trampoline, a mom who worried too much, his father who acted as if the laundromat was already his and made him overly responsible for it. It's your job to open and close hijo, keep the place clean, maintain the machines, no ves que eres grande.

Grande y el más grande are different, he'd grumble every time it was brought up. No wonder my older brother left, he knew it was a dead end sticking around. That's why he decided it would

just be better to leave and do something on his own too, you know? He reminded me that I was invited to come, his voice hopeful but high and tight in his throat like he knew it would be unlikely. Everyone knows esa Ximena has her daughter on a tight leash, people would say. She's very polite and well-mannered, you're a good mother, they would tell her.

What they meant was that I was quiet and didn't often make eye contact, because it was easier to just keep my mouth shut and not look at someone in any way that could be considered defiant or rude. It was easier to make people think that Mamá and I did not argue at almost every given moment when we were home. Why do you never listen? Why must you be so rebellious? Don't you know that you are an adult woman now and should act like it? You're young, ¿cómo que te mandas sola? Sea responsable, sea considerable. Vives en mi casa, you obey my rules. Imagine how it would've been if you were living with your grandmother, esto no es nada.

The dryer had finished its cycle desde tiempo, and I hadn't even realized because we were too busy talking. When I started to fold the clothes they had cooled and wrinkles had begun to set in. The son eyed the piles. Maybe your mother won't notice, he said.

I went home and told Mamá about the plan, what I thought should happen if I went with him and his primos to meet up with my father. Papi is picking grapes too, no? He must miss us, no? If I went he wouldn't be alone and neither would I. Plus, we would send her double the money along with whatever my aunt and cousin could start contributing to the household. She became angry that I'd even mention such an idea to her because it was dangerous to only be around men for a long time like that. You never know what could happen, ¿cómo crees? And then to expect me to start asking our family members for money? ¡Menos! Besides, you wouldn't even know what to do without me when you got there, pendeja que estás. No. No. Go feed the chickens. Put the clothes away. Never say that to me again.

I bit at the inside of my cheek and walked away, as Mamá groaned and began to rub at her temples with the heels of her

hands.

Later, when my aunt was getting ready to leave for work, I heard her open the hall closet and mention loudly how wrinkled the sheets were, how this girl had done such a careless job, Ximena.

Mamá's footsteps took her from the living room to the hall, where she gasped like the state of those stupid flower-patterned sheets was something ghastly.

"Ah, she was just telling me unas estupideces about going to the U.S. to see her father y luego sale con esto. She's delusional."

My aunt clicked her tongue against her teeth because according to her I didn't know anything about responsibility. I guess responsibility looked more like her daughter who eloped with her boyfriend in Hidalgo when she was 15 and then came home a year later with only the clothes on her back to show for it. Acting high and mighty when the both of them could only afford to live with us an hour away from their job in the city didn't make any sense to me, but I knew saying that would cause more trouble than it was worth. I was just glad our work schedules kept us from seeing each other in person too much so I wouldn't be tempted to. By the time I had to go to bed I'd stewed in my anger long enough to keep me warm at night.

Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday were working days. Playa Linda was a seafood restaurant downtown where I was a server who worked from open to close. When I wasn't taking orders, I was cleaning. I don't think they could afford to hire someone else to do that work, so they would pay me and the only other waitress menos del mínimo for one person's job to do two. I could've complained, but for what? We were all struggling.

I got paid on Wednesdays. 900 pesos every two weeks, and 650 of those went to Mamá. Even with the money Papi would send us when he could, it only went so far. She needed a way to cover the rest of our expenses because her job at the grocery store didn't make very much either. I owed her at least that much, for all the time she spent cooking and cleaning and putting the

roof over my head.

Although, even with three incomes, there were still times I'd come home to faucets that wouldn't release water and long-overdue light bills sitting on the counter.

Because there was no one at the restaurant yet, the kitchen was full with the other staff huddled close and talking. The other waitress, a girl maybe 3 years older than me but already married and with two children, laughed loudly at something the cook, who was around Mamá's age and lived with another man he claimed was just a second cousin, said. Nothing unusual; when business was slow that was how things usually went. I put my things away and joined them, answering questions about what I did on my day off and if I had any interesting plans coming up soon. At the latter, I told them I was going to California.

Be careful if you go, they said to that. It's quite the trip.

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Sometimes, Mamá would get in really good moods that made me believe she could have been as beautiful as the woman in the picture at some point in time. Her smile was beautiful, the popped seam of her mouth revealed charmingly crooked teeth. Papi used to say her teeth were arranged like a flower and Mamá always covered her mouth when he did, while still continuing to smile.

Her moods became few and far between after Papi left, but even from 2,000 miles away he was still able to bring out the best in her. A letter here and there, loving words crammed into every available corner of those *Welcome!* postcards, pictures of Papi with his sun-dried raisin skin and a glittering gold chain hanging low and close to his heart. I knew she kept all of it, asking for forgiveness in the way she carefully stored them in a wooden box in the closet, next to the cenizas of charred palm-leaf bracelets. She hadn't put his most recent one away just yet, because I saw it lying open on the table when I came in.

I could always tell when her liveliness had set in because music would be playing long before I woke up and got out of bed. I'd follow the sound of trumpets spitting out a good morning and

guitars whose strings were strummed by the sway of her hips in front of the kitchen sink while she washed dishes. Of all the lujos we could have had, we chose a good speaker system. I think Mamá made a lot of noise these mornings on purpose to hide her singing voice among clattering pots and running water.

“Qué voy hacer sin ti cuando te vayas...”

She took my hands into hers, still damp and red from the hot water, twisting me back and forth like the accordion in the banda. She pulled me in close and my cheek rested at the top of her head while her voice pushed into my chest and expanded to fill it. I was taller than her and my feet moved too slowly, staying too close to the ground with knees that didn't quite bend like hers. Igual la dejé moverme across the marbled green-and-white linoleum. Our feet stuck to the floor from spilled caldo on some spots, and slipped across droplets of soap like the flow and staccato of the music.

The morning was already hot and the pot on the stove boiled inconsiderately despite it. Se me antojaba pozole, Mamá said, and we already had the pork in the fridge and she didn't want it to go bad.

It's almost ready if you're hungry. It's good breakfast food, ya sabes.

I was hungry. I stretched my neck to look at the bubbling soup, rich red broth and hominy that sat near the rim of the pot, golden like the beads on the rosario that hung over the top of Mamá's bed next to a picture of Jesucristo.

If I just wanted plain pozole ahí estaba, but if I wanted to have the toppings for it I needed to cut them myself, because Mamá was already tired from getting up early to make it, but even if she didn't tell me that I would have done it anyway. That was my job no matter what. I'd get the cilantro out of the fridge, still in its thin plastic produce bag, and chop it how she showed me—doblado y bien finito—then to dice only a little bit of onion because Mamá didn't actually like onion that much, and slice magenta radishes into pieces that looked like full moons. We didn't have limes to squeeze into our bowls this time.

“Do you work today?” Mamá asked me. Yesterday she

asked if I work tomorrow, and the answer was the same then as now.

“Yes. At 11,” I said, crumbling tostadas into the pozole. It was already 10.

Mamá nodded and told me to take some pozole in a container so I could have it during my lunch break. By the time I was finished eating, she had already packed it up, putting it and some cilantro and onion in a little plastic bag inside a grocery sack that she tied tightly so it wouldn't spill. I washed our dishes and went to my room to change. Before I left, I made sure to tell Mamá so she could give me my *bendición* and a *see you tonight*.

We didn't argue once, and I thought that it was nice we got along so well, so that maybe she wouldn't be as angry with me tomorrow morning when she saw that I had left in the middle of the night.

The laundromat owner's son had said they were going to meet at the bus station and leave on a Sunday night. The trip from Michoacán to Fresno was about two days. As soon as I knew that, I kept a bag packed and hidden in Papi's truck so Mamá couldn't find it and ask any questions. It had been weeks away at the time that he told me, but knowing I had the bag waiting for me on a whim made time feel like it was going by faster until it had finally brought the day here. There wasn't much in it: a change of clothes with a jacket, some money, an empty jug for water. My birth certificate was tucked inside a small prayer book in the front pocket, since I figured the safest place for it would be in Jesus' grasp.

Work was busy as Sundays tend to be, with families who stopped by after mass in dresses and dress pants and shiny black shoes, or young couples who snuck looks at each other over the menus they pretended to peruse. I served plates of camarones a la diabla and fish tacos y chismeaba with the cooks in the kitchen. The white sun bled and fell lower in the sky, its vibrant color leaking into empty blue and turning it watercolor purple then heavy navy. Ten hours at work felt like ten minutes.

I went home and heated the water for a shower, but didn't let it get as hot as I would have normally liked lest it take too long

and Mamá come home before I was done and dressed.

I was slipping into dirty tennis shoes by the front door when I heard keys in the lock. My aunt and my cousin worked nights so I knew it could have only been Mamá coming home earlier than usual. The door opened, the cluster of Christmas bells that hung on the doorknob year-round chiming as tiredly as Mamá walked in.

I watched her tuck a piece of black hair that slipped from her long trenza behind her ear. She glanced at the clock on the wall to her left—9 o'clock—and the way her mouth drooped at the sides not-on-purpose like a pouting tired child, how the crow's feet pulled the corners of her eyes downwards, made her look younger than me and older than herself. I wanted to reach over to her and smooth out the lines of her face, to press my thumb into the deep crevice between her eyebrows and rub it away to reveal the woman in the photo Papi treasured so much.

"Hola hija," she said so quietly, I had a hard time believing I wasn't just imagining it. It sounded like it was coming from the back of my own head, and not her mouth. "I came home early because my migraines are coming back."

Mamá's migraines were more than just headaches, I learned a long time ago. I think she just called them that so it wouldn't seem like a bigger problem than they might have been, because I had never seen a migraine send someone tumbling to the ground and unable to stand back up for long periods of time. I had never heard of a headache that I thought could extinguish the fire that burned in Mamá, leaving her slumped in our bathroom as she waited out bouts of nausea.

She pressed her fingertips to her eyes, then her temples, then her ears, then behind them. Finally she noticed that I was wearing only one tied shoe.

"Where are you going?" she asked. She sounded so tired. Tired and small. I would forget too easily that Mamá was so small. Pictures of her pregnant no *había visto*, but even if I had it would be hard to believe that between her straight hips and below her small breasts a whole person had been able to grow. On her narrow shoulders, our house rested, and I could see then

that the weight of it all, for the first time ever, seemed heavy on her body.

I thought of my own body, taller than Mamá's even if just barely, and of my wide shoulders and large hands. I imagined myself crouching beneath the weight she carried and taking it for my own, because she needed me more than I needed her, and she needed Papi too. She had for a long time and he wasn't here. Once again I found myself, as just one person, doing the job of multiple.

I untied the shoe, and slipped both off.

"Nowhere," I told her.



Chelsie Sunde

Drawing Blind

I spent the last few months painting on the theme of human fragility. What we are made of is transient. The impermanence of our bodies and our short time on earth is something I consider often. We only have so much time to work with. For me, this means prioritizing the people in my life and doing work that truly matters to me. Often, I can get caught up in the crowd and simply start moving with the waves made by everyone else. This painting is a reflection of me as a person as much as it is a comment on the way that God sees us; as individuals, passing so quickly through time, and also from above in a way that we may not see ourselves.

Rebecca Simmons

Single-use Suicide



Alyssa Cink

La madrugada

“Olly, do you have to go?”

Olly looked up from her phone and glanced at her father in surprise. The family’s silver Tahoe was no longer in motion. Somewhere between the high school parking lot and the text Olly was drafting, her father had parked in the garage and was waiting for her to notice. Olly unclipped her seatbelt and reached over to open the passenger door, her mind already focused on the mountain of tasks ahead of her. She heard a *pop* – the door wouldn’t budge.

Her father’s left hand retreated from the child lock button. Refusing to meet her eyes, he returned his hands to the steering wheel like he needed something to hold on to.

“Dad. We’ve talked about this,” Olly said. “I need to be at Megan’s house by 9 tomorrow.”

“You need to be there?”

“It’s a good idea. I mean, practices won’t officially start until August. But Megan said this is my chance to bond with the kids who are already on the speech and debate team. I need to get my foot in the door.”

Her father nodded, though not in agreement, then flipped the child lock switch again. Olly’s door released itself with another *pop*.

“Dad. Come on.”

“Your mom and I were just really hoping you’d change your mind,” he said. “It’s our last anniversary in this house. We thought we could start packing together, maybe go through some of those old journals your brother used to love.”

Olly stepped out of the Tahoe, nearly leaving her backpack behind in a hurry to escape the conversation. She reached around to grab it. As she pulled herself back from the passenger’s seat, her father put a hand on her shoulder.

“Please,” he said. Olly didn’t have time to argue. She jerked her shoulder away from him, ignoring the look in his eyes as his hand recoiled away from her.

“It doesn’t make a difference whether I stay or go,” she said. “I’ve moved on.”

Olly slammed the door behind her, knowing her father

would follow after a few minutes alone in the car. She stepped inside her parents' house, kicked off her shoes, and jogged up the carpeted stairs. Olly's mother, typing on her laptop at the kitchen table, craned her neck to see her daughter moving by.

"Hey!" she called. Olly stopped.

"What?"

"I dug up Abuela's old *bolillos* recipe. I was thinking we could try making them together tomorrow. I bought the yeast and everything on my way home from work."

Olly frowned. They didn't need a recipe to make Abuela's bread. Her mother knew it by heart. Besides, the major ingredients – flour, salt, yeast, water, and shortening – weren't exactly difficult to remember.

"I can't hang out tomorrow, Mom," Olly said. "The speech and debate meeting starts in the morning. I might be there for a while."

"You're really going to that?"

"Yep!"

Olly continued her jog up the stairs. Her mother didn't even bother to argue; it was the same fight every year, for four years in a row. Each year brought another reason for staying away: sleepovers with friends her parents had never met, tryouts for the school play, even though Olly had terrible stage fright. And now the speech and debate club. There was always something better to do – or, as her father would say, something easier.

"Leave Cas's door open," her mother called up the stairs. "I just cleaned his room. I'm letting it air out before we start packing this weekend."

Olly didn't look back. She propelled herself up the staircase, through the second-floor hallway decorated with framed photos and children's artwork. The family relic just across from her bedroom door, a walnut cabinet, had lost its sheen from years of dust and neglect. It was an ancient and forgotten thing, displaying heaps of faded, hard-covered journals that had once belonged to Olly's abuela before her passing. Her high school bucket list had included reading every one of those journals. Now, with college an ever-lingering thought, her homework always took

precedence.

With a sigh, Olly dropped her backpack by her desk and locked her bedroom door behind her. Staring at the disjointed pile of sticky notes above her desk, a wave of dread washed over her. It was going to be a long night.

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In another lifetime, before Olly cared about speech and debate meetings, studying, and homework, the peak of every month was when all of the cousins gathered for sleepovers at Abuela's house. Those sleepovers always began with the warmth of freshly baked *bolillos* emerging from the oven. Olly and her little brother, Cas, would watch Abuela's gentle hands, wrinkled but soft like the cotton bedsheets she hung up to dry in the Texas heat. Sometimes they volunteered to shape the dough or divide the finished loaves – crispy on the outside and pillowy on the inside – into bread baskets for their dinner. Once seated at the table, the cousins ate the *bolillos* first, rushing through every meat and vegetable before pouring into the backyard to chase fireflies at dusk.

Nights at Abuela's were extra special because she never forced them to sleep in beds. One of the children came up with the idea of bundling their sleeping bags together in the open living room, forming a U-shape around Abuela's rocking chair. It was an effective system. Abuela took frequent naps during the day, and she loved staying awake to write at night. They were allowed to stay up with her, on the condition that they didn't disturb her.

Cas, the youngest of the grandchildren, managed to snag the best spots while the others were too busy fighting amongst themselves. At three or four years old, his face overwhelmed by round reading glasses that were too large for his head, Cas always saved a spot for Olly. Together they propped themselves up on their elbows, their chins resting in their hands as they listened to the scratching of Abuela's pen: the decisive erasing, the humming as she considered the unfolding narratives. As the youngest of the cousins, it was always Cas who begged for more stories, long after the other children had dozed off or outgrown

them altogether.

On those summer nights, exhausted from hours of chasing fireflies across Abuela's yard, Olly and her brother fell asleep to the soft murmur of a language they scarcely understood: an old language, to them, ancient and forgotten.

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Inside her locked bedroom, Olly had scattered her Calculus homework across the wooden surface of her desk. She scratched her pencil against the paper, making hesitant strides and then erasing them with urgency. She tried to sink herself into that rhythmic motion, into anything that wasn't just the sound of her own breathing. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught the digital numbers on her alarm clock. She strained her neck to read the time: 12:35 a.m.

Olly groaned and tossed her pencil onto the desk. Her parents had retreated to bed hours ago. She imagined her father feeding the goldfish, putting the dishes away after dinner, pouring two glasses of Bourbon, and tossing them back before retiring to an early sleep. Her father always offered his wife the other glass, but she never accepted it. She preferred to cry herself to sleep. It was their annual tradition.

The heavy bedroom curtains obstructed the night sky. Olly's window, clamped tightly shut, locked in the smell of her dry shampoo and of the unwashed bowl she'd abandoned on her dresser that morning. The bowl still carried remnants of cereal-stained milk, which now wafted through the room in a sickeningly sweet cloud. Olly told herself she would clean it tomorrow – well, maybe. It was another thing she didn't have time for.

Olly's every waking moment was a rush: a rush to pull herself out of bed, a rush to get dressed, a rush to shove books and papers into her backpack at the last second because she always forgot to pack the night before, to get to every class on time, to attend her club meetings, to see every friend, to take notes faster, to raise her hand faster, to get home sooner so she could retreat to her room sooner so she could struggle through her homework and go to bed sooner. Now, in the artificial light of

the task lamp on her desk, there was nothing to do but finish this last assignment and submit herself to sleep.

If she could sleep, that is. On this particular night, Olly imagined she would finish her homework only to stare at the ceiling until her alarm chirped her out of bed. It was the least she could do, she thought – to pay homage to that sleepless night so long ago.

Everything was too quiet after that night, and too clean. As small children, Olly and Cas frequently raced from one end of the hall to the other, flying toy spaceships and launching rescue missions for lost droids. Legos, stuffed animals, and candy wrappers littered the carpeted floor. Olly would chase Cas with pirate swords, and Cas would retaliate, his body smaller but faster. The siblings would kick, scream, pull hair, tackle, and laugh until they passed out from the exhaustion of it all.

Olly craved that pandemonium now: an argument, a noise, anything to replace the paralyzing emptiness of the second floor. No amount of sound, not even the Beethoven emanating from the speakers in her phone, could scare it away – that silence, that stillness. She felt it like a cold slap, the phenomenon of a presence standing behind you that vanishes as soon as you turn around. She imagined it crawling through the air vents at night, inching down the lavender wallpaper and ghosting through the fibers of the carpet between her toes. It struck her with a desire to run.

Run? No, she thought, that wasn't the right word. *You can't run from an absence of something.*

Abuela had never feared the silence of a long night. It was *la madrugada*, she called it. *Mi tesoro personal*. Abuela wielded the night between her hands, carving from it entire worlds and people that only existed inside her head. She'd always intended for her family to read the journals she'd filled– especially Cas, her grandson who'd become her most watchful audience in her twilight years. It never worked out that way. Olly and Cas's mother had tucked the journals away behind the glass windows of the family cabinet – memories that smelled like flour and pulled apart like the *bolillos* that she refused to make after Abuela's

funeral. There they remained – relics of another lifetime, of a forgotten language, of Olly and Cas submerged together in *la madrugada* back when the world belonged to them.

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Cas's bedroom was just next door to her own. There was one wall between them. On Olly's side, she'd plastered it with pictures – photos of friends, the cousins, memories from past vacations, posters from college brochures, and, oh, the places she would go. She realized she didn't have any photos of her and Cas. She couldn't stand those goggle-like, oversized glasses that he insisted on wearing in every picture.

When Cas entered the first grade, proudly showing off his glasses, the other kids on the playground started calling him "Bug Boy." Perhaps just to spite them, he decided he would become an entomologist – a big word for a first-grader, Olly had thought, and even for a third-grader like herself. While the other kids kicked dodgeballs and raced each other across the monkey bars, Cas would settle himself somewhere in the grass, a magnifying glass in one hand and an open jar in the other. He never kept the bugs for long. He just enjoyed looking at them, studying their antennae and the flip-flapping of their small wings.

For his birthday one year, Cas received his very own copy of the *Illustrated World Encyclopedia of Insects*. He called it his Bug Bible, and it followed him everywhere: to school, on family hikes, to the dinner table, and, once, even into Olly's bedroom.

"No way! This is my side of the wall, remember?" Olly had said. Her brother's face was crestfallen.

"But – "

"No! Your creepy bug book stays *out* of my room."

As the years passed, Olly decided that "Bug Boy's Sister" wasn't a legacy she wanted to go down with. She tried to convince her friends that Cas was an alien her parents had rescued from a fallen spacecraft.

"No, it's true!" She would say to the other girls, whose giggles betrayed their disbelief. "You see that spot where the

garden is now? That's where he crash-landed in our backyard."

"No, no, no, he only *looks* human. That's his disguise, see? If he looked like a beetle, the government would take him away."

"He is *too* an alien! Why do you think he's obsessed with bugs? Everyone was a bug on his home planet. He needs to speak to them so he can get the blueprints for his rocket ship and go back."

No matter how much Olly pestered Cas, he only seemed to love the joke more. One time he even dressed as a beetle for Halloween. Olly dressed like Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*.

"I can't believe you're making me go trick-or-treating with an insect, Mom," Olly had said. "My friends invited me, you know."

"He's your brother," her mother answered. "You're supposed to spend time with him. Bond with him, while he wants you around."

From across the room where their father was pouring individually wrapped candies into a bowl shaped like a pumpkin, Cas stared into the hallway mirror, adjusting his antennae into place.

"Look, Sis, I'm an *Eburia mutica*, from the family Cerambycidae," he said, grinning. "What do you think? I painted the spots myself. Pretty cool, huh?"

Olly rolled her eyes. "You're from some family, alright. Just not mine."

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Olly's hand brushed Cas's bedroom door; it opened on its own, still ajar from when her mother had cleaned the room hours ago.

She stepped inside, her footsteps uncertain. She'd expected to see a cluttered, stuffy room like her own. Instead, Olly felt a light breeze emanating from Cas's open window. Her mother had left the curtains open, revealing distant streetlamps and the silhouettes of suburban homes. Crickets, too, hatching from springtime eggs, practiced their summer choruses in the backyard.

Cas's desk was a science lab in the making. Color-coded sticky notes in clean, straight lines decorated the wooden hutch where Olly preferred to keep a disjointed mess of reminders. In the fifth grade, just months before he went missing, he'd swapped his bug terrariums for a microscope, connected by a cable to a now-darkened computer monitor.

Olly walked around, picking up various items that had escaped her memory: a plastic toy of the Millennium Falcon; the Bug Bible, smelling of white vinegar and water, their mother's homemade disinfectant; and the stuffed bear she'd given him for his first birthday, still propped up on the twin bed just like Cas would have left it. Olly sat on his navy-blue comforter and smoothed out the bear's soft, brown fur. As she looked out the window, she imagined Cas doing the same. He wouldn't have been afraid of silent nights. Cas would have become a professional entomologist so he could follow the bugs wherever they took him. She imagined him sending Christmas cards from some obscure part of the globe, the murky river water reaching waist-high, his brown eyes magnified by round, oversized glasses, and a rosy grin stretched across his face.

It sunk in just then, as Olly sat on his bed for the first time in years, that they never really had a chance to say goodbye. Their final anniversary in the house of Olly's childhood, and Cas wouldn't even be home for it.

A flash of movement in the backyard forced Olly out of her thoughts. There was a small figure standing in the grass. She couldn't make out its face, just a rough outline – but something about it was oddly familiar. The image shifted like a shadowy mirage. It couldn't be. How many times had the police filled them with hope, only to reveal that the boy they'd found was just another outline of the boy they'd lost: lanky, brown hair, their father's pointed nose and their mother's freckles? How many times had she seen him in the hallways at school, or passing by on a sidewalk, even four years after the investigators had closed the case? It was impossible.

Before she could even process what she was doing, she was stumbling down the stairs, nearly tripping over her own feet

to reach the backyard.

Olly crossed the threshold of the sliding glass door and stepped down into a grey cloud swirling at her feet. It was fog, she realized, a hazy ocean that had swallowed the backyard whole, leaving behind only the tallest grasses and trees. The figure was still there, too – nebulous, like the fog, but unmistakably *him*.

Olly squinted her eyes in disbelief. She turned to look at the house behind her, and then back at the lone figure. Yes, it had to be him: barefoot in the unmowed grass, wearing long basketball shorts and a baggy Star Wars t-shirt that hung off his boney arms. He was scratching his head, notating something on a pad of paper in his hands. Yellowish-gold specks illuminated the blades of grass around his feet. In the humid yet cool air of late spring, the chorus of crickets was louder than ever.

Olly stared at him, mesmerized. She flickered back and forth between terror and glee. She wanted to wrap her arms around him or run away screaming, but couldn't bring herself to try. He was the first to speak.

“Hey, Sis, close the door, will you? You're letting the air conditioning out.”

When Olly opened her mouth, her voice cracked.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“How are you here? I mean, like *this*? It's been a long time,” Olly said, scrambling for the right words.

He didn't look up from his notes to respond, but Olly could see his eyebrows knitting together with confusion.

“I've always been here,” he said. “I never left.”

“Then why haven't I seen you here before? Why now?”

“Maybe you just weren't paying attention before,” he suggested.

The words struck her, urging her forward with a jolt of sudden determination. *Maybe I haven't been*, Olly thought. *But I am now*. She stepped carefully through the damp grass and scattered fireflies, approaching him but keeping her distance.

“I've been waiting for these guys all spring,” he said. “Their light patterns are neat, aren't they? That's how the males and

females talk to each other. The males synchronize their lanterns in a sort of courtship ritual. If the females are interested, they'll respond with their own lights."

Olly nodded. He'd told her that, once, back when he first started reciting from the Bug Bible. A bubble was rising in her throat. She was afraid to breathe; she imagined the bubble bursting inside her, along with everything else she was holding in. She decided to keep the words brief.

"Too bad they're not around long," Olly said.

"Yeah," he said, "their lifespans are pretty short. They'll only live for a few more months. Then they'll lay eggs and die, and so on."

That was it – the bubble was bursting. Olly choked it back; she needed a distraction, something to hold in her hands. He'd left a few glass jars in the grass. Olly picked one up and studied it. It reminded her of summers long ago, back when Abuela's yard was filled with cousins and the promise of nighttime stories. She had an image of Cas, his glasses too large for his face, running and shrieking as he chased little bugs from one side of the fence to the other.

"I couldn't sleep," Olly said, as if answering an unspoken question. "It's too quiet."

He considered this. "Have you tried opening your window at night?"

Olly shook her head.

"You really should," he said. "It stinks like death in that room of yours."

"What?" Olly gasped. "Have you been in *your* room lately?"

She didn't know what surprised her more: his lack of a response – Was he always that nonchalant? – or how naturally her own snarky response had come to her.

He said nothing. His eyes were still glued to the fireflies and to the notepad in his hands.

"Mom sends me into your room to clear your cereal bowls out," he said.

"She does that herself now."

"Really?" He giggled.

“What?”

“Well, she always refused to go in there before. Said she needed a hazmat suit to breathe the air.”

Olly fought the urge to push him. Not in a rough way, just teasingly, like when they were kids. Now, she didn’t know if she could. Off in the distance, the fireflies had formed golden spheres in the hedges that traced the fence line.

“When did you become such a smart ass?” Olly said.

“November 5, 2006.”

“No, seriously.”

He shrugged. “I’m not sure. Maybe it’s a defense mechanism. It sort of comes with the territory of being teased.”

Olly’s heart sank. The jar and the enclosed firefly inside felt heavier in her hands. She returned it to the grass where she’d found it, feeling unworthy of holding it. How many times had she called him Bug Boy, Bug-Eyes, or Alien in front of her friends? What was wrong with her?

She urged him to move – to walk, to hug her, *something*. Instead he stood perfectly still, his hands clutching the notepad and his face dark in the shadows of the backyard. With his oversized clothes and pointed knees, he looked like an adolescent deer still growing into his legs.

“Hey,” Olly said. “I’m sorry. For how I treated you. I mean, I must have been a pretty messed-up big sister.”

No response. His figure seemed farther away now, more transparent and distorted. Olly wanted to reach out and pull him back. The two of them could relive those precious memories from their childhood. She would force him to take thousands of pictures. He would read out loud from the Bug Bible again, and she would memorize the words and the sound of his voice.

No, she realized. That will never happen. His silence, his distance, were just fragments of another lifetime.

“Were you scared?” Olly asked. She’d always wanted to know. “By yourself out there. Whe-when Megan’s mom drove me home from middle school, and we called Dad, but I forgot to pick you up. Why didn’t you stay at the school? Where did you go? We drove back an hour later, and you were already gone!”

The bubble wasn't bursting anymore. It was boiling now, simmering and overflowing. He didn't retaliate against her outburst. He turned around. When their eyes met, his were murky and far away, looking through her but not at her. She knew they were supposed to be brown, but they were grey now - two grey and murky orbs.

"I'm not mad anymore," he said. "I know I embarrassed you. I wasn't an easy kid to get along with. We didn't have much in common anyway."

"We had Abuela's stories, though, didn't we?"

"I guess you're right," he said, looking at the yard that surrounded them. "It's peaceful, isn't it? In the hours before dawn when there's no one else around. What did Abuela call it?"

"La madrugada."

"Yeah. That's it. Do you still read the journals, Olly?"

"No," she answered, "I can't say that I have."

"Why not?"

"I've been...busy," Olly said sheepishly. "Besides, I don't know Spanish."

"Neither do I," he said. "I always wanted to learn. Abuela said she was going to teach me, but...Well. You know."

His form shifted, disappearing for a second and then appearing again in the same spot. Olly could tell their time was running short. The questions and unspoken things were piling together, but something told her that they didn't need saying. Looking at him from across the lawn, she felt neither anxiety nor fear - only a sense of calm.

Olly picked herself up and turned back toward the house. His voice, suddenly loud and close, surprised her.

"Sis," he called.

Olly refused to turn. She stared ahead at the sliding doors; the glass reflected no face other than her own.

"Yeah?"

"You should leave your window open tonight. The white noise will help you sleep, and maybe your room won't smell like death anymore."

"Watch it, Cas."

“Goodnight, Olly.”

“Goodnight.”

If she closed her eyes, she could pretend it was just another, ordinary goodbye.

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Olly climbed the stairs back up to the second floor. She removed from the walnut cabinet the first journal in the pile. When she returned to her room, she picked up her phone and opened the text she'd been drafting. Olly deleted the original draft and started from the beginning, deciding to send it right away so that Megan would see it first thing in the morning:

I'm sorry, I can't make it today. A family thing came up. Please tell the team I said hi.

Olly tossed her wet socks into the hamper, opened the window just above her bed, and snuggled down into her comforter, the journal in her hand. Some of the words returned to her; most of them, she knew, would take time to learn. Maybe in the morning, she would take up her mother's offer to make *bolillos*. Maybe next year, in the new house, the anniversary would be just a bit easier. There would always be guilt. In that moment, however, she knew he'd forgiven her. That was all she needed, for now.

When she finally turned the light off, Olly nestled into her pillow and fell asleep instantly. The cool, humid air of *la madrugada* filled her room, a harmony of crickets singing in her ears.



Luke Kenneally

Loud Brain

Loud Brain

Luke Kenneally



Kaitlyn Johnson

The Problem of the Tooth

Gurian Fiction Honorable Mention Recipient

They found him in my apartment building, unconscious, sprawled at the bottom of the stairwell. He had been there for hours. At the hospital they would put him in an induced coma to control the swelling—they didn't know for how long. These were the facts. They couldn't tell me anything else until they talked to his family. But Avery *has* no family; no one he talks to, anyway. In the five years we spent together I had never been introduced to anyone.

I imagined the impact of the fall, how it must have sounded. I imagined his parted lips, the red pouring from the great fissure across his skull, his faint breath rippling the blood on the linoleum. He had fallen forward and failed to catch himself. He had been drinking—they didn't tell me this, but they didn't have to. If it hadn't been for that, he would have landed right. And if it weren't for me, maybe Avery wouldn't have been drinking at all.

I found an old, crushed pack of cigarettes in the kitchen drawer for such emergencies. I turned to Rodney, a neighbor I never talked to much but who always seemed to be chain-smoking outside. He had been the one to knock on my door, and we were both watching from the curb now as the response team drove away. He took off his baseball cap, running a hand through his dark hair, which seemed to be thinning early for his age. He had the quick, strange eyes of someone who doesn't sleep well or often.

"Do you have a light?" I asked, my voice cracking.

He reached into the pockets of his denim jacket and handed me some matches. "I'm sorry about your boyfriend." He watched as I cupped a shaky hand over the small, blue flame.

The sting of matchbook Sulphur filled my nostrils. I exhaled deeply. "We broke up. He doesn't live here anymore."

"Oh. I didn't know. I'm sorry to hear that," Rodney replied sheepishly. "It's a good thing I was working the graveyard shift. Who knows how long it could have been? Was he visiting you?"

I took another long drag, the cigarette already collapsing into a pillar of ash. I gave it a tap and sighed. "I don't know. Maybe. I'm not sure what he was doing here. We haven't talked

I couldn't bring myself to follow Avery to the emergency room. I imagined him lying in crisp hospital linens, wrapped in bandages, tangled in awful, heaving machinery. Other people visited and said he looked like an entirely different person. They seemed to remember him differently too—as a deeply sensitive person, a loner, a talented mathematician who had lost his way, a man whose only fault was a weakness for drink. “If only we had been paying closer attention,” they said. “If only one of us had done something.”

Sometimes I drank alone at the downtown bar we used to frequent, a dark and dingy place that opened far too early and closed well past legal protocol. Occasionally I saw some of our old drinking buddies—Tim and Frieda, the couple Avery knew from university. They had visited Avery a few times and were always trying to give me updates. They glanced at me curiously, regarding me like one might regard an injured creature, with eyes full of pity and apprehension. They muttered over their pitcher of pale ale and hoped I would look in their general direction. Eventually they stopped waiting for me to beseech them with grief and approached me themselves.

Frieda's hair was the color of persimmons and pulled into a tight knot. A few wild tufts escaped around her prim face. She had a nervous disposition, and quick hurried mannerisms that reminded me of a small bird. “Hi, Mara.” She tilted her head. “It's so good to see you. I like your shirt.”

I had been wearing the same shirt for three days straight. It was grey, with a picture of a racoon, and underneath it said *Iowa... Naturally!* Avery hated that shirt—he never understood my fascination with old, thrifted tees. Neither of us had even been to Iowa. Despite his cantankerous nature, I often enjoyed his teasing remarks, and sometimes I wore those shirts after arguments just so we'd have something to joke about. Then that got old too. Then we fought all the time.

“Are you okay? We were just about to get another pitcher. Why don't you come join us?” She seemed sincere, lightly

touching me in a kind but unwelcome gesture.

I looked over her shoulder and gave Tim a weak smile, as if to say *I'm okay! Really!* He waved me over, and Frieda looked at me expectantly. I shook my head. "Thank you," I said. "But I should get home."

As Frieda walked away, I looked hurriedly around for the bartender. James was working that night. He was alright—he knew about Avery, of course, but at least he wasn't caught up in other people's drama, waiting to glean every piece of gossip at someone else's expense.

"What's the damage?" I asked as he approached.

"Your friends took care of it." He shrugged, nodding over towards Tim and Frieda, who were preoccupied in a round of ski-ball. "Do us all a favor and get some rest, okay?"

"Not you too, James."

"Take care of yourself. Get home safe."

But at home it was even worse. Everything reminded me of Avery now: the button cacti he gave me for Christmas, the abandoned bookcase we carried home together from a nearby alley, even the flour he used for fry bread—the only thing he knew how to make that involved more than one cooking step

At night I dreamt I was swimming through a bog, duckweed clinging to my skin like tiny scales. I could feel the mud between my toes, the decaying matter of the forest shifting beneath me. I tried to move, but with each step I felt more resistance. Suddenly I was running through flooded houses, blackened doorways swollen with water-rot, pushing blindly through curtains of Spanish moss. I was being chased by something. I hid in the corner and waited with a broken tree limb. When I saw the shadow of it emerge through the doorway, I swung wildly. Then I looked down and saw Avery at the bottom of the stairwell, staring blankly at me, surrounded by strangers. Everyone wanted to know why I was beating his corpse.

I convinced myself that dreams were the one place he could find me—that in his comatose state he had wandered inside my very mind to stage a reckoning. I would wake up and think about him, wondering if the relationship had really been as bad

as I remembered. I made calculations in my head, trying to make sense of the truth. I remembered when he progressed to acts of destruction. He smashed a thirty-year-old fichus given to me by my grandmother. He told me that one day I'd be his age and I'd be alone, surrounded by weak men who couldn't handle me, and filled with regret. "No one will understand you like I do," he said. "You're making a mistake." He took another pull of bourbon, his eyes ignited by liquor and rage. He opened cabinets and began smashing our plates, mason jars, our thrifted coffee cups until the whole floor glittered with the remnants of the life we built. "I hate you," he yelled. "I fucking hate you, you selfish bitch."

I wanted to kick him out then, but we were both broke. There was no way either of us could afford a new place. Every six months the rent increased, and we were barely scraping by that summer. Whatever he made from the coffee shop down the road barely covered the utilities. It was difficult to see him like that—drunk on the couch, wrapped tightly in an old wool blanket, surrounded by old scratch tickets and the shiny, crinkled wrappings of processed food.

And then one day he was gone. He left me at five in the morning, a wake of smoke. I could hear his feet shifting the floorboards, the quiet breathing that accompanies still, early hours; so quiet that I heard him smother the end of his cigarette in the ashtray, and the hard click of the lock. Somehow, I knew he was really gone that moment, for good. Even though I had wanted him to leave, I was surprised by the sensation rising in my throat. I was alone. I thought I would feel relieved. I thought he would at least say goodbye. In the restless hours of the night, pacing the cluttered perimeters of the apartment over and over while he was out boozing, I had rehearsed exactly what I would say that morning: *Avery, you are and will always be an important person in my life. I hope that you get the help you need, but I no longer feel safe with you.*

After some time passed, I rolled over and spread out like a starfish, stretching to the far corners of the bed limb by limb. It felt nice to take up space. I crept into to the living room and

reached into the stale smoke hovering thick and ghost-like in the air. The floor was littered with books spilling in a pile from the shelf he overturned the night before. The entire apartment was in a state of disarray. I opened the window. I put on the kettle. On the lacquer table I found a creased, ceremonious note in his distinct handwriting, neatly scrawled. *Mara*, it said, and I could hear him say my name, the way it sounds in cursive. *You can have the furniture, but not my forgiveness.*

The scream of the kettle brought me back, and then I saw the tooth. At first, I thought it was a pebble, but then I saw the dried blood, the pith, the sinister sheen of something once human. I remembered the night he lost it. What did he mean by leaving it behind, leaving it on the table? I didn't want to think about it, didn't want to admit that its ambiguity frightened me. Securing the chain lock on the door, I turned back to the kitchen to pour myself a cup of tea, feeling a new rush of anxiety seep through my being. After the last few weeks, I didn't know what he was capable of anymore. I put the tooth in a small, glass box and tried to put it out of my mind. I rearranged the furniture, bought a new set of cerulean dishware, and filled the room with rose geranium, ivy, and lucky jade.

Eventually I was at that bar in Belltown so often that James offered me a job, which was lucky, since I had long since stopped going to the diner. I needed a change. I was tired of slinging coffee on the northside, tired of runny eggs, greasy knives, the men dragging their slack bodies from the graveyard shift and into my vinyl booth, muddy boots and all. If I could stomach their sweet talk at the diner, I could handle the Belltown luses. I am familiar with angry drunks, their unpredictability, their unrestrained belligerence.

It's been a few months since the fall, and the shock has lost some of its freshness. The southbound bus heaves to a stop, opening its doors with a groan. It's fifteen minutes late, and the line is long. The ramp unfurls like a long, metal tongue, and an old woman clambers aboard slowly, squeezing her bulging tote bags through the door while the rest of us pretend not to mind

the delay. I smooth my floral dress around my thighs and sit in the middle, where the two halves of the bus meet in something like an accordion. Inside there are techboys with lanyard badges, Ethiopian women wrapped in scarves, international students, homeless people—our various smells a mix of perfume and pheromones. We are all avoiding eye contact. Instead, we look out our windows, or at our phones. Even the gaunt man wrapped in a dirty sleeping bag has a phone, although instead of scrolling he is trying to rant at the bus driver, who has no choice but to listen.

“This whole city has gone to shit. Fluoride in the water. Police chief beating his wife, getting paid to kill people in the streets. You think I’m crazy?” He laughs, his dark eyes glittering. “Naaaaw. *Ya’ll* are crazy. I’m fucking *free*. I’m free, motherfuckers.” He crushes a can in his fist, scratches at his trackmarks. “I’m free.” He throws the can in the aisle and no one says anything, shifting in their seats nervously.

I watch the tiny houses turn into apartments, turn into glass hives—everything growing larger and larger. The skyline is a jagged set of teeth, its gaps filled with moving cranes. They call it progress, talk about new jobs, but the people I know, the people who have lived here for years—we’re still serving dressed-up slop and shaking cocktails for mere scraps.

Exiting the bus, I can hear the rush of the living city all around me. The sidewalk is speckled with gray gum, paint, bits of paper dancing around my feet as I walk past the dog park. I watch a corgi wiggle its way to its owner, licking the woman’s hands. The distant horn of a ferry reverberates across the water, carrying passengers from nearby islands. I breathe in the smell of salt and cedar, wrap my loose sweater around my shoulders as the wind picks up speed between the tall buildings. I stop for a moment—someone has written a note in fresh, blue paint across the sidewalk. *Kat, you deserve your miserable, heroin life.* I wonder who she is. I wonder what she did to make someone hate her so.

My coworker James is standing on the corner of Second and Lenora, staring off into the looming skeletal structure two

blocks down. He looks at me, the corner of his mouth lifting into a half-smile. His gray eyes reveal a flash of something; is it pity, or just concern? As suddenly as I see it, it's gone and replaced by his casual warmth and gentle demeanor.

"They're building more condos," he says finally. "Patrick says they're going for one mil each. Can you believe this shit?" He takes one last pull from his cigarette, flicks it towards a BMW and turns to unlock the door.

"One mil, huh? Let's hope they tip well."

"Fucking doubt it. It's your turn to pick the music." He turns on the light, throws his denim jacket over a stool, lunges forward and slides down the length of the bar in a boyish way that I think is meant to impress me.

"Show off," I say laughing. It feels good to laugh. "Put on some Patti Smith."

The first time we met, James scared me. I could tell it bothered him. I'm not sure what the dagger etched into his cheekbone means, or why he wrapped the word "hellbound" around his neck in thick, black ink. He's covered in strange symbols and images, far too many to describe. Last week when we were a few shots deep, I asked him about it. *These?* He smirked. *I got these out of the cereal box.* His tattoos are like a shield, keeping most folks away. And yet, I can see the way it bothers him—the way so many strangers glance at him with disdain, or even worse, with fear. Like me, James is a warm but private person, and even after drinking with him all these months I still can't say I know him all that well. But I know that he's lonely. I know that when the bar closes, he avoids going home. We could spend hours there, off the clock, avoiding our problems together.

"Did you change your hair? You look different. Better," he comments, rubbing his hand over his buzzcut. It is a nervous tic I've come to notice as of late.

"Wish I could say the same about you. Now shut up, this is my favorite song." I turn up the music. He flips me off and cracks open a beer, letting its contents froth over the bartop and fizzle into a syrupy glaze.

As I restock the bar, I try not to think about Avery, but I

can feel him nudging incessantly at my mind like a curse. I find myself thinking back on that day he lost the tooth. It was before he started drinking again, before things got real bad. Something happened there, in that moment. Avery was shaking with that big, generous laugh of his, almond eyes crinkled in the corners. They reminded me of amber and seemed to glow against his skin, which had grown dark from sprawling in the park the other day. He was eating neon candy by the fistful, and there was something childlike and endearing in the way he was slouched, gazing up at the TV from upside-down. I was trying to focus on the movie he picked out, but my mind was elsewhere. I was pressing my face against his thin, cotton shirt, feeling the warmth of him seep through. I could hear his heart murmur, the curious way it skipped a beat here and there. It reminded me of when I was little, and how I used to press a mottled seashell to my ear—how I thought I could hear the echo of a distant ocean, instead of the sound of my own blood thrumming through my head.

Moments later he pushed me off and clutched his jaw. He gave a soft cry, and with a shaking hand he reached into his mouth. He held his head there for a moment, then spat neatly into his palm, his lips wet with saliva and blood. We sat there, mesmerized, staring at that animal thing, that strange piece of bone. It was a shock to us both, and I struggled to know what to say.

“Are you okay?” I finally asked. I touched his shoulder, but he was still looking at the tooth as though in a trance. “I lost a tooth,” he gave a forced laugh. “I lost a damn tooth. No. No, I’m not okay, Mara.” He turned away from me then, spitting my name in a way that stung. For months he complained about his jaw, and still like a child he avoided brushing at night or going to the dentist. But Avery is not a child. He is a man in his mid-thirties. At first I had found this charming—the way he seemed to need a woman to mend his reckless ways. I thought it was funny that no one had ever told him to separate his laundry, that he thought my simple no-frill dinners were the best food he’d ever had.

“You need to go to the dentist,” I said, walking towards the stack of dirty dishes in the kitchen. His anger could be a

vacuous force in our small apartment at times, and I had learned to occupy myself in menial tasks in hopes of getting my point across without directly engaging his temper.

“Stop it, Mara. Just stop, I don’t want to hear it.”

“Okay. I love you,” I said, but it sounded more like a plea than a statement of fact. He sighed, turning back to the screen. The movie continued, but his gaze seemed to stretch beyond the television, somewhere far away.

He had been so handsome when we met—tall, with a dark, furrowed brow that made him look perpetually serious. I was nineteen when I first saw him at the coffee shop, and his unkemptness only seemed to add to his mystery and appeal. He was wearing blue jeans and a plain white t-shirt, worn thin and slightly frayed at the edges, damp with sweat as he finished locking up his bicycle. I watched amazedly from my table as he scanned over the strange scrawls of mathematical proofs and wondered what his life was like. He was drinking peppermint tea. I asked if he had ever had his tea leaves read and made predictions from the whale and the tree I found resting in the bottom of his cup. I couldn’t have possibly predicted how things would turn out—that we’d live in a crowded apartment complex, crying and yelling more than anything else after five years. I didn’t know yet that the stress of money and unemployment would cause him to go silver, that his inability to take care of himself would destroy his looks and make him bitter to the whole world. How could I have predicted that?

It’s seven o’clock before the bar fills up, everyone murmuring under the warm, pink light. Everyone looks soft and dreamy, all liquor and laughs, the haziness of it all wrapping around us like a womb. It’s been a long time since we’ve had a mean drunk in our midst. Most of the people who come to the Divine Oasis work in the neighborhood, some from other bars and some from the tattoo shop down the street. Sometimes we see couples in cocktail attire stumbling through, making fun of the locals and demanding special treatment from the staff. We call them tourists, and we charge them double.

We close early on weekdays, and when the last of them stumble through the doorway there is a sort of static left behind—something electric, demonic hanging in the air. After stacking the glassware into neat towers, I finally sit down. I pour myself a glass of something golden, something lovely that will make my throat burn in a delicious way. For the first time I look, I mean *really look*, at the room before me: the devil's ivy climbing over the shelves in pale, waxy leaves, the collection of geodes gleaming in lavender hues. I settle my eyes on the various shadowboxes full of exotic butterflies, pinned eternally in neat rows and think back on that trip to Montana—the last time Avery and I were happy. We wandered through the boreal forests of his youth, watching for the deep, honeycomb features of the morels he so loved. I marveled at the clusters of foxglove, the black butterflies, the array of wildflowers. *You're my whole world*, he said. He gazed at me, his eyes shining, and pushed a dark strand of hair from my face. *I don't know what I'd do if I lost you.*

I find myself absentmindedly reaching into my pocket. I don't remember when I started taking the tooth with me. Even when I didn't feel the literal impression of it on my person, it was like I carried it with me wherever I went.

"What's in your hand?" James asks, sitting down next to me. I turn to show him, and it feels like I'm revealing some strange, awful secret. "Is that a fucking tooth?"

"It was Avery's." I say slowly. "He left it, after we broke up. Before the fall."

"And you kept it? You just carry it around with you?" Suddenly, I feel like a lunatic, like I've forgotten how to be normal, like somehow Avery had embedded his crazy deeper and deeper until there was nothing left.

I tip the glass against my lips, then stare at the scarlet smudge of lipstick along the rim. "I don't know what to do with it. I put it in my pocket one day, thinking I'd throw it off the bridge, bury it... but I couldn't. I can't." Something warm and wet drips down my cheek, and I realize I am crying. "Sorry," I mutter weakly, hiding my face. "I'm sorry."

"Why are you apologizing? That guy had serious issues,

Mara. We didn't know each other well then, but I'm glad he's out of your life. That guy..." He trails off, sighing and shaking his head. "I remember him. That guy had issues."

"You don't know, James. You don't know him like I did. I should have helped him." I took another gulp, tried to steady my voice. "Now I'm just a goddamn hypocrite."

"No one could have helped Avery." I reach for the bottle, but James inches it away, locking eyes with me. He is so steady, so sure that I am good; that Avery is the bad guy, that I'm the one that needs saving.

"He woke up finally. I don't know if I told you that." I reach for the bottle, and he doesn't stop me this time. "He'll have to relearn everything. Tim says he's like a child now," I pause, shaking. "He doesn't remember the break-up."

We sit in silence for a moment, the weight of it all resting so heavy it is almost unbearable. I wonder if he thinks I'm a hypocrite, if he blames me now, too. We sit there for what feels like several minutes, and then James startles me by standing. "Let's do it," he says. "Tonight. Let's throw it over the bridge, get rid of him for good."

"No," I sigh. "I told you, it's not enough." That's when I see the hammer leaning against the wall beneath the newly installed artwork. I walk over and grasp it firmly by its smooth, wood handle. James gives me a knowing look, then follows me out the door, locking up behind us. I feel dazed and strangely numb-relieved even. Outside, the autumn shrouds us in cold winds, making my bones ache. There is nothing left of summer. The only people wandering Belltown are the ones with nowhere to go. No one gives us trouble, no one even does a double take at James, who looks like a hieroglyphic demon beneath the streetlights.

When we get to the bridge, the smell of damp earth and moss fills my lungs and leaves me calm and quiet. The water shimmers, refracting the city lights. No stars in the sky tonight, but the moon glows in a thin sliver above. All around us the cedars stir in the wind. James looks at me with his dark, serious eyes. He reaches for my hand, gently releasing my hold on the tooth. I realize how small it is, that somehow, I am afraid to let it

go. He sets it down on the ledge before us, and we stand there for some time. Then he hands me the hammer, and I can feel its tremendous weight, its certainty of power.

I grasp its neck firmly, my knuckles pale with the strain of it. I swing it back, feeling the pull of gravity in my limbs, and I bring it down again and again, heavy with intent. When we finally look down, it's nothing but pale dust amongst stone. If I tried to hold it now, it would only slip through my fingers, the essence of something primordial—something once extraordinary.



Brett Bean

Untitled

Isabel Frohnhofer

The Rope Ladder

Julie fiddled around in her faded pink and green L.L.Bean backpack and pulled out her binoculars. The shuffling noises were loud against the snowy forest air and a rogue squirrel darted up a tree to escape. Julie stood up and continued walking. She knew that she had to get to her treehouse before her older brother and his friends or the whole afternoon would be spoiled. When she came to the clearing, she found her treehouse and brushed the snow off the rope ladder. She looked up at the house. It seemed to be locked up still; but you never know with Kyle, she remembered. One time while she was at a birthday party, Kyle had stolen their father's toolbox away and spent the afternoon removing the door from the treehouse just so he could get in and steal her diary. *Boys are the absolute worst*, she mumbled to herself as she trudged through the snow.

She walked to the foot of the tree and began to climb the rope ladder up to the house. When she got to the platform just outside the treehouse door, she pulled the rope ladder up. You can never be too careful, she thought. Julie then found her key, hidden on the lanyard she kept inside her big coat. The lock to the key was small and engraved with the words: "Property of Warren Middle School." She was supposed to use it for her school locker, but this was so much more important. In the distance, she heard the dreaded sound of prepubescent boys' voices quickly followed by high-pitched laughter. Soon after, she saw her brother and his friends walk into the clearing and casually stroll up to her tree in their unwashed sweatshirts and basketball shorts. Their presence was a definitive sign of trouble. Julie quickly unlocked the door and stepped inside, taking the lock with her. She locked the door from the inside and sat down in the small wooden room. After grabbing a blanket and binoculars from her bag, she sat down by the window.

"Hey!" She heard Kyle yell faintly down below. "I know you're in there! Let us in! I called having the treehouse today!" This was kind of true: their mother had made them write out a schedule for the treehouse. Technically, this was his week. But Julie needed the treehouse. She absolutely had to write in her diary and the treehouse was the only place she could concentrate.

“No! Not today! The treehouse is mine and you know it. Leave me alone!” Julie shouted. “I took the rope ladder up anyway, so you might as well just leave.” The air was quiet for a few moments. Silence was never a good sign. Julie peeked out the small window of the treehouse and saw that Kyle was gathering sticks and small rocks to throw up at the ladder. He launched a few; none of them caught. His friend Stephen launched a couple more. Those were no good either. Charlie tried, then Greg. None of them were successful. Julie watched and laughed.

“Hey! Look what I found,” Charlie said. He held up a medium sized glass bottle, probably left from some other Saturday afternoon. “It was over here in the snow!” Kyle, now visibly frustrated, grabbed the glass bottle and launched it as hard as he could, straight up toward the treehouse. It flew right by the rope ladder and toward the front window, which Julie was using to watch the boys throw sticks. The bottle hit her in the head and she stared blankly for a second before falling back into the treehouse, unconscious. The glass bottle fell into the treehouse beside her and the rope ladder remained up on the platform in front of the locked door.

Before Kyle could even process what he had done, Charlie, Stephen, and Greg muttered something about going to get help or finding cell reception. The clearing was silent after they ran off, except for the sound of the bottle hitting Julie’s head echoing in Kyle’s mind. Kyle stared up at the treehouse, still not believing what had just happened. He called for her once, but heard no response. He didn’t dare do it a second time. He was afraid she wouldn’t answer again. When the fire department finally arrived, Julie had still not made a sound and Kyle was standing at the base of the treehouse: fists clenched, bottom lip quivering, still staring at the empty treehouse window.

Loud Brain
**Luke
Kenneally**



Arcelia Martin

Almost There

I should not have gotten in the car.

Usually by that hour his eyelids would have grown heavy and he would have sunk deeply into his corner of the sectional. The fluorescent screen would light his sleeping face, as the late-night news anchors talked of continued traffic and crimes a few neighborhoods over.

But at that hour, when he walked through the door his eyes were wide with an enthusiasm I dreaded.

“Grab your jackets, *vamos chapparos*,” he waved to us, smiling as he entered the house.

My younger brother ran upstairs to his bedroom to find the kind of jacket you need for a San Diego spring. Just heavy enough to protect against the occasional bite of the coastal air, but light enough to be comfortable in the 65-degree weather. I grabbed my green hoodie, with the thinning sleeves from being over worn, off the corner of a dining room chair as I walked toward him.

“Where were you?” I whispered to my him as the two of us walked out onto the porch to wait for my brother.

“With some friends,” he slurred as he wrapped his arm around my shoulder.

My arm did not give into his. Instead it tensed, as did the rest of my body. The skin above my eyebrow creased. “Dad, why didn’t you answer my calls?”

“I just lost track of time, *Chaparra*,” he reasoned. “But I’m starving now! *Vamos, Chapparo*,” he yelled into the house, hurrying my brother.

He reached into his pocket for his keys and activated the motion

sensor porch light, affirming what I wished wasn't true. His shadow teetered behind him, while his grip on my shoulder gave him stability. The light found his fogged eyes and his teeth, which revealed an unusually large smile for the otherwise stoic man in front of me.

He never shared much about his life outside of the world I experienced with him. I only knew what he told me and what I had seen for myself. Questions of where, or who, or how they met would never be answered. He told me that a long time ago, he lived luxuriously. He traveled often, ran large businesses and was a regular at Duke's in La Jolla, an ocean front restaurant and bar. Mom confirms it, too.

But he had since abandoned those luxuries. Now, he found richness among strangers who agreed to a pact of secrecy, existing only to each other. They shared their evenings away from whomever they were coming from and opted for their bottled company. Once, I saw his brown Jeep Cherokee parked outside of a dive bar on Morena Boulevard. I figured that's all the friendship he and his friends needed.

My father, brother and I naturally spent a fair amount of time with one another. We lived in the same house. Dad and I watched the news together every morning. It was our common point of interest. But few times did we leave the house to spend time with one another.

That Friday, we had agreed. At 6 p.m. we'd meet at the house and go to Ottoto. It's a small sushi restaurant just over a mile from our house. When picking a place for dinner, it tended toward Ottoto. My dad and I would order a rainbow, salmon and spicy tuna roll to share, while my brother ordered chicken katsu. Their food was always relieving. It soothed our desperate hungers and left us blissfully overfed. Even their edamame was memorable, with large flakes of salt sprinkled on the warm steamed pods. That night, when my dad walked into the house, the green digital

numbers on the kitchen stove read a couple hours past six. Somewhere after 8 p.m.

The three of us walked out to the driveway and approached his car. Mateo slid into the backseat, and I sat beside my dad in the passenger seat. I was suffocated by the smell of cigarettes and liquor that soiled the air. My mind flooded with every terrible possibility. We'd die. We'd get pulled over and he'd get a DUI and bankrupt our mom. We'd hit another car. We'd fall off the bluff. He put the key into the ignition. The radio was playing, but I couldn't hear the words. I rolled down the window to completely fill my lungs with the still, warm air. Breathing in until I had no room left, yet managing to take one more sip. Moving his hands to the left side of the wheel, Dad turned the headlights on. The lights shined onto the blue wooden door of the garage. His hand moved onto the gear shift and the other one found its place on the wheel.

Can't tell Mom, I thought. Say something, just say something. I wanted to yell at him. I wanted to tell him to get out of the car. But I was afraid. He began to reverse out of the driveway. Smooth, smooth, I prayed - oh, thank God. We drove into the middle of the street and his hand moved back onto the leather gear shift, placing the car into drive. The last licks of orange were fading into blue above the row of neighboring two-story homes. I held the still air in my chest as the car began up the road. As we headed down the east side of the bluff, my body clenched with betrayal and anticipation. I looked at his face. His eyes followed the curves of the yellow striped asphalt with seemingly effortless focus. As we descended to the red stoplight that led to the main road, my constricted breath loosened. From here, it was three more minutes down a straight road.

We sat at the light in silence. "Hey Dad, I can drive if you want?"

He glared at me. "We're almost there, *Chaparra*."

The light turned green and he looked out onto the road, offended by the accusation I had just made. I looked at Mateo through the rearview mirror. There was an unsettling comfort in knowing that I wasn't alone. One more block. I stared at Dad's wrinkling and freckled hands. The skin on his hand pooled at his knuckles as his hand loosely guided the wheel.

He pulled off of the main road and into the parking lot. Less than thirty seconds left. There were no spots in the first aisle, so he combed the second. He held the wheel with vindication as he went up the third aisle of parking spots. Finally, he lunged the car into a spot. He turned to his right to sneer at me, mocking my concern. He turned the keys out of the ignition and walked out of the car as Mateo and I trailed behind in silence.

Dad's enthusiasm had turned into impatience. The counter was bustling with people waiting to carry out their orders, and the dimly lit dining room bustled with first dates, families, and friends laughing. Hanging chalkboards read happy hour specials and the new beer on tap.

He walked past the host and straight toward an empty table.

"Dad, you're supposed to wait," Mateo said in a small panicked voice.

"But this one's empty," he pointed while moving toward the table.

He found a menu from the end of the table and began circling different rolls from the order sheet. His marks were slow, as if the short pencil was magnetized to the table. He paused to look up at me.

"You know what, *Chaparra*," his eyes and words lagged, "the world doesn't need more writers. It really doesn't. You're not very good, anyways" he slurred.

What else he said, I'm not sure. He said more, louder. But I

meditated on the center of his forehead. I knew if I looked away, the words would get louder. I felt the swelling, starting in my throat and heating my eyes. Four in, four out, I breathed. Tears traced my face. As he continued to talk, they slid along the sides of my nose, salting my lips and trickling past my chin.

I could feel the weight of unfamiliar eyes, each sending their regret. Poor girl, probably. Or, what a monster. Or, in public?

I slid out from the wooden booth and began walking toward the bathroom. I could hear him saying something to my brother as I continued toward the back of the restaurant. I marched and looked at no one. The tears forming in my eyes blurred the path I had memorized, left at the small table, down the cherry blossom hallway and the first door to the right. I clutched at the door handle and melted into the cold tile. Here there were no words, no unfamiliar eyes, no kind defenses from Mateo, just the cold tile slowly helping me to readjust.

My face was wet with an anger that I didn't know how to use. The anger left dark trails down my face as I pored over the words in my head. I wasn't unused to the desire to hurt him. I had rehearsed monologues and drafted letters demanding him to choose: me or his vices. I wrote about wanting another father. I wrote about his power as the only person who made me feel small, fragile, and insignificant. I wrote so that he might choose to become sober. But the sermons were left unsaid, and to a God he didn't believe in.

I let my face run dry and slid up the wall until I found my feet and headed back to the table. By now, no eyes followed me back to my seat. The cruel words and tear-stained face were left in history. Our food sat on small black ceramic plates.

"Llorona," he scoffed.

I nodded.

The sounds of our chewing interrupted the otherwise silent

minutes that passed. Mateo sawed into his breaded chicken with a fork and a knife, as I began to approach the seaweed-wrapped tuna.

Mateo grabbed the wide rainbow roll between his two chopsticks and dipped into the smaller plate of soy sauce. He lifted it back up and held it for two moments, counting them by the drops of soy sauce that fell back into the black puddle. As he inched the sushi to his mouth, it unraveled itself in front of him. Little pieces of rice splattered along the shiny black table like specks of snow.

I looked at the sushi spread along the table and then up at Mateo, whose eyes were waiting to meet mine. He began to laugh at the mess he had made.

A slight moan escaped between my lips with relief. Mateo started laughing. He tried to sweep the rice grains off of the table and onto one of the tiny black plates, with wide eyes and puckered cheeks.

We were almost done.

As we walked out of the restaurant, I ran ahead of him and extended my arm before we had left the sidewalk to the asphalt.

“Llaves,” I nodded.

“Chappara, I’m ...”

Interrupting him, I lifted my hand and placed it in front of him again. *“Llaves please.”*

He tossed me the keys. *“You just want to drive my Jeep.”*

I unlocked the car and entered on the left side into the driver’s seat. It only smelled faintly of tequila and stale smoke. The tension that scrunched my shoulders close to my ears for the

last hour was released. Mateo sat in the back again, where we could communicate silently through the rearview mirror. I turned on the radio.

A few minutes later, I pulled into the empty driveway beside the jacaranda tree. I had accidentally left the light on in my bedroom, and the warm yellow peered out into the dark street. I moved the gearshift into park, pulled the parking brake toward me, turned off the headlights, and twisted the key out of the ignition. Dad opened the passenger door and walked in front of the car toward the house. Mateo followed behind him as I sat alone.

I didn't need a jacket. There wasn't any wind, but instead I could feel the cool air through my nose as I breathed it in.

I walked into the house, gently closing the heavy wooden door behind me. I put the single key to the Jeep in the ornate silver dish where the other car keys and business cards from door-to-door salesmen lived. I looked past the dining room, to the tethered corner of the sandy beige sectional on the turquoise carpet. Dad had sunk into his corner. His only movement was the slight rise and fall of his chest. I flicked off the overhead fluorescent light in the kitchen and left him alone to sleep.

The lightly caramelized smell of the morning's coffee trailed up the stairs as I headed down in my blue plaid cotton shorts and long black t-shirt. I heard the mumbling of the Channel 7 weather woman. I sat down next to him in my spot of the sectional, with my arms wrapped around my knees.

He turned toward me with his forehead creased and his eyes squinted. "God, her voice is annoying."

As I rolled my eyes with a smirk, he grabbed the remote to change it to Channel 10.

Kaylee Bosse

**Yoga in Unlikely Places: What I Learned
Practicing in a Lululemon Versus a Cathedral**

A childhood memory of enchantment with store displays and soft, cinnamon-sugar pretzels during special mall excursions resurfaced upon entering Lululemon for free Saturday morning yoga. Though pretzels were absent, the warm scent of cinnamon sugar had a thawing effect on all who entered. Tensed from the cold, their expressions shifted to soft smiles as they exchanged greetings with fellow yogis. As class commenced, it felt a bit like attending a Catholic Mass as a non-denominational Christian: slight unease while partaking in hazily familiar ritual. To supplement my ballet training, I had been to a few yoga classes in the past and vaguely remembered the names and sequences of poses but had to match the movements of the muscular and heavily tattooed man practicing expertly to my right. Despite my need for visual guidance, I found myself retreating inward. This was a new sensation as years of ballet had bred a habit of comparing myself to my peers. Though ballet is also an inward, individual art, a pre-professional ballet dancer is constantly in competition with others for jobs and teachers' favor. As a result, a ballet dancer often has one eye on their own journey and another on their peers' progression. This is something that often happens subconsciously, making it a difficult habit to break.

Surprisingly, the beat-heavy music usually used to compel shoppers to impulse buy was kept on, yet the class sank deeper into repose with each warrior series. Was this relaxation in a retail environment countercultural, especially given the fact that "the aim of yoga is to eliminate the control that material nature exerts over the human spirit?" (Miller 1). Glancing up at the instructor quickly, I noticed a group of homeless people shivering in the crisp autumn air outside the storefront. Realization hit: this class was free, so technically these homeless people could have attended. However, the choice to hold class in a pricey store develops interesting tensions. Not everyone can afford \$128 leggings, and high-quality retailers have the reputation of being judgmental places. This contributes to the intimidating nature of the venue, despite likely good intentions of holding class in a place that most know and can easily travel to. Yoga is about noticing and accepting differences, yet the venue, however innocuous it may

have seemed, undermined this premise. It is interesting to note that the first yogis were encouraged to take a vow of poverty to further their practice (Miller 2). Yet the decision to have class in Lululemon further entrenched modern yoga as an elite, white, \$80 million-dollar industry.

My thought was interrupted by the instructor prompting the class to let go of doubt, fear, and anything else holding us back in life. How could I think about myself when there were people in dire need right outside the tall shop windows? As the warmth in my limbs deepened with every stretch, so did my thoughts. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which had been taught in my Strategies for Dance Instruction class, came to mind. These homeless people's basic needs of safety, belonging, and esteem was not being met, so they were not afforded the opportunity to focus on furthering their lives in other areas, such as self-actualization. Maslow defined self-actualization as doing what one was "born to do" (McLeod). One that is restricted from self-actualization is often restless. The irony is that the homeless would arguably benefit from a yoga practice as the chronic stress of survival takes a huge toll on the mental health of the displaced community, yet even free classes are inaccessible. In between bites of post-class eight-dollar Pumpkin Harvest toast and sips of Malabar tea at a coffee shop best described as "bougie," twinges of guilt bubbled in my stomach. Was it okay to participate in and even enjoy stereotypically upper middle-class, white activities if they made me happy and were not directly harming anyone? Or does doing so contribute to the marginalization of minorities? How could I bring awareness and foster discussion of these types of issues? I gazed dolefully into my teacup.

A day later, I found myself lying on a borrowed hot-pink yoga mat in an aisle amongst wooden pews, gazing up at the cold stone ceiling of St. John's Cathedral. A joyful din echoed through the sanctuary as mothers in Target leggings helped shepherd their young children into position, single men grunted as they contorted into downward dog, and startlingly flexible elderly ladies chatted amongst themselves. As the teacher threw in a few jokes while prompting several series of brutal planks

and squats, students exchanged pained smiles and encouraging words instead of retreating inward. The instructor wore a mic and walked about, dropping verbal cues instead of visual ones. As a relatively inexperienced yogi/college student craving a meditative mental break and stretch like the one from yesterday's class, this challenged my expectations. However, I felt a connection to fellow community members that was not present the previous day. Instead of glancing briefly at the instructor to check my technique before closing my eyes again, I watched those in front of me, helping those behind me. Hearing the instructor's guidance but not able to see her, I wondered, "Is this what encounters with God are like?" At that moment, a cloud moved, and I watched golden-hour light pour in through the glass.

When I finally caught a glimpse of the instructor, I noticed that she had on a colorful, albeit unusual-looking headband and was carrying a singing bowl. The same uncomfortable gut twinge resurfaced. Was this cultural imperialism/appropriation, or was she just being herself, wearing what was comfortable and made her happy? Or, was this ensemble an honest attempt at fostering an interfaith/intercultural experience? Thus, the questioning began.

The setting of the class had interesting implications, especially recalling the church's history of denying the body I had recently learned about in my Dance History class. The Church's distaste for the body and movement was brought about by the barbaric spectacles of Roman theater, which lowered theater and dance in the eyes of Christians. These art forms were then associated with pagan worship, which did not help their case. A similar attitude carried over to the Middle Ages, during which the mind and spirit were superior to the body as they were eternal. These opinions continue to color people's perceptions of dance and the body today. With this in mind, was the very act of moving one's body in a church rebellious? Because the times and places people dance are determined by societal attitudes toward the body, does the ability to do yoga in a church indicate a generally more positive perception of the body in America (or at least Spokane) nowadays?

We then transitioned into a standing tree pose, the instructor quipping that we should be pressing the knee of our working leg back so much that we get “butt dimples” much like those of ballerinas. Trying not to giggle, I shared an amused glance with my friend before turning back around. Was the mention of butts in church slightly sacrilegious? What about the position of our hands in a praying gesture that was not used for prayer? All this physical and mental exertion was making me warm, tempting me to take off my sweater to reveal a sports bra. But is taking one’s shirt off in church, an ornate cathedral no less, even remotely ok?

Despite all these questions, I do think that a free yoga class is a clever way to get people into church. An interesting dichotomy exists here: while free yoga can bring people into church, yoga has been shown to subtly change one’s beliefs over time, leading many yogis to identify as “spiritual but not religious.” The general increase in religious “nones” due to many factors of modern society means that churches are empty, but yoga centers are full (Brown 659). Additionally, Christianity and yoga are often at odds as yoga is perceived as a pagan activity despite its focus on spirituality. Many are uncomfortable with the spirituality aspect of yoga, so they problematically try and Christianize it (Brown 659).

At the end of the day, Dr. Ishwar V. Basavaraddi, Director of Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga, says that “Yoga does not adhere to any religion, belief system or community; it has always been approached as a technology for inner well-being. Anyone who practices yoga with involvement can reap its benefits, irrespective of one’s faith, ethnicity or culture” (“MEA: Statements”). Our instructor expressed a similar sentiment in a comment she made toward the end of class when we were in triangle pose. She told us how some people had made negative comments on the Yoga at the Cathedral Facebook event and commented something along the lines of, “we’re just making shapes and providing a docking space for people to ground themselves and relax so they can go out and spread love to the world.” This idea of nourishing the mind, body, and spirit has

been ingrained in my thoughts throughout my four years of Jesuit education, and I believe in its importance. Though I still have many questions and concerns surrounding the modern practice of yoga, I can say that I enjoy it for a combined exercise and mental break (such multitasking even in the act of relaxing is quite telling of the effects of capitalism, but I won't go into that). By replenishing myself through yoga, I can go out into the world and be a better Christian. This time though, I must say that yoga ironically made my head hurt!

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Holden Jeffries

When the Ballgame is Over

Green plastic covers the seats at my home ballpark.
At night, they freeze. From the west, the ocean
Pushes cold, brackish air that scrapes at my nose,
Even in April. The stadium lights
Pour out into a citrus rim of orange and pink
As the night drifts into a dream.
Whispers all around ask, where has Time gone
Over the mechanical hum of the crowd?
Ascending into the scaffolding,
Spying over the field as I envision myself
Scaling the top to see everything from above.

Maybe catch a glimpse of Him at the gates
Walking out onto the street
To get one last picture of this landscaped memory.
Cracks of bats and bottles shatter the glass-vaulted facade
Of my concentration.

The city escapes beyond the center field wall.
Beyond the streets and avenues and the cheap liquor stores in
Between. A man lies down to dream of a home or a place to return.
A place filled with dew-covered seats at the park.





A Broken Bike

Alex Lee

Change in the Fountain

Andy Frank

In the Beginning

I had created fire.
Flickering a glow of potential;
but fuel ran out
so I burned the
ground.

Then I turned fire into
future, and the world
didn't lament; but instead stood
proud.

Progress smolders like the burning
wick of time –us feeding the flame.
The good.
The mild.
The wicked.
All the same.

Now the embers rise to meet
the sky's light, and fill the horizon as
the two become blurred. Scorched
floor breathes smoke to the air,
and red is all that is left.

I had created fire.

And fire created death.

Kaitlyn Johnson

Walking Along the River After Supper

Gurian Poetry Prize Winner

He stoops over, slick to the hips
in slush. He leans over the watershed,
and howls: at the filthy river, the puny
gulls among the trash, the hidden
clumps of stars. He stops.

We watch him bend down, paw at his slung bag.
We watch him palm something weighty,
something hard in his cold, red hands. He looks at us,
then looks away, and then we watch him
throw the first stone at something formless, something
so huge we shake in our warm boots.

Peter Jonas

Fortune and Glory, Kid

Gurian Fiction Honorable Mention Recipient

My brother stared at the picture for a long time. He held it up to the dim light of the lamp as if it would allow him to see what was hidden beneath the picture as an x-ray would. As Adam blinked at the image, I sat uncomfortably in the wicker rocking chair in the corner of the storage room in my basement. I played a sort of juggling act and kept readjusting to compensate for the silence as he continued to look at the picture. He didn't move. Each time I'd cross or uncross my legs, I would also need to make sure to keep the rocking chair perfectly balanced in its center. The silence felt wrong to break.

The picture was of us. Much, much younger of course—I'd guess we were about 10 and 16 in the photo—but we looked like pioneers of an arctic exploration as we posed next to the snow bike. I was wearing my father's long brown overcoat that went down to my ankles, practically drowning in it, and had my mop of brown hair buried in a thick wool cap. The jacket was the color of coffee with two cups of creamer in it, and my 10 year-old self looked ridiculous. The only parts of my legs you could see were my feet poking out from the very bottom of the coat. On my face you could see a thin line of dried blood running out of one nostril and I grinned wildly, proud to show it off. Adam, always the daring one, wore a thin Macalester hoodie and our old adventuring hat. He had his arm draped across my shoulders and wore a cocky smirk that was just begging for the snow and anything else that came his way to do their worst.

Because of the hat Adam was wearing, I figured this must have been around the time that the first *Indiana Jones* had come out. We'd bullied our dad for weeks after we'd seen the movie until he'd got us a hat. It was brown like Indiana's, worn and patched from all the times we'd brought it on an excursion, also like Indiana's, and even had the right dimples in the front. If you were really looking at it, the color was slightly off, but we let that part slide. We could make do.

I felt astounded at how long ago those winters felt now. Across the room, I watched Adam, here in this time and place. He was beginning to grey now, with threads of silvery hairs beginning to weave into his overgrown beard. He continued to sit and stare

and as he studied the moment frozen in time, I thought to myself that while a picture can have this effect of freezing and preserving a moment, there are many, many more ways for a person to be stuck in time.

Every winter in Saint Paul, Adam and I would take out our father's snow bike and go skiing in the city. This place always had the perfect parks to do so—long strips with few trees and just the right amount of hilliness. Adam, being six years older and the only one our parents would permit to drive the snow bike, would always treat his duty and appointment as pilot with the highest degree of reverence.

Early in the morning of the photo, with a new foot of untouched snow floating over our lawn, he woke me up by pulling the covers off my bed.

“Adam, what the Hell!” I yelled at him and jumped up to grab the bunched up blankets from him as he ran away and dangled them out of my reach. He'd learned how effectively this could get me out of bed.

“This is for your own good,” he called back to me as he hopped out into the hall with blanket in hand.

Next, following his itinerary, he'd probably walked into the cluttered garage and begun to prepare the snow bike for its daily voyage. He would slowly pull the sheet covering the snow bike from it and let it pool down the sides like pouring milk. It was a miraculously wonderful oddball—the bike, that is. Never since have I seen anything like it. The body was like that of a standard motorbike but not the kind for dirt racing. More like the ones that you would see someone driving around town with a messenger bag strapped to the back. Instead of tires, the bike had a tread in place of the back wheel and a short ski in place of the front. Looking back, I'm not sure whether our father reengineered an old road bike or found the snow bike that way. Regardless, the bike needed no explanation in those days. It was as if there had never been a time when it did not exist; this was something as sure and sturdy as the existence of our parents, floating ever so

concretely above us.

After dragging it out to the front porch, Adam ran back inside to make sure I was doing my duty. I had already slipped on my dad's long coat and bundled myself for the day.

"Did you get them?" Adam said as he ran by me, making last preparations for takeoff and adventure hat in hand.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm going."

Half-awake, half not, I trudged down the back walk and opened the door to the garage. Stacks of faded chairs lined the right side of the garage and junk seemed to pile all the way up to the ceiling. Somewhere in there were my dad's old cross-country skis that he hadn't used since before our parents had gotten married. Those things were thin as twigs and not much sturdier, but man did they glide.

I began to weave my way through the labyrinth of old camping gear and spare auto parts, but did not see the skis. They always seemed to be barricaded behind some piece of broken furniture or buried under a heap of clothes (my suspicion was always that my mother would intentionally place these obstacles in my way to put as much distance between me and the skis, but I never got proof of her sinister actions). One time in third grade, I'd pulled down a whole stack of chairs onto myself and wound up with two cracked teeth. Baby teeth, of course. But from then on, I'd pretty much always found the skis conveniently placed at the door of the garage, and there seemed to be a decrease in the obstacles I would have to go through to get to them.

For some reason, the skis weren't by the front today. A moment of panic gripped me. There was no snow biking without the skis. A perfectly good adventure would be lost without them. As I peered around the back of a dusty blue couch, I saw the tip of one of the skis poking out from underneath a bed sheet. I narrowed my eyes. Not today, Mom, I thought, as I pulled the skis out from under the sheet.

Adam swayed in place on my porch, tying and untying his hands into knots. He hadn't told me he was coming. We were in the

middle of dinner. Claire had made her Friday regular—porkchops, oiled potatoes, and green beans—when the doorbell echoed through the house. It had wavered at first, as if the bell had a case of stage fright, and then warbled into its high reverberating call. Claire gave Jason a look, not even a word needed, that told him to go answer the door. He slid out of his chair after a quick flit of his eyes that he threatened to roll but would not dare as long as Claire was watching. After a brief silence, Jason had called back to me.

“Dad, come here.”

I folded up my napkin, placed it on the chair, and then strolled to the front, wiping my hands to get rid of some invisible filth. I stopped near the bottom of the stairs when I saw him standing there in the doorway. He looked like someone who merely looked like my brother, his beard not neat like it usually was. He had let it grow down his neck and it was further up his cheeks than I had ever seen it. There was a dress shirt beneath his maroon sweater and the collar popped out of the top, unbuttoned and spread out across his shoulders like the petals of a flattened tulip.

“Hey there,” he said. He raised a hand and waved through the screen door.

We had let three years slip between us. Well, not three full years, really, since we’d see each other at holidays and every so often when the kids got together. But functionally, three years. Obviously, it wasn’t like it used to be when we were kids. But not because of distance, with him just over in Minneapolis and us here in St. Paul. I suppose our 40’s were a busy time and he’d had a rough time since the divorce recently, jumping from one law firm to another. But all in all, I think it was a general feeling of tiredness that kept us apart. Missed calls, missed lunches, missed time, and all through it, something between us missing. But then again, silence is only half physical. The other half is the thing that hears the silence and receives it. The listener of silence, its audience, makes it silence in the first place, gives it permission to continue. Nothing heard and nothing said.

“Oh. Adam,” I said. “What are you doing here?” It sounded

so much more accusatory than I had wanted it to. He let out a casual chuckle and flung out his hands, nearly falling as he did so.

“Just stopping by, I guess,” he said as he picked himself up and smeared a goofy grin across his face, like he’d just pulled off an elaborate prank. I didn’t laugh.

After a second of hesitation, I reached over and hugged him. He didn’t really hug back but sort of leaned into me, I suppose. As I pressed my face into his shoulder, I inhaled the musk of cigarettes and dirt that had been ground into the coarse wool. My top lip curled slightly when I caught a hint of whiskey nestled beneath the other two smells, and I drew back to examine him more closely. He straightened up a little bit and forced his face into a more formal expression, raising his eyebrows to show extra sincerity. At least he was sober enough for there to be a doubt if he was drunk or not. I slowly shook my head, but I didn’t say anything. Not when Jason was standing right behind me. Adam let his face fall. A look of guilt sunk over it and he dropped his eyes down to his feet.

“You can go back to the table, Jason,” I said.

Jason had already said hi to Adam, but gave a cheery wave and rushed back to the table, relieved not to have to stand there any longer. I looked at Adam trying to stand still, but wavering back and forth.

“You can come in.” I turned around and began to walk back down the hall, leaving him to sort out closing the door for himself.

I led him into the kitchen. At the table in the dining room, Claire was just putting her last piece of porkchop into her mouth when she saw him walk in, and actually stopped her fork in mid-air with her mouth still open to receive the halted bite. Her eyes darted to mine and she quickly recovered. She placed the speared porkchop back on the plate then and stood up to greet Adam.

“Adam,” she said stretching his name out as she walked over to hug him. He smiled in return and gave her a brief one-armed hug.

“It’s good to see you,” he said.

“Yeah, you too.” She waited for him to say more but he just kept nodding and smiling as he looked anywhere but into her eyes. I jumped in before she could ask him anything.

“Well, we were just about to go catch up a little,” I said, wheeling him towards the stairs to the basement. “If that’s all right?”

“Of course,” she said.

“We’ll be back up in a little.”

I led him down the stairs into the basement and then around the corner to the room where our couch was set up in front of the TV. I spun around in the middle of the room and stared at him, clenching and unclenching my jaw. He stood by the edge of the couch, not willing to enter the room in full, and looked at me.

“Do you mind telling me what the hell you’re doing?” I jabbed an open-leafed hand at him like I was using it on a chopping board. “I don’t know what is going on with you, but we’re eating dinner and you decide to show up out of the blue. Out of the absolute blue. With no warning—” Adam sunk down to the couch. I began to pace now, making more large hand swoops and deep exhales. “And on top of it all, you have the nerve to walk in here drunk.”

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled.

“Sorry? Oh no no no. You do not get to just say sorry to this.”

He had shrunk down into his shoulders and I didn’t even see the tears beginning to well up in his eyes until I’d finished talking. He struggled to come up with something to say for a second, but all he could do was keep saying, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”

“Are we twelve, Adam? Do I have an obligation to take care of something for you?”

“I just wanted to see you—I didn’t even think about it.”

“What about your kids? Isn’t this your week with them?”

He went silent for a moment and I watched as he continued to sputter and sniffle. He bowed his head and wrapped it in his hands now.

“Just can’t do it,” he whispered. “Just can’t.”

“Do what?”

“Any of it.” He was fully crying now and had scrunched up his face and stuck out his jaw. “Father, husband, friend, none of it. Absolutely none of it.”

It scared me to see him like this. For sure, it tore me to shreds to see him hurting, but it scared me much more. I sighed like someone does after they have accidentally hurt a child while roughhousing.

“Come on,” I said, sitting next to him on the couch. “It’s nowhere near that bad.” Adam tried to respond but said something so quietly that I couldn’t hear it.

“What?”

“I abandoned them.” He said now with conviction. “Just told Ellie I couldn’t keep taking them for the weeks I’m scheduled to.”

“Jesus Adam, the kids? When was this?”

“About a month ago.”

A month? He hadn’t seen them in a *month*? I couldn’t believe that this Adam was sitting in front of me. So eager for kids, so sure of his role as a father once upon a time. Now he just laid limp, sunk into the couch with his head flung back on the cushion and looking up at the ceiling. And I had not a clue of a word to say to him.

“Well, let me put some water on quick,” I said more to myself than him, as he wasn’t really listening. I stood up, glanced at him, and then walked out of the room. I could still hear his uneven breathing as I climbed up the stairs to the kitchen. As I walked by Claire and Jason still at the table, Claire looked at me questioningly and I gave her a look that said *we’ll talk later*.

At the sink, I dumped out the remnants of that morning’s coffee and then flipped on the faucet. I put my hand under the water and immediately jerked it back because of how hot it was, blinked a couple of times, and then corkscrewed the faucet in the opposite direction. Pouring cold water into the coffee pot, the thought of how our mother made coffee bubbled up from the back of my mind. In the tone of her fluttering voice, she’d always

sing-mutter to herself, *And now the cold water, because for some reason coffee's always better with the cold.* A coffee pot lullaby for no one in particular. And I felt myself walk through the same steps she would take. Swish the water around to make the coffee pot into a small whirlpool, hold up the spinning water to inspect it, dump out a smidge, pour a long stream of water into the coffee machine and raise my hand higher and higher so that the stream grew longer as the pot grew emptier. *Always better with the cold,* I repeated in my head.

I waited for the full pot to brew before I went back down stairs.

The bike sat on the front porch, impatient for us to set off on our voyage through the snow. The whole thing had been spray-painted black, but Adam had added a lightning bolt, made out of gold duct tape, to the side of the fuel tank that sat between the handlebars and the seat.

I stumbled through the door with my arms full of the skis, our boots, and miscellaneous articles of winter clothing. I always got stuck with ski duty. As I had delivered the gear to the desired location, I let all of it drop from my arms and the skis clattered left and right around the snow bike.

"Aaaaaaaaam," I called through the front door. "Let's. Go!"

I slammed the door a couple times for emphasis. He came running in from the kitchen with two mugs of hot chocolate spilling over the edges and his Indiana Jones hat on.

"You're the one I've been waiting on all morning," he said.

He handed me the hot chocolates and grabbed a sled from the side of the porch. After placing it in the snow, he ran back up to lug the snow bike down the steps and placed the back tread on top of the sled.

"Aren't you gonna ride it over?"

"And leave you to find your way over on your own?" He twisted his face in mock consideration. "Puh-leassssse."

The walk over to Hamlin Park was only about half a mile,

but it took a lot longer when I would drop a ski or a glove every half block or so and Adam had to slide the snowbike along at a pretty slow pace. To keep to the snow, we walked down the middle of the street.

“You know that part where their faces melt off in Indiana Jones?” I said.

“Yeah I guess.”

“You think that we could make that happen if we got going fast enough?”

Adam squinted at the bike.

“Well, she probably only goes about thirty max, but maybe if we had a better engine.”

“That would be wild.” I imagined the skin peeling back from my eyes as Adam drove an out-of-control snow bike down a hill. “Oh, or if we had a tunnel with like a huge boulder that rolled down it? And we had to drive fast enough to escape?” I said.

“Or if we made a snowball and let it roll down the hill behind us.” My eyes widened.

“Oh my God, it would get bigger as it got closer to us,” I said, suddenly realizing the magnitude of our discovery. Adam laughed and downed the rest of his hot chocolate.

“Yeah that just might work.” He put the empty mug into his backpack. “Just might.”

We walked in silence for a moment, letting the sound of melting globs of snow falling from the occasional roof fill the air. They all plopped when they hit the ground.

“I know we definitely can’t, because we’d have to go so so fast, but if you went like lightspeed, that would definitely mess your face up.”

“You’re an absolute goon—you know that?” Adam pulled my hat down over my eyes and ran ahead, laughing as he dragged the bike bobbing against his side. I chased after him.

I stopped at the bottom of the stairs, wafts of steam drifting off the mugs of coffee in each of my hands. That was always Adam’s job on our outings. Hot chocolate duty. There were

still a couple sniffles coming from up ahead, and I looked around to see how I could kill a few more minutes. My eyes stopped on the door to my right. That box was probably still down here. With no convenient ledges around, I placed both mugs on the ground and opened the door. Half opaque plastic boxes lined the room in neat rows. Books, insurance files, old art supplies, assorted business cards, or anything else we'd tucked away. I scanned the room for an old shoebox but didn't see it.

"Adam," I called, "come and give me a hand."

He'd cleaned up his tears by the time he reached the storage room, but his eyes were still freshly pink. Overall, he seemed to have sobered up a little. In each hand he was holding one of the mugs I'd left in the hallway.

"Yeah?"

"Do you see a shoebox in here anywhere?"

He began to circle the stacks of crates. He didn't ask what for, and maybe he didn't have the will to at that moment. After a couple minutes of searching, he found it nestled behind a filing cabinet. The cardboard had faded and was less rigid. I popped off the top and threw the lid on top of one of the boxes. Inside were neat stacks of rubber banded photographs.

"Are those Dad's?" he said. I nodded.

As he peered into the box, Adam's eyes seemed to glow. I handed it to him and he took it lightly, as though he was being handed a baby. He sat down in the corner on a stool and I walked over to the opposite corner where the old rocking chair was sitting. Adam began to flip through the photos of the stack and then froze.

"I can't believe it." He pulled out a photo from the middle and set the rest of the photos down on the floor. "The snow bike."

My brother stared at the picture for a long time. He held it up to the dim light of the lamp as if it would allow him to see what was hidden beneath the picture, like an x-ray would.

Adam pulled me through a long turn around a patch of trees. Ahead, I could see him mounted on the snow bike, brown hat jammed down on top of his head. I gripped the end of the

rope tied to the back of the snow bike and leaned away from the pull of the turn to stay upright. I held out my tongue to catch falling snowflakes on it and then let out a loud holler. Adam began to climb a gradual hill up ahead and I leaned back and looked around the park as we zoomed up the hill. Matching houses lined either side of the thin park. They all had the same high-pointed roofs and looked out at us from their huddles. The park itself was wide open, and we made the first marks on the snow as we circled it in wide loops. I looked back towards Adam. He had just reached the top of the hill and he yelled back to me.

“Ready?”

I gave a whoop in response. Adam narrowly turned at the top of the hill and then rocketed back down the way we had come. There was a second when I had begun to slow down and it felt almost space-like: I was just floating around, but then the rope snapped tight and jerked me fully around. I felt like my body was being ripped out of its place, but I managed to hold onto the rope and began screaming the *Indiana Jones* theme song as I chased after Adam. The snow and wind swept up into my face and muffled the roar of the engine ahead of me. I heard a faint voice over the wind singing in reply, *Dun da dut daaaaaaa*.

He had nearly made it to the bottom of the hill where we had built a small jump in the snow.

“Launch launch launch!” I chanted as Adam zipped me towards the jump. He pulled on the gas—really gunned it—and I flew off the ramp and into the air. I felt my gut lurch at the feeling of being airborne and I flailed, unbalanced and leaning too far forward. The tips of the skis dug into the snow at 90 degree angles and I kept going until my face hit the hard-packed snow on the other side of the jump. My ski-bound feet were arched up behind me like a paratrooper who had gotten stuck in free fall position, and my nose began to throb. I rolled over quickly onto my side so that I could grab it with my hands. Hot blood was already pooling from it and crimson smeared all over my hands as I tried to stop the bleeding.

Adam came running into my vision out of nowhere and slid down onto his knees next to me. I felt his arms force themselves underneath my back and lift. He dragged me onto his

lap, whispering, "I've got ya, I've got ya."

It sounded funny to me. *Gotya gotya gotya*, I repeated in my head.

"Hey-hey, look at me."

He craned up my head to face him. He took off his gloves and I felt the warm brush of his fingers as he pulled up my eyelids. Adam's face hazily hovered above my own, eyebrows knit into concern. After looking into my eyes, he let his drop and said, "Okay, now close your eyes." My head felt like I was spinning around one of those merry-go-rounds on a jungle gym. I imagined my face melting off. Imagined Indiana Jones himself screaming, "Don't look at it! Don't look!" as the Ark of the Covenant melted all the Nazis around us. His hand was still resting over my eyes.

"Okay, open." It was still Adam, although if I squinted, he looked just like Indiana with his hat.

"Ohhh, thank God. Mom would have killed me." Adam said.

He wrapped his arms over me and sagged on top of me. I felt a laugh bubble up from the bottom of my stomach, pushed up by the weight of him laying on me. It stole my breath away and fizzed through me.

"I can't breathe," I said, barely getting it out between laughs. Adam couldn't help but join in. He rolled over on his side and we laid in the snow, laughing and rolling around and getting snow in between all the cracks in our clothes.

Adam finally let go of the picture. Spun it out of his hands and let it swing down in a couple swoops like a fall leaf knowing it had reached its time to drop. It lay on the dusty ground. We laid there in the dust, smiling in a winter day and unable to see past what was right in front of us. I stood up, let the rocking chair fall back into pendulum swoops, then walked over to the photo. Stooping over, I picked it up and then tucked it back into the rubber-banded stack. While I wasn't looking at Adam now, I could feel the weight in the air around him.

"Man, always fixing me up after all the hell I raised," I said as I turned towards him. He nodded but didn't look at me.

“Used to, at least.”

I wanted to tell him no, to tell him that he’s wrong and that of course he still did, but neither of us were in a mood for make-believe. But I couldn’t leave it at that.

“That’s not true, you’ve been there for the kids.”

“There for?” He laughed. “I don’t even know how to talk to them. And that’s the thing. Parents always talk about it like their kids are the problem making it hard to talk, but it’s not. It’s me.”

He looked at me then, focused on my eyes. “Even with you. I just always thought that I’d be the one to protect you. Like that was my role. I don’t know what your role was, but mine was to protect you.”

And I thought about how unfair it was for him to be here. For all the spirit he’d had in him, life had not treated Adam the way it should. It was reckless with him. Careless. It had played with him too hard and too fast like an unaware child with a toy it would soon discard.

I walked up to him, so small and deflated on that stool. Resting a hand on his shoulder, I knelt down next to him.

“You have been trying so hard to force yourself into something that you’re not. You’re not an action hero. The people around you are not in need of saving.” He began to lace his fingers together and then one by one pull each finger out of the hold.

“But they need you, Adam. Not anyone else.” I reached up and encircled him in my arms. “I’ve gotcha, I’ve gotcha.”

Adam did not move. He remained frozen as I squeezed him, but softly, ever so softly, he began to melt.

The sun had turned to an ember orange by the time we lugged up the steps to our house. Even the snow bike looked exhausted, handlebars nodding to the side in hope of sleep. Our dad was waiting on the porch and saw the haggard travelers before him. Me, smiling through my bloodied face and decked down in his coat. Adam, hat proudly in place. Adam had quickly explained that we were fine, that accidents happen, and that sometimes you gotta take a punch or two. Dad chuckled, shook his head and ran inside. *This is too good*, he had said.

He came back out with his film camera and told us to pose with the bike in front of us. Adam wrapped an arm around my shoulders and pulled me in close to him. I wrapped my arm around his back and we both held onto each other as brothers should. We smiled and the camera clicked once, stopping that moment, and casting us in bronze.

Peter Jonas

Hermit Crab

Gurian Poetry Honorable Mention Recipient

I had not thought Death to be a beggar.
Yet, he fluttered to me
in the brine of the Scottish coast.
He'd been a good loose tooth to me,
His small insistent tapping
On the roof of my mouth,
His fossils washed up on my shores.
But I had seen him naked,
Stripped of scythe and skull,
So feeble for all his talk of flames.
Pink and wrinkly
He dragged his pulp
Over grit and too smooth stones.
I could not stand
To be a witness of him.
I found Death a new shell
Made of one way glass
And I think I like him better in his skeleton.



Abigail Kirsten

Pioneer Peak

Bridget Foster

Lament of a Cuticle

The way you are, you hang to me with might,
The means to say goodbye remains one bite.
I did not try to drive you to this point,
Your heart, my skin, I've pulled, I've torn past joint.
Upon my hand we once were one, now split in two
We live. The space between stays red and blue.
I wait and wait for you to fall away.
Instead you choose to cause me pain and stay.
The graphic truth of flesh once fresh now dead,
Inflicts a sort of madness in my head.
Despite my hate for you I know it's not
Your fault. A painful fate for me I bought.
How can I feel such epidemic guilt?
Our bond so strong again will be rebuilt.

Sarah Kersey

Medusa, Experiencing Activist Burnout

Gurian Poetry Honorable Mention Recipient

I once learned that snakes don't have eyelids.
I think that's why the mythmakers chose
these beasts for me. Unable to stop seeing
the muddy hands of calloused and unwanted
men perform pirouettes in sacred spaces,
I am damned with remembrance.

There was a time in antiquity when I rioted
with others crumbled by fate, cut men
into effigies of rock and fire, looked the gods
in the face and spit on their thrones. I drained
myself of venom only to discover oceans
of power aren't phased by pebbles or sparks.

I braid my hair into serpents these days,
pinning back the parts of me that bite
with black bows. I do not want to use
the evil they forced upon me. I am
too tired of the fruitlessness of my own
rage to unleash the hell I hold.

Some nights, when it's just myself and the mirror,
I unravel. I let the animals hiss, dance, snap
at one another. They search the room for men
to strip of beating hearts, to turn to stone.

contributors //

Garrick Bateman is a first-year student at Gonzaga University from Fort Collins, Colorado. He is studying English and Environmental Studies. He looks forward to three more years of writing at GU.

Brett Bean is an English Major with Theatre Arts Minor, who spends most of his time at Gonzaga acting, writing, and taking pictures.

Sophia Bohley is a Psychology and French double major from Portland, Oregon. She enjoys spending time in nature and painting landscapes.

Kaylee Bosse is a senior English Writing and Dance Pedagogy double major in the Honors Program. She loves to share her experiences on her blog, Big World, Tiny Dancer, which can be found at bigworldtinydancer.com, as @bigworldtinydancer on Instagram, and as Big World, Tiny Dancer on Facebook.

Alyssa Cink is a senior English major with a writing concentration, minoring in Spanish and journalism. In her free time, she enjoys swimming, listening to the Beatles, and dreaming about her future corgi.

Brianna Covert is a first-year college student at Gonzaga University pursuing an English major and a Fine Arts minor. In her free time she enjoys reading, writing and drawing. She has a fascination with the connections between and among people. Brianna uses her art and writing to explore the human condition.

Maya Coseo is from Portland, Oregon. She is a senior majoring in English (with a Creative Writing Emphasis) and minoring in Spanish. She discovered her passion for writing in high school after one of her poems was published in a student anthology.

After graduating, she hopes to write professionally.

Myonne Davis-Nicholson is a junior Biochemistry major and Communications minor. Life is hard, but writing makes it a little easier.

M. (Matthew) Dobner is a Junior studying International Relations, with minors in English and Spanish. He has passions for writing poetry and watching and critiquing movies, along with traveling to new places. In the future, Matthew hopes to enjoy a job secure from replacement by artificial intelligence, all the while maintaining his creative interests. Additionally, during the winter months, Matthew can be found skiing the slopes of the Selkirk Mountains.

Evelyn Elston is an author of poetry, short stories, and one act plays. They were raised in Beaverton, OR before moving to Spokane, WA in 2018 to attend Gonzaga University as a full time student of accounting and writing. “Daytime and the In-betweens” is dedicated to Charlotte Tavernise. You can find more of their work on Instagram under the username @evelyn_types.

Nora El Naby is a sophomore studying Computer Science, and is from Seattle, WA. She started writing when she was 12, when she bought a notebook one day and decided that she was going to be a writer. Though unpublished, she has written countless stories since then.

Bridget Foster is a senior Art and English major at GU. She enjoys creating things.

Andy Frank is from Denver, Colorado. He was initially a Business major until his sophomore year when he realized his passion for writing should be what he was studying, and switched majors to English with a writing concentration.

Isabel Frohnhofner is a senior English writing and technical Theatre

major. She is passionate about supporting the production of new work from marginalized or underrepresented communities in order to foster more empathy in the community. She enjoys long books and true crime podcasts.

Kaitlyn Johnson was raised on San Juan Island, in the northwestern corner of Washington State. She will graduate in the class of 2020 with a degree in English.

Peter Jonas is a Sophomore English Major from Denver. He has recently been reintroduced to poetry through a college course and is excited to keep developing his own work. He loves his dog, the mountains, books, film, and, of course, writing out all his feels.

Judge Thomas Kearns is a Psychology and Communication Studies double major and Poetry Editor of *Reflection*. He loves writing and conducting research.

Luke Kenneally is a photographer working mostly in street and landscape photography as well as photojournalism.

Sarah Kersey is an English major with a writing concentration, minoring in WGST. She dreams of becoming a great chef, despite being a rat in a definitely rodent-phobic profession. She moves to Paris to follow her dream, and with the help of hapless garbage boy Linguini, she puts her culinary skills to the test in the kitchen but she has to stay in hiding at the same time, with hilarious consequences. Her life story gets a well-deserved 96% on Rotten Tomatoes, proving it to be superior to Stuart Little's.

Abigail Kirsten is an Art and Math double major from Sammamish, WA. When she isn't frolicking in nature or painting her next masterpiece, Abigail is spending time with her loved ones, hanging around downtown Spokane, or even sipping on a drink and chillin' at the Baby Bar.

Alex Lee, originally from the East Coast, is a senior from the Bay Area studying Accounting. Traveling has influenced him and his work. Much of his work has been inspired by traveling and finding new perspectives. The majority of his work is oil on canvas. He has been painting for 8 years and will continue after he graduates as he begins working in San Francisco this coming fall.

Sophia Maggio is a senior and the editor of *Reflection*. She studies Psychology and Art with a minor in Leadership Studies. Sophia lives in the Yam Haus on Nora Ave and loves thrift shopping in and around Spokane. She also holds a deep love for Pop-Tarts, the Student Media coupon book, and painting, especially while listening to podcasts: most likely the Moth, Criminal, or Call Your Girlfriend.

Natalie Marssdorf is a first-year student at Gonzaga University from Portland, Oregon and is double majoring in English and Music, her two passions in life. She loves to write creatively on the side and hopes to bring this joy of writing into her time here as an English major.

Arcelia Martin is a senior studying Journalism, English Writing and Political Science. She has held numerous positions at *The Gonzaga Bulletin* over the past four years, most recently serving as the newspaper's Editor-in-Chief. When she's not reporting, she enjoys reading fiction, feeding her friends, and spending time outdoors.

kristy maría montoya is a first-generation Mexican American woman from Pasco, Washington. She does and says and writes, according to her family, *lo que le da la gana* (whatever she wants).

Sarah McCarthy is an English Major from Bend, Oregon. She is a lover of bread. She hates raisins. She hates when people think it's okay to put raisins on doughnuts. Bacon on doughnuts, however, is ingenious.

Anna Sherwood has a cat named Zeke and he is a perfect boy.

Rachel Simmons is a Psychology major at Gonzaga. She grew up in the Boston area but has also lived in New Hampshire, Seattle, and now Spokane. She has a passion for all things related to art and the environment, so she combined the two!

Chelsie Sunde is an artist and photographer who is proud to call Spokane her hometown. She is currently a junior at Gonzaga University pursuing a degree in Fine Art and Criminal Justice. Some of her favorite things are church, coffee, and a good political debate. You can purchase her art and learn more about her at chelsiesunde.com.

“Jax” Jacqueline Viteznik is an English major with a writing concentration and International Relations major. She was born and raised in Portland, OR, where her love of writing grew from days spent at the infamous bookstore. Jax now makes a point to visit famous bookstores around the world to fuel her creativity.

Kylie Urbanek is a Biology student at GU.

Morgan Wald’s talent for art began when she was just a toddler with a “Magna Doodle”. Her mother still tells stories of drawings that were too good to erase. As she got older, her artistic journey grew through her love of comic books. As the daughter of an Air Force pilot, Morgan seldom lived in the same place for more than a couple of years at a time. When meeting new people was difficult, she found herself getting lost in her comic books, and soon began drawing the images from those books. Comics continue to influence Morgan’s work today. Most of her work is black-and-white ink illustrations, heavily influenced by Japanese Manga in an American comic book style. Morgan is currently a Junior at Gonzaga University, and calls Tacoma, WA home.

Alex Weaver studies computer science and used to be allergic to gluten.

Poetry. Prose. Visual Art.

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