

Glass Mountain is a literary journal edited by undergraduate students at the University of Houston. Dedicated to showcasing the work from undergraduate and emerging artists around the world, *Glass Mountain* publishes issues each Fall and Spring.

Submission guidelines can be found at www.glassmountainmag.com/submit

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glass mountain

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

What an impersonal salutation to such a cherished group of people! As I look through the pieces selected for inclusion in this issue, I imagine the finished volume in the hands of our readers. This issue began, like every issue, as floods of submissions. Staff members pored over each poem, piece of art, review, or prose. Selections made, each piece is assembled into a whole, until the finished product truly represents art itself, in mixed media. Imagining it now, in the hands of you, our readers, is to imagine a handcrafted gift, a piece of art, in the hands of the person for whom the piece was intended. This issue was crafted for you, bringing you the very best that we had--you are not generic "readers," you are the very reason that this issue exists!

And yet this issue represents so much more than this specific volume. As we have moved forward with the production of this issue, we have seen *Glass Mountain* grow and develop as an organization. Now approaching our tenth birthday, we have seen dynamic change occurring at a breakneck pace. *Glass Mountain* began as an undergraduate literary magazine, and this will continue to be our primary focus, but awareness of the magazine has spread, both at the University of Houston and worldwide. *Glass Mountain* is unique in that we only accept submissions from emerging artists, those writers who have not attended an MFA program. Often these writers and artists labor alone, without the support of a writing community. One of the ways that we have addressed this lack of support, is by hosting the yearly Boldface Conference for Emerging Writers. This focus on community has only continued to spread, with expanded readings and involvement in local literary events. Seeking to expand our support to the undergraduate writers here at the University of Houston, we have developed monthly lunches with craft talks. We are working to branch out

and network with other arts organizations on and off campus. However we are aware that our reach is not limited to Houston. Attendees to Boldface arrive from one end of the country to the other. Submissions to the magazine also arrive from nations around the world, this very issue contains pieces from not only the United States, but also Colombia, and Russia, and Canada. Mindful of the capability of linking with readers and writers around the world electronically, an online version of the magazine is in the works. This online presence will not be identical to print versions such as the one that you now hold in your hand--it will tap into the flexibility of the internet, with podcasts and videos, extending the scope of the art that we are able to bring to the public. Most importantly, these developments will help us strengthen the community of the emerging writer, bringing together both undergraduate writers locally, and those laboring away over their work in far-flung regions of the world. We will be bringing community to those who need it most, those of us who are just beginning to develop and refine our art.

This, to me, is the most exciting part of being editor of *Glass Mountain*, the creating of community. Whether you participate in this community by reading the work in this issue, brought together in one cohesive piece from many disparate parts, or by finding us at an art festival, or even online, you are becoming a vital part of what we do, and why we do it. Which is why "Dear Readers" does not even begin to express how valuable you are to those of us who work to bring you this issue. You are not just "readers," you are community.

Welcome to the family.

LeeAnne Carlson
Editor, *Glass Mountain*

To our communities of writers and artists wherever they are found.

— The Editors

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If a Confession Falls and No One is Around to Hear it, Does it Still Make a Sin?

Merideth Melville

The drills happened every Wednesday night—up at St. Francis de Chantal. The earthly saints, bound in black and white, snapped the whip as we recited our catechism lessons, instructions and protocol—beating and berating us with the seriousness of it all. Our First Holy Communion.

As part of this religious rite of passage, we had to prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (as they call it now). Back then, we just called it “going to confession.” And it was up to me to come up with mine. I worked on it for months. How far back did I go? Did I start big and work my way down? Or inch my way up to my worst transgressions? Should I include all of them or save some for later? What if they were too bad? What if they were too good? What if I didn’t have enough? What if I had too many? The saints never told us how long a confession should be.

I panicked, realizing I didn’t know what the hell I was doing. I only knew I was eight years old and had my whole confessional life ahead me, as long as I got this first one right.

I ran through the Ten Holy Commandments, looking for ways I could have screwed up:

1. I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange Gods before me.

No problem; I could barely handle the one I was dealing with already.

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in Vain.

God no, not in my parent’s house.

3. Remember to Keep the Lord’s Day Holy.

The only way I’d get to miss Sunday mass was if I were dying...maybe dead.

4. Honor your Father and Mother.

Yep, couldn’t cross Mommy or Daddy.

5. You shall not kill.

Everyone knew that.

6. You shall not commit adultery.

What was adultery?

7. You shall not steal.

Now, here was a confession waiting to happen. I stashed it in my back pocket for later use.

8. You shall not bear false witnesses against your neighbor. False what?

9. You shall not desire your neighbor’s wife.

Does this mean I couldn’t be friends with Mrs. McKenna next door?

10. You shall not desire your neighbor’s goods.

What about my sister’s ice skates?

Unlike my two oldest sisters, I escaped going to Catholic School. My dad eventually took them out, claiming the nuns were “no better than the Nazis” after my oldest sister

told him that, after some minor transgression, she had to keep her arms up in the air as punishment.

Mom converted—or, as she liked to say, was “tricked” into becoming a Catholic, surrendering her Baptist religion. She’d heard them say she HAD to become Catholic in order to have her children baptized in the Catholic Church, but later was told it was an OPTION, really. This irked her, but I think she was happy to ditch the dour Baptists and their rules...no dating, no dancing, no drinking. She quickly embraced Catholicism, eventually surpassing my father’s earlier altar boy dedication to the religion.

Compared with the Texas Southern Baptists on my mother’s side, the New York Catholics on my father’s side must have looked positively medieval—what with all the kneeling, sitting, standing, signing of the cross, blessing the room with holy water, incense burning, consuming Jesus’ blood and body and all those damn blessed sacraments. But at the end of the week after church was over, at least the Catholic contingency could wash away whatever sins Jesus couldn’t, with a big pitcher of whiskey sours, while dancing to Al Hibbler belting out “When the Lights Go Down Low.”

Every Sunday, the whole “fam damnly,” as my dad liked to put it, piled into our (non-air conditioned, non-seat belted) red station wagon and headed to St. Francis, where the seven of us took over an entire pew. For an hour we listened to prayers and sermons, mostly delivered in Latin, which none of us understood.

It’s the Catholic version of the old Jewish joke: “the Rabbi

told me the meaning of life. Unfortunately, I don’t understand Yiddish.”

We’d arrive in our finest outfits—hats, gloves, coats, and black or white (depending on the season) patent leather shoes. On the occasion that Dad would go unshaven in his grungy “weekend work” clothes, Mom would sit as far away from him as possible, lest people think they were together. Sometimes when the money plate was passed around, Dad would drop in a twenty and then take back some change. This really drove my mother nuts and they’d have a big fight on the way home.

Fasting for hours before mass meant that instead of praying to Jesus up on the cross, counting on him to make me a better person, I was praying for mass to end, so I could get home to my dad’s Sunday breakfast of bacon, fried eggs and rye toast.

I was hungry, sure, but less in my soul than any Catholic had a right to be.

All this practice finally led up to the eve of my First Holy Communion where I’d have to make my first confession. I entered the dark, quiet church. There a little early, I knelt at the altar, pulled a wood stick from the sand, lit a new candle and prayed. I practiced the confession in my head, asking God not to let me down. Then I took my place with the rest of the kids, all lined up on either side of the confessional box, to wait my turn.

I kept my eyes on the deeply hued purple curtains on either

side of this box (where the Priest lay in wait), watching one kid exit and the next one enter. And like a lamb to the slaughter, I moved from number fifteen, to ten, to five, to two, to one.

I pushed aside the heavy curtain and stepped into the center of a small box. It was dark inside and I heard someone murmuring. The room was so small, that I was able to feel all three walls and the curtain when turning around in a circle. I made my way to the back and knelt on the cold stone floor, my nose barely touching the wall. I nervously began: "Bless me father for I have sinned. This is my first confession..."

Somehow I managed to get through the whole thing... mother, father, sisters, teachers, friends, strangers. All the indiscretions I'd made. The times I'd talked back. An unkind word I'd said. A chore I'd left undone. A thought I'd had.

I finished and waited. My knees hurt on the hard floor and I could feel my hot breath bouncing off the wall. Nothing happened. Was anyone there? Where was my absolution? When did I recite the Act of Contrition? Was he going to give me a couple of Hail Marys for my penance and throw in some Our Fathers for good measure? Oh Jesus, were the sins I'd confessed to so awful that the priest wouldn't even respond?

I heard the slide of a small window opening up and looked over my right shoulder. A sliver of light shined on the stone floor and there, finally able to see, I noticed the cushioned kneeler underneath. Above it, a rail with room enough for elbows to sit upon, hands clasped in prayer. In shadowy profile behind the small screen, the priest began with the

sign of the cross and whispered:

"Bless you, child. How long has it been since your last confession?"

Mortified at having confessed to a wall, I made a break through the velvet curtain and lost myself in the deadly, darkly silent, stained glass window-paned church.



To Be Half & Half

Brooke Lightfoot

I like to pick scabs, not
fights. I'd rather work with you, weaved
like the thatched seat wicker chairs. I'll be the columns,
you'll be the rows, interlaced like knobby knuckles
of hands clasped; which is to say,
thread your body on my spool.

Let's tan bear skin rugs
people will place too close to fires
before making love upon. We'll leave the heads,
taxidermied maws housing silent screams.
Let's hope sparks warm bare cheeks, slaps, brute grunts.

My dreams have me bedridden, have my heart
humming like a bird, where my needle-nose beak
suckles her blossom, seducing me to lie
longer. Waking life has yet to counteroffer.

If I were an egg, I wouldn't be Fabergé,
but the broken kind made for omelets—I've been told
this is necessary—in any case, whisk yourself
into me; become as irretrievably part of me
as milk & heavy cream.

Squeeze me between your knees, strum my neck
whose strings go on for days. Make me vibrato
under your trembling hand. Play the music
babies are made to. I want to be plucked
until your fingers hurt.

Meanwhile, a casserole grows cold
in the country of my body. I marathon RomComs on Netflix.
My Xbox controller blinks green warnings,
daring me to decide which toy deserves the last AAs.
Even the washer sounds like it's about to climax.

The Trees Were Calling Your Name

Diantha Sneed

It was 1957 and Americans were prospering—this included a Greek immigrant. James Dimitri Pappas was a solitary man even though he lived with a wife and a son. Each day he woke up at five a.m. without an alarm. His daily routine was ingrained in his being, and he never wavered from it. Up and into the shower, shave all hair: face, neck, chest and head.

As he entered the small kitchen he noted that the black and white linoleum tile was impeccably clean – far different from the dirt floors of his childhood. Despina excelled at keeping house. The kitchen had the warm fragrance of many meals cooked with rich meats, onions, and garlic. He opened the full refrigerator and took out a bowl of home-made yogurt. This was wealth: a clean house and a full refrigerator. Putting on his circular, metal-rimmed glasses, he would read the paper and then leave the house before sunrise, walking to work.

As James left the house, the chilly, fall air was thick. His glasses fogged up. Taking out a clean handkerchief, he wiped them dry. He could only see a few steps in front of him, although he could take this walk blindfolded. The street where he lived was lined with narrow, two story row houses butting right up to the sidewalk. Through the years he had purchased all but three of the twelve houses on the block. The investment was one thing, but it was also a way to provide housing for other Greeks. He charged a reasonable rent, and he ensured that his properties were exceptionally well maintained.

Within ten minutes he arrived at his restaurant, and he

unlocked the door. The familiar smell of cooking grease and ammonia filled the air. Passing the stove, he wiped his finger across the grill to ensure that it had been cleaned properly. He walked through the kitchen to his small, windowless office and began working.

Typically he did not take matters of family into consideration during work hours, but he kept thinking about his boy, George. Boy? He had grown to six feet tall, and now towered over James. He was eighteen years old, and no longer a boy.

He thought back to the days when his boy was small and moldable. He made a practice of telling him stories about their Greek heritage through the ancient myths and some history. Even at the end of a long workday, he always made time for this.

“You have the strength of Sparta and the beauty of Athens. This is what you are made of. This is who you are. You can always have confidence in who you are because you have a heritage filled with strength.”

“Pop, I want to know more - tell me about the Trojan Horse again...what about Achilles? Am I like him?”

The curiosity and enthusiasm from this small boy moved James. He had once been like this boy - filled with the visions of the ancient heroes, and he believed that they were his ancestors - the very same blood flowing through his veins.

He patted the boy's head.

"I will tell you more tomorrow night. Close the light and go to sleep."

A knock on the door jolted James back into the moment. It was Morty, the kitchen manager.

"Boss, we are running low on pickles and hot sauce, should I put in an early order?"

"Yes, yes do it. And make sure you check the other condiments. It costs extra money every time we add an order."

"Sure, Boss. Is George playing tomorrow tonight? That kid's a star. Are you going the game?"

"I never go to the games," James answered abruptly, clearly not wanting to continue with the subject. "Place the order."

Morty shut the door. James tried to concentrate on the spreadsheet in front of him, but his thoughts kept drifting back to George.

James had worked since he was seven years old. It was to be different for his son. His boy was given summers at the Jersey shore while James stayed back and worked. Greek lessons, violin lessons, and an opportunity for a good education—these were all a part of this boy's life. He grew quickly.

He laughed to himself thinking of the many occasions that

his son would come to visit him at the restaurant.

"Hi Pop!"

"My Boy, come here!" He would hug him and kiss him on the lips in front of everyone. It was an old world custom that became a new world embarrassment.

"Pop, do you have to kiss me on the lips in front of everyone?"

"You are my son, I am proud of you."

"But what will people think?"

"I don't care what people think."

It was true, James thought. He did not care what people thought of him inside his restaurant, but it was different in the outer world.

James had decided to enroll George in the prestigious high school in the affluent neighborhood of Swarthmore. As he walked with George down the long corridor looking for the main office, his dress shoes clapped loudly. A tall slender man came out of a classroom. A look of suspicion crossed his face as he quickly glanced up and down at James who was dressed in a full suit and a hat in the middle of August.

"Can I help you?"

"I am here to sign my son into school." He could feel

George shifting with discomfort at the sound of his broken English.

“I’m sorry? What?”

“My son—George—here. I want to sign him in.”

“Oh, you mean for registration?”

“Yes.”

“It’s in the gym. I’ll show you.”

He and George stood in the line to register. This reminded him of the day he arrived in New York City. Waiting in the long immigration lines, he watched the officers as each new arrival approached them. They were the judges who determined who could pass through to a new life.

Standing in this line, he became aware of the other parents and students staring at him, but politely turning away when he looked back. They all seemed to know each other and were talking about summer activities: golf, the club, and vacations.

These people were multi-generational Americans who were doctors, lawyers and highly educated businessmen. They lived in two-story, stone houses with full lawns and gardens. They employed gardeners and housekeepers, and ate their meals in formal dining rooms—never in the kitchen.

James knew his success and power were limited to Chester.

There he was a rich man, a respected politician, and the head of his household. Although it was only a twenty-minute drive away, Swarthmore was another world.

It wasn’t long into the school year that George expressed a desire to play football. James hated football, and did not want George to play. He thought the sport was a mindless and stupid game. But George did not regard his opinion in this matter.

After a particularly long workday, James came home. George and Despina were already eating at the kitchen table in the middle of a tense conversation. James took off his coat and hat and sat down at his place. Despina looked worn down.

“James, tell him, tell him that you forbid it!”

“Forbid what? What are you talking about?”

“Pop, I am going to play football. The coach wants to try me out as fullback, and I want to do it.”

“I have been telling him that I am against and you are against, but his mind is set.”

James put his hand up, and Despina knew she had said enough.

“Football is for animals. You are better than that.”

“But, Pop, I’m good at it and it’s fun. I want to play. Plus the coach says I could be eligible for college scholarships

from places all over the county.”

“You could get hurt, and then no one will want you.”

“Pop, I am going to play.”

He looked at George. This boy was telling—not asking.

There was a long pause.

“You are going to have to make your own decisions. When I was your age I was working and on my own, and you are old enough to decide. It’s up to you. I am going to bed.”

Despina was left to clean the kitchen.

Although he allowed George to play football, James refused to go to any games. The violence of the game, and the fear of George getting hurt made it impossible for him to watch. This fear was deep inside him. James knew all too well what it was like to lose loved ones. His parents had died when he was a young boy. He had lived and worked in a village, just off of the coast of Turkey until he had to flee on foot with his older cousin after the Turkish invasion. The Turkish soldiers went from house to house, killing men, women and children – sometimes with one shot and other times through ruthless torture. He had seen enough violence for a lifetime. He wanted no part of football.

James realized that George’s school success was deeply connected to football. He was known throughout the community as “The Golden Greek,” leading his team through two undefeated seasons. Now in his senior year, George was

getting offers from around the country for college scholarships to play football: Duke, Stanford, Penn State. He was a star in this world that was so far away from Chester and James Pappas. And soon he would be leaving home.

Suddenly the phone rang.

“Hello.”

“Mr. Pappas? This is Millard Robinson, the Swarthmore football coach. I am calling you to invite you to the game this week. “

“I do not go to the games.”

“I understand, Sir, but this is a special one. We honor the seniors, and George has been such an important part of the team, I thought it would mean a lot if...”

“I do not go to football games.”

With that he hung up the phone. James looked at his watch and realized it was late. He locked up the restaurant headed for home.

The kitchen table was set for three people. In the center of the table were the staples: stuffed grape leaves, feta and olives. The small house was filled with the aroma of tonight’s roasting lamb and potatoes. Despina prepared the dinner while James read the paper in the living room. James heard George come into the kitchen.

“George, take off your dirty shoes and leave them outside. There is grass and mud all over them—go, go!”

“Ok, Ma, I’m going!” George walked out the door backwards, laughing.

James appreciated Despina’s commitment to cleanliness – especially in the kitchen. George passed through the living room, barefooted, and took his dirty clothes and shoes out back.

During dinner, James sat at the head of the small kitchen table and Despina sat at the other end.

“Pop, coach said he called you and invited you to the game tomorrow night.”

“Yes.”

George could tell by the clipped response that his father wanted no part of the conversation, but he couldn’t resist pressing a bit further.

“Well. I know you don’t want to come, but if you do come there is a place for the parents to sit. I just wanted you to know that. Plus, I think you would enjoy seeing me play. You wouldn’t believe it, Pop. It’s like the stories you used to tell me. When I play – I feel the strength of Sparta.”

James looked at George. He knew that George was using his own words to try to convince him to go. He saw part of himself in his eyes and in his tenacity. He saw his boy,

growing into a man. The right kind of man: strong, confident, and persistent. He said none of this to George.

“Enough.”

James left the table and went to his chair to finish reading the evening paper.

He kept thinking about George. He had come so far. His son was getting ready to leave home—the place he had provided for him to grow and flourish. George was going to leave and not look back as he himself had done many years ago.

Yet he did not expect to have these feelings, unexplainable and dark. For many years the house had been filled with the nonstop movement of an active boy. He had watched him grow and develop. Now that George was on the brink of achieving this long hoped for success, a painful, hollow void filled James’ chest, and he did not know how to control it. He put down the paper and went to bed.

The next morning, James was not able to keep his routine. He was up without the alarm as always, but it was because of a sleepless night. He could not get George off of his mind as he tossed and turned. He shaved, but he could not eat. He went to work with an empty stomach, and a pressure in his chest and head.

Throughout the day he was distracted. He pictured the game, his boy, and the crowd.

The crowd.

The crowd was comprised of full-blooded American men, their children and wives.

He saw himself in that crowd.

Different.

Small.

An immigrant wearing a coat and hat, polished leather shoes, speaking broken English. He knew this crowd, and he remembered the days when he had arrived in America with only the shirt on his back. Disconnected and unknown, he walked the crowded streets of New York City and looked at the people who did not see him - his presence of no importance or consequence to anyone. He did not care what people thought of him, but he vowed to make a better life here in America.

Now, in his own world, he was in control. He was the boss. A landlord. He was a success. In this outside world, he was an alien, an outsider, and an intruder. He was not welcome. He avoided this world.

He had never seen George play football and he had never had the desire to do so.

But then he saw his boy, wide brown eyes, sincere respect and love filled those eyes, and he knew that he had to go. He had to leave his domain and venture to see the boy he

loved, play a game he hated, at the end of the season. The boy would have to go to live his life. It was what he had planned, worked for, and he knew that this new season would bring emptiness to him. He felt compelled to go to his son.

He put on his hat and coat and headed to his car.

*

The sun had begun to set when he arrived at the stadium. The lights glared against the dimming sky. The band's percussion pulsed through the air. The stadium was surrounded by trees laden with speakers where the announcer's voice could be heard egging on the crowd's enthusiasm. James paused and looked at the trees. They flanked the perimeter of the stadium and looked as though they were the guardians of a great temple like in the ancient myths.

He parked his car and walked to the gate where he bought his ticket. A small white-haired woman manned the entrance table. He paid for the ticket without a word. As he entered the crowd was full of the people he had imagined. Tall, slender, pale-skinned men in khakis and plaid shirts were sitting with their wives and children. He felt them staring at him, but he did not look back.

He saw the special seating area for the parents of the senior players and walked the other way climbing steep steps to the top row where there were only a few younger children sitting to be away from their parents.

He looked down at the field: red and blue helmets lined up in a combat formation. The ball was thrown to one of the red helmets. Cheers and shouts as the helmet was tackled. The teams lined up again. A red helmet had the ball and broke from the pack. And then he heard a chant from the stands, PAPPAS, PAPPAS. He saw the same red helmet break completely away, running, chased by others, both red and blue. Three or four blue helmets dove to catch the ball carrier, and were now clinging to him as he carried them down the field. The crowd was in a frenzy calling the name again and again. In the highest part of the stadium, the treetops were visible - glistening from the bright lights that surrounded the stadium.

James paused and listened. Cheers—Pappas...Pappas...Pappas. The hollow place in his chest was filled with an outflow of warmth that moved into his throat and his eyes filled with tears. The strength of Sparta, the beauty of Athens; his boy was a hero in this stadium where he himself was a stranger.

*

That night he sat in his chair waiting for George.

He heard the car pull into the drive, and George came in quietly through the back door. He clicked on the kitchen light, unaware of his father's presence in the other room.

“George.”

“Pop, you scared me! What are you doing up?”

George walked into the living room and looked at his father, their eyes met. James swallowed hard. There was no smile, even though the corners of his mouth naturally turned up.

“Even the trees were calling your name.” His voice cracked.

“What?”

“Even the trees were calling your name.”

“You came. I didn't see you.”

James nodded and stood up. He walked over and embraced his son. He held on a little longer and patted his son. He went to bed without a word, preparing himself, as always, for another day's work.

Red and Blue

Victoria Marino

As my friends and I played tag in the recess yard, I felt a tap on my shoulder. A boy from my class named Joey wanted to show me a pretty white butterfly that he had caught near the flowers. I was envious and remembered all the times I had tried unsuccessfully to catch one on my own before. Once, in the yard of my old house, I managed to touch the wings of one as it landed on the splitting wood of our swing set. My mother smiled at my excitement and I told her it was now my butterfly and his name was Butter. She chuckled at that.

My envy soon turned to horror as Joey grinned wide and held the squirming bug up to my face by its white wings. I gasped as he ripped one of the delicate wings off and tossed it to the side. I saw red and immediately pummeled him to the ground. Within seconds, our entire second grade class gathered around as I punched Joey with all my might. I remembered what my father had told me:

Don't tuck your thumbs into your fists. Aim straight and try not close your eyes. Put all your weight into it!

Again and again I swung and hit until someone pulled me off. We were both escorted back to our classroom. Once inside, I was in hysterics. Our teacher rushed over to hug me as I choked out what had me so upset. "It's not dead, he just pulled a wing off!" One boy told her. My teacher's voice raised and her brow furrowed.

"It can't live without both wings!" Joey was quiet and wiped a dot of blood away from his nose. My teacher led me out into the hallway as I cried.

"Am I getting kicked out of school for hitting?" I asked her as she kneeled down to my level and hugged me again.

"No. It's to be expected that you have some anger considering what happened last year. Why don't you just go to the bathroom and calm down while I have a talk with Joey."

I was dumbfounded. Expected? I was sure I had only fought that boy to avenge a butterfly.

*

During the beginning of my childhood, I had hair that nearly touched the floor. My mother would occasionally take me to have it trimmed but only for the split ends. Nobody was able to tame it but her, not even the hairdressers. She had years of practice with her own nearly identical head of dark curls. I enjoyed having her brush it and particularly liked when she ran her long pink nails through my scalp.

After she died, my father and I were left with little inkling of how to handle such thick long hair. Every morning there was a fight as he valiantly tried to get a brush through it as I screamed and cried. I fantasized about short hair that would be easy to manage. He eventually agreed to take me to have it cut.

During a visit to my mother's parents, I let slip my intention of cutting what had become a mop of tangles. "You better not cut her hair, Bob!" My grandmother snapped when my dad arrived to take me home.

“Lisa would have let her cut it if that’s what she wanted. She’s not a doll, Anna—and besides, it’s becoming too much to handle for me right now.”

As time went on, the relationship only became more strained. My father was insistent that my brother and I should still see our grandparents, so he would drop us off at their house a few times a month to spend the night. Every visit, almost without fail, I would immediately be met with comments about my “embarrassing outfits” and “terrible hair.” Apparently a granddaughter with a ponytail and sneakers would send shockwaves throughout all of South Philadelphia. Spending hours surrounded by floral rugs and huge pictures of my mother on her wedding day left me itching for entertainment. I knew how to push buttons. And I was good at it. One especially bad fight occurred after I had just turned nine and told my grandmother that when I grew up, I wanted to be a boxer just like Rocky Balboa. Her red curls bounced as she paced back and forth and yelled about what a sweet normal girl I once was. For a moment I thought she was going to slap me.

That night, I called my dad in tears and he promised he would come and get me. When he arrived, I was sure steam was seconds from exploding out of him. I went outside and put my hands on my ears as he shouted. But even clasped ears could not conceal his words.

“Victoria is not Lisa! You cannot make her Lisa! How about instead of obsessing over what she isn’t, you just appreciate who she is?”

I turned my attention away from the stars and watched as he had to duck under the doorway to avoid hitting his head. He picked me up and took me to the car. “Mommy would have wanted you to be yourself and make your own choices,” he told me as we drove back to our house. “They remember her in a distorted way. They act like she was some sort of perfect angel. She never took shit from anybody. I admired that about her.” I watched cars flash by on the highway and imagined my mother knocking people out who gave her trouble. I remembered how once, while she was driving with me in the backseat, a guy held a soda out his window and it got all over her car. She made him pull over and wipe it off.

“You know when she was in 8th grade she asked them if she could try out for the basketball team and you know what they told her?” my dad asked.

“What?”

He gripped the steering wheel with a little more force than was necessary. “They told her girls don’t play basketball. Isn’t that shitty? She could have been really good.”

“Yeah, that sucks.”

He assured me they weren’t bad people and were just struggling with their loss. “Kids aren’t supposed to go before their parents,” he told me.

Suddenly he took a sharp U-turn. “Shit, I left Nick there by mistake, we have to go back.”

*

While I mopped the McDonald's lobby, Frank called out across the store and asked how much of the closing checklist I had finished. I called back that we only needed to stock for the next day's breakfast shift.

"Why's he always yelling?" an older woman asked me. "Every single time I come in here he's always shouting or carrying on about something." I continued to mop and didn't look up as I answered her.

"That's just how he is. He's actually my favorite person to work with." The woman made a face at me as I wrung out the mop. As soon as I finished in the lobby, a group of teenage boys giggled as they got up, leaving behind a trail of trash in their wake. I looked at Frank in defeat.

"Ok, you little punks do this every single night. If you purposely leave a mess one more time for her to clean up, I'm banning you all from the store!" he told them. They shrugged and left. I heard another customer giggle when I flipped them off. "I'll clean it up," Frank told me as I reached for the broom. "Go finish what you have to do and I'll handle the lobby."

While I stocked the sauces, I managed to drop the entire box. "Better to have loved and lost the barbeque sauces than to never have held them at all," Frank said as I cursed.

"Can we lock up now?" I asked when everything was done. He nodded as he finished counting the drawers and sang

along to the radio off key. For a forty-something year-old man he often would act like a teenager. He had so much body hair that the other employees would tease him, and he was on the shorter side for a man. Still, women his age who came into the store seemed to take a shine to him and would often flirt with him. And while he would reciprocate the flirtation, I still wondered aloud why he would never actually ask them for their phone numbers. He told me women weren't really interested in a divorcee with four kids who worked at a McDonald's.

When we finally locked up, Frank insisted that he wait with me in the parking lot until my dad arrived. "All the drug dealers come out at night," he said as I rolled my eyes. The rain began to pick up and I saw lightning in the distance. When I had started working at the store as a teenager, there were three other girls named Victoria. Frank began calling me by my last name to differentiate us and it stuck even years after the other girls had quit. He could really talk an ear off and tonight was no different. "What happened to your mom? You never say anything about a mom," he asked at one point. I told him she died when I was six years old.

"Oh I feel bad now, my mom's dead too, was it cancer, it's usually cancer," he blurted out the words so fast I could barely keep up.

"No, it wasn't cancer." I considered telling him the whole story but didn't think we had the time. Besides, I loathed having to explain to people that I didn't really know for sure what happened to her. To admit even to myself that I was too afraid to ask.

“My mom wanted me to be a priest,” Frank said as he stared off into the distance. Seconds later, my dad pulled up and thanked Frank for waiting with me.

*

The child therapist had me sit and color far enough away from her and my dad that she must have thought I couldn't hear their conversation, but my father's voice was too loud for me to tune out. He stroked my little brother's hair as he slept on the couch next to him. The therapist advised him to hold my brother back in school because he had been clinging excessively to female figures and teachers. My brother loved to be held by mother and never wanted her to put him down to walk on his own. Now, my father told the woman, he was having trouble making friends at school and was worried that I seemed to shut down whenever he tried to talk to me about my mother. For the first time, I noticed that gray streaks were beginning to appear throughout his once dark hair.

Eventually, I was left alone with the therapist so that I could talk to her. She looked down at what I had colored and cocked an eyebrow. I had been asked to draw a picture of my mother. Instead I colored the entire page blue. Her favorite color.

*

A few years after she died, my father decided I should be the one to hold onto my mother's journals. There were six in total. She intended to have one for each year I (and even-

tually my brother) was alive.

One night, I turned to the last page of the sixth journal thinking it would provide me with a clue to how she died. For quite a while, my father would become emotional at seemingly anything. Even happy movies could leave him running to the bathroom to blow his nose. In the early days after it happened, he would come into my room to try and talk to me but would always end up weeping. Seeing such intensely blue eyes swell up with tears upset me deeply and I would wrap my arms around him and pat his back. On the very bad nights, when his pain turned his entire face bright red, the blue in his eyes would stand with such stark contrast that it would break me every time. He would rock me when it became too much. I liked to pretend to myself that she was coming back one day. That this was all an elaborate prank. Crying only served to remind me that she was gone. I didn't like to do it, but my father and I both seemed to sleep a little better when we faced it together.

I tried not to ask questions about what happened to my mother because I wanted to spare my father hurt if I could. Because of this, I knew only what I had been told. She had collapsed in the middle of the night while I slept and died on the way to the hospital. Going through those journals made me sure I could figure things out on my own but I was not prepared for that last page. In large bold handwriting she had written:

I'm pregnant with baby number three!

My stomach dropped when I read it. I may even have put

my hand over my mouth to stifle a gasp. There would be no baby number three. Just two motherless children. I never turned to that page again.

I tried to put it out of my head for as many years as I could until I had a pregnancy scare at twenty. My boyfriend and I were relieved when it turned out to be nothing but that didn't stop the nightmares from coming. I dreamt of hospital walls and beds. Of waiting rooms filled with broken hearts and doctors with empty stares.

I sat upright in one of those hospital beds and reached out as a nurse (who looked suspiciously like a certain fast food clown) handed me a baby wrapped in pink. I held that baby and was happy. "She's my second chance," I said to no one in particular. But then the dream switched and the girl was about five or six with a head of cascading brown curls. She called out for me but I could not reach her. I tried to get her attention but she couldn't see me. Her father then had to get down on his knees like my father did and tell her that her mother had gone to heaven.

*

"Do you own a fucking clock? You can't just come to work three hours late and expect that to fly!" Frank snapped at a girl who smirked and rolled her eyes. I raised the volume on my headset which beeped every time a car pulled up to the drive-thru order box. Between Frank's yelling and the snickering coming from the other managers and employees, I had to really concentrate to hear orders. At some point, Frank stopped long enough for the girl to gather a response.

"Yeah well, your mom," she said flatly. Things then got so loud that I had to walk out of the order taking box, past the crew room and up to the front of the store to take orders on a different computer.

I rushed people as they ordered so I could get back into the crew room quickly. The two were still going at it when I walked in. Frank looked at me and was silent for a split second before getting his second wind. "And you need to apologize to Marino because Marino's mom is dead too!" The girl said nothing while a different manager wrote her up for being late three days in a row. I grabbed Frank by the arm and dragged him into the stockroom.

"Calm the hell down, Frank, it's ok," I told him. The other manager walked in before Frank could say anything.

"Hey, I tried to call you last night because I couldn't get into the computer, but you didn't answer. You really need to get a cellphone, Frank," he said while tucking the write-up slip into his pocket.

"I don't need a cellphone because I don't have any friends," Frank answered.

A year or so later, and about a month after Frank got switched to a different store, I dialed his number on a whim and hoped he would answer. When he did, I told him that I wanted to come visit him at his new store and see how he was doing. I also let him know there was a Rocky movie marathon being played on TV. He pretended to be busy but talked to me for nearly an hour. When I came to see him,

he told everyone I was his friend from his old store.

*

My mother's nails were always meticulously manicured. I, on the other hand, had begun biting mine by the time I was three. Once, in an attempt to get me to stop chewing them, my parents held out both their hands for me to see. I looked at my mother's perfect nails and my father's chewed and damaged ones. They asked me which ones I would rather have. I would have liked to have had her pretty nails but didn't want to hurt my dad's feelings in the process. I told them that both their nails were nice.

Years later, I found a picture of my mother holding me as a baby. I was glad to see that her nails were in the picture, I had been remembering them correctly after all. I looked at my own hands and then at hers. She had my same brown eyes, the same nose and similar lips but I had always had my father's nails. I slipped the picture into a frame I had found with rusty gold edges.

For a second, as I flipped through more photos, I was sure one picture of my mother on her honeymoon in Hawaii was of me. She sat by a pool with her hair soaking wet smiling in a blue one-piece bathing suit with black trim. Her smile wasn't wide but it was genuine and showed just glimpse of white teeth. I noticed that one tooth had a little chip in it similar to the two teeth I had cracked on my bottom row. Although I doubted she damaged hers by biting a rock on a dare the way I had. Her olive skin was a touch darker than mine but we both had nearly identical round dark

eyes. With my glasses off and my own hair wet and down, I could have been mistaken for the woman in that picture.

*

My grandfather always had difficulty with my name. Sometimes he would call me by my grandmother's name, other times by one of my cousins. Once even by my brother's. But most often, he would accidentally call me by my mother's name before correcting himself.

When I was about thirteen, I went over to their house to visit with my brother. As my grandfather sat in his arm-chair, he called for me as I walked down the stairs of the house.

"Hey Lee get over here! Lee! Lisa!" I surprised even myself when a few stray tears slipped out.

"Please, I'm not Lisa. I'm Victoria. I'm Victoria," I said as I put my hands up to hide my face.

From his chair, he stretched out a hand and put it on my shoulder. In the gentlest voice I had ever heard come out of his mouth he told me, "I'm sorry. I know you're Victoria. I'm sorry."

"It's alright."

*

As soon as I walked into work and caught a look at Frank,

I knew we were going to have a bad night. “You’re always an asshole when you’re wearing the burgundy shirt,” I told him. One of the other managers scoffed.

“He’s just an asshole in general,” he said as I leered at him. “Oh, sorry, that’s right, nobody can say anything bad about Frank in front of you! My mistake, I forgot!” Frank said nothing and continued to type at the manager’s desk. Before I could retort, a newer crew member arrived and greeted us.

“Hi, Frankie. Does anyone ever call you that?” she asked. Frank continued typing as he answered.

“My mom used to,” he said. I cringed. I followed Frank to the freezer while he went to get a box of fries before the shift started.

“She couldn’t have known that would bother you,” I told him when I noticed he was still quiet.

“My mom wanted me to be a priest,” he said finally lifting up a box of fries. I extended my arms and he handed the box to me and grabbed one for himself.

“Yeah, you told me that once.”

“She was disappointed in me, my father tells me all the time.” I would have hugged him if not for the thirty-pound box of fries in my hands.

When he got back to the desk, the phone rang and I walked

to the front of the store as he answered it. “Are you fucking kidding me?” I heard him shout. “That’s the third call out of the night!”

The rush hit early and I had to manage the drive-thru by myself, a job that usually requires at least two other people. Meanwhile, Frank was taking orders on front counter while the new girl was working in the kitchen by herself completely drowning under all the orders.

“I’m sorry, we’re really short staffed tonight,” I said to a man who was demanding to know what the holdup was. When he kept shouting at me, I turned to call over Frank but saw he had his own problems as a large family walked in.

“Can’t you see we are getting swamped?” I asked him. For the first time in maybe ten years I prayed. I prayed to whoever would listen that the cars would somehow sense my distress and stop coming. As customers continued to be ornery, Frank began to get more and more worked up.

In the heat of his stress, he shouted, “Marino, if your kid ever grows up and tells you they don’t want to go to school and want to be a fast food manager, for the love of fuck don’t let them do it!”

When the drive-thru finally lulled, I found him in the lobby with his head in his hands. “I didn’t mean to shout at you.” I assured him I wasn’t upset. I sat down next to him and said that I didn’t think he was a failure and that I thought very highly of him. He smiled a little at that.

I told him that when I was little, my mother signed me up for ballerina classes and I was awful at it and wanted to quit but never told her because I didn't want to let her down. "I don't know why I thought of that," I said.

"I can't imagine you as a ballerina."

"Well I can't imagine you as a priest."

We were laughing so hard that people started to stare.

*

At my grandfather's funeral, I was sure I was getting more stares than my brother or cousins. My grandmother had us stand in a straight line so that people none of us had ever met before could offer their condolences. I wore one of the few dresses I owned in an attempt to avoid snide remarks from her. I did, however, leave my hair down and natural knowing full well it would frizz in the heat. I wasn't aiming to please that hard.

I stood last in line and one by one, my cousins and my brother would introduce themselves to the many strangers. When it came time for my introduction, I was interrupted nearly every time.

"Oh you must be Victoria!"

"You look just like your mother! A spitting image!"

"You know your mother had hair exactly like yours. Curly

hair is so beautiful.

"I can't believe how much she looks like Lisa," somebody said to my grandmother. After the tenth or eleventh time, she started introducing me herself.

"And this is Lisa's daughter, Victoria. Doesn't she look just like her?"

Eventually, we were ushered up to say our goodbyes. I noticed that inside my grandfather's casket was a picture of my mother holding my brother. I always knew he must have loved being held by her so much because of her warmth. We must have been told we were loved more than any children in the world. Of course he would want to be in her arms as much as possible. It didn't bother me that I wasn't in the picture. I knew full well I wasn't the favored grandchild. But going off what everyone had been telling me, my eyes reflected my mother's. It almost felt like he was being buried with an image of both our faces simply by being buried with hers.

Later that night, my father, brother, and I stayed behind at my grandmother's house. She thanked my dad for giving the eulogy telling him it was very touching. He had told me the night before the funeral that he was shocked he had been asked to speak as the two had rarely gotten along after my mother died.

"A day after it happened, he came over the house and told me I wouldn't be able to take care of you and Nick by myself. He wanted to take you both. I told him, 'You can't

even take care of yourself, who are you to tell me what I can't do?' Man, was I angry," he confessed.

"Is that going to be your eulogy?" I asked smirking slightly.

"No, smartass. He wasn't a bad guy, he did a lot for me and Mommy over the years. I think I'll talk about that."

At my grandmother's house, my father laughed as she gossiped about some of the people who came to the funeral. Apparently a woman she didn't care for had shown up.

"Lisa used to call her a jar of mayonnaise. That was her word for people with a bad personality," my dad said laughing.

"She was always so funny. You got your sense of humor from her," she said looking at me. "She used to like to write. She wrote beautiful poetry. Didn't you say you liked to write in school Victoria?"

"I do. I always have."

"You got it from her."

*

My mother's favorite color was blue and mine is red. But her lipstick was always crimson and her cheeks were always rosy, so maybe it balances out.

momma's megazord

Hakeem Hopper-Collins

momma's megazord was her existence.

the arm had access to swords
in case we forgot we were her wards
and unless we paid rent, we maintained chores
so an ass-whooping wouldn't be the reward.
ass-whoopings awarded to us were as
frequent as my keyboard's keys being
tapped into words about topics featuring black love -
momma setting curfews in case young people or police have guns
and decide that night is the night to cap some-
one too many friends from the beginning passed young -
momma momentarily abrupt, maximized oppressed adult
pressed profanity, tethered tears, stretched smile became mad love.

momma's megazord was her existence.

the legs made of religion and philosophy.
half my family getting saved as christians
was partly her decision when she lifted
my older brother and me out our seats
to see this travelling preacher.
momma was our first teacher with love.
teasing us about special friends and kissing tongues,
talking on the phone until it's unplugged,
is it sex or just a simple fuck?, what's after love ends
is separation or the creation of just friends,
the conversation just in, exist in public,
around the dinner table—the kitchen smelling of fried chicken,
steamed green peas, baked mac & cheese
momma's thoughts would have to reach as we feast
always telling us; you don't ask, you don't get,
only post your business on the internet,

get a job if you want something to spend
don't start smoking if you're gonna start choking.
don't start drinking if you're gonna start sinking.

momma's megazord was her existence.

the arm had access to scissors
since style was something to be delivered
through the brushes, hot-combs, shears or clippers.
always experimenting, me, my brothers, and sister
always had momma behind us looking at the mirror
as we kept growing, kept becoming bigger [niggers],
just trying to be winners, or enough to be in the picture.
some styles made it too easy to trigger..

momma's megazord was her existence.

the head all the wisdom from her existence.
from her experience of getting spit on
for being black in her town's all-white middle school.
from her experience of halfway raising her siblings,
since my grandparents were working parents.
from her experience of leaving home after a prom
pregnancy created both my older brother
and initial anger from my grandmother
then momma found she couldn't go live with my pops
since he was still an asshole in the early 90s
so she was forcibly brought back home since "the streets
ain't a place where family should see family weak."
from her experience of living in a family
that fluctuated addictions and being black christians.
from her experience of wishing

Teeth For Seeds

Erika Walsh

I used to paint my palms yellow and press them into oil-slicked canvases. I used to see red when I spit into the sink after brushing my teeth. I used to know what the color green smelled like. That was before.

Now, everything is stunning: black, white. You've read the newspaper. I live in the crossword puzzles.

We've been relocated to live, if you can forget enough to pretend that it is living, underneath the sewer grates. When I press my ear against ceiling tunnels there is static, punctuated by explosions. They don't want us getting out, making anything new.

They snapped our brushes and our pencils and our guitar strings in half and made us throw them into what little is left of the ocean. They erased the color from our world and dug their nails under our doorframes, burying us underneath the city streets without a second thought, as though it were the decent thing to do, as though we had already died and rotted away into bones in need of hiding.

Some people bathed themselves in paint and inhaled the fumes. Some gouged their eyeballs out with quill pens, or filled their pockets up with charcoal and sank to the bottom of the ocean, lace X's embroidered across their concave chests. I stuck around.

Those of us who know how to make love do so in brushstrokes. But not me, not yet. My love doesn't know right from left. I hope that when it does happen, I will close my eyes and see blue. It will feel like holding a paintbrush,

pressing into the flesh of canvas, swirling my pinkie around a cup of orange water, like something found.

The men who called themselves police made me chip away at my paintings, bit by bit with stubbed fingernails, until the crescents of my cuticles pulsed with blood. I'm sure that there's a reason I'm still alive.

*

There's a man here. Ian. Curly hair down to his shoulders, eyelashes that curl up at the ends, and a few sweet freckles across the bridge of his nose that look like they're about to pop off. He's my age, maybe older. Definitely older, okay. Last time I checked I was fifteen and a half, but that was I'm guessing two years ago. Without the sun it's easy to forget.

Ian's job is to stick intravenous needles inside of the sun and extract yellow gelatinous pockets of light. The guys that strapped bombs to every exit let him travel back and forth. They know that sunlight is the blood of the living. They can't kill us off completely because that would be unethical, and they would hate for people to think that they were being unethical.

He whispers to the sun that we need her, that we L-U-V luv her, just a vowel or two short of compassion. Her light is bottled up in plastic, sold for our consumption.

*

He comes back, I swear, I know it's crazy, but he comes back dripping in color. I see it when his eyes hover over the slope of my neck. His eyes travel. It makes my insides feel like sandpaper.

But when he comes back from a mission, and slinks down the ladder, I almost cannot smell the rats. I forget where I am for a moment, God, when he looks at me. So clean! He smells like soap, I swear to god. He really does.

Anya, he'll say, looking right at me, sun radiating off of him, all those shades of red and orange and yellow standing on their own. I Goddamn swear. He'll tilt his chin and scrunch up half his face like it hurts him to smile.

Ian, I'll say, or sigh really, because I hold my breath when he says my name like that, so by the time I'm supposed to speak the air just kind of pushes the letters out of me in this delicate way. I hope he thinks it's sexy.

Then he'll brush past me, and he makes a point to touch me every time, I'm telling you. Shoulder against shoulder, his hand on my elbow, tripping over each other's ankles, fingers on the backs of my knees. Once he even looked right at me when he passed, his chest pressing hard against mine. I had to soak my heels in a bucket of ice to calm down.

*

Vera told me, once, that she thinks it's possible to find the colors again on each other's bodies. It doesn't have to be

romantic, or anything. Sometimes your skin just doesn't know how to react.

It happened to her, once, with a man who squeezed sunlight into his palms, massaging it into the space between her shoulder blades until she remembered how to breathe.

I used to think she was lying about that, because Vera tends to be dramatic. She was a performance artist, before. She won't even walk around without these ridiculous flippers strapped to her feet, even though we were able to dry up most of the sewage, and the flippers make her toes smell like seaweed.

Fuchsia, she said it was. I barely even remember fuchsia. And now that I've seen Ian I'm not even sure if the colors are there, or if maybe I'm just turning all sorts of delusional myself.

Without my paintbrush, without color, it's like half my voice is an echo. Like I need to make words disappear into shapes and landscapes and figures in order for them to make sense. The poets have it easy.

*

Anya, *it will only take a second, please don't run*, Coo says. He's coming towards me, holding needles in his hands and wipes that sting and too many bad things that hurt.

I try to stay seated, but my body is running ahead of me, since I guess probably I'm just a huge coward, but maybe that's not a fair thing to call myself. I mean, I did stay alive,

even after the world died, or at least everything that makes it livable. Even when death would have been an understandable reaction.

Coo hobbles after me. He's hobbling because both his legs are made out of iron. He wouldn't give up his poems, so they took his legs. Vera and I take turns oiling his kneecaps every other day. We all have jobs. Doctors need to stay mobile, even makeshift ones with creative writing degrees.

I leap around the bend and almost smash right into a pile of ballet dancers, all twisted together, doing stretches or something. There's maybe six of them, I don't stop to count, but I really don't get why they're all lying on the floor like that, half naked and covered in dew, getting dirt in their hair and everything. Aren't ballet dancers supposed to be dainty? But they're laughing, snorting sugar up their noses and touching each other all over, so they must be having fun. And I'm a little jealous, because with the way they're touching I wouldn't be surprised if they could see the blue in each other's veins.

*

I'm pretty out of breath at this point, panting with my hands on my knees. When Coo's a few feet away I say something kind of sassy, like, Can we please just get this over with? He lifts up his eye-patch, squints his broken eye at me, says *That would be ideal, Anya.*

I hold out my arm and shut my eyes, tight. He sticks the needle into my vein, the bumpy one. He has to pinch my skin between two fingertips to find it. I admit that it doesn't

hurt very much. It never really does.

Some silver liquid that belongs to me fills the vial. His hands shake as he presses a bandage over the wound, and he's coughing up little bits of blood, but I can hardly tell. I notice the little translucent drops on the collar of his shirt. We don't worry about stains much, anymore.

Are you feeling alright, Coo? I wiggle my eyebrows at him.

Always, he says. He looks somewhere over my shoulder, scratches his iron kneecap, pulls his hand away, wrist limp, remembering.

Got to get back to work. They need all of the blood by the end of the day.

He's talking about the men outside. They collect our blood every other week and never tell us why. I'm not sure that anyone thought to ask. I think maybe they're trying to figure out what makes us different from everyone else — the artist gene, you know — so that they can do some sort of weird eugenics thing to make sure this doesn't happen again, that we don't happen again, as if erasing all of the color wasn't a big enough precaution, but whatever. That's just what I think.

Well, you have mine. I feel bad for having wasted his time.

He folds his left hand over his right, the spaces where three of his fingers are missing casting shadows over his knuckles. The men didn't take those. Their absence is only a

side effect of too many metaphors. He didn't feel like they belonged to him anymore. They weren't fingers. They were perforated nets disguised as flesh wrapped around little porcelain fish. He never misses them.

I pop a piece of butterscotch into my mouth, turn away.

Don't get distracted, Coo says. He's studying me with the one good eye. He thinks that just because he's a poet he knows everything happening inside of me.

Excuse me? My arms are feeling pretty tingly, now. Maybe I'm allergic to something inside of the needle and my head is about to blow up like a balloon.

You love somebody, he says. *It's distracting.*

I want to curse at him, but he's too fragile. I shake my head, slowly. Before I have the chance to defend myself, he's gone, hobbling around the bend.

I spit my butterscotch onto the ground, shivering against the metal clang that it makes. The thing has gone dry.

*

I held my brush tight in my hand like a knife. I painted flowers with girls' faces twisted up in the middle, seeds coming out of their mouths. I painted them in blues and purples and reds. The girls were the quiet parts of me, and the loud parts, and the parts that only I knew, that only wanted to be known by me. I laughed with them in my dreams.

When the men came for me, I hid. I watched them stomp on my girl-flowers with their clumsy feet and I watched them laugh while they did it. When they found me, they dragged me out by my ankles and made me destroy the last three by myself.

With your own hands, they told me. I chipped away at the colors and watched them flake under my bones.

Most nights since then have been dreamless.

*

Ian used his hands to make me something, strung a few teeth together on a thin piece of hooked metal. An earring.

I wasn't about to tell him that I don't have my ears pierced, that I did once, but I didn't put anything inside, so the holes mostly closed up. I wasn't about to tell him that, because what if he suggested that we pierce them? They use needles for that.

*

He doesn't mention where he got the teeth from, and I don't ask. There are four of them, twined together. Of course they all look white as pearls, given the circumstances. There are perks to every absence.

I hold the earring in my hand, watch it roll around like a drop of sweat.

What's this for?

It's a reminder.

I feel a little bit sorry that I asked. I don't know why I want him to say something meaningless like, *You're just so beautiful* or *I want to marry you and be with you forever*.

Dr. Coe might be wrong about me loving him, but I do feel something. Something at the bottom of my stomach, smoothing out my flesh from the inside.

I am remembering my first tooth lost, the one that flew painlessly out of my mouth into the water and the chlorine when I dove off of the diving board, gnashing at the liner before getting sucked down the drain. My mother held a bag of frozen peas against my red gums, as if there were anything that needed soothing.

I tell him thank you. He holds the jewelry up to my ear. The scar is still there from the hole that closed up. He presses the pointed end of the metal into it, mistaking it for a wound. It's hard to tell without any color, what is alive and what has died. *Ow*.

Oh, sorry, let me just... and he jams the hook through my skin. Four teeth quiver against my jawbone.

I cringe in pain, make sharp noises. Blood glitters on his fingertips, silver and almost invisible.

He just looks at me and says: You're bleeding.

Lips press into the space behind my ear, that little hollow of skin that no one ever touches. It feels like my knees forgot how to bend.

When he pulls away, there is violet glittering at the corners of his mouth.

All better, he whispers, and he's walking away.

*

Sometimes, I have a dream that doesn't feel like a dream. It feels like being asleep.

In it, I am standing inside of a small black room, listening to a faucet drip. I reach my hands out in front of me, trying to find the faucet and turn it off, but I cannot feel any of the room's parts underneath my palms. The whole place is just empty.

*

Vera blows a gum bubble. Hubba Bubba. I pop it with the tip of my finger.

Real nice. That was half my lunch. I think about telling her about what happened with Ian, but I don't. I'm afraid she'll laugh. She tends to get pretty bitter about young people being in love and everything. She's maybe thirty-six, but I don't know. I haven't seen any calendars lying around. We celebrate her birthday a few times a year, to be safe.

I miss broccoli, I sigh.

The men outside bring us food to keep us alive, of course. Starving out all of those people would really be a publicity nightmare and nobody would take them deadly serious anymore. The food they deliver, though, is all sugar and chemicals. No vegetables at all. Lots of times my skin feels weighted. I can feel my bones scraping inside of me. They don't want us getting strong, making any sudden movements.

I can't even talk about it, she says, It's painful to talk about.

*

I roll the teeth between my thumb and index finger. They mold into my fingertips, turn warm against my skin.

Maybe he sees the colors in me, too.

I feel a pang in my stomach at the thought of him seeing me in black-and-white, of not being able to take him to this place with me. I imagine hands moving from the nape of my neck to my shoulders, imagine him holding me still, away from him, safe distance, imagine him saying, *You're just grey to me, Anya. Black and white and grey to me*, and he's walking away, and there is no kiss melting behind my ear, and I will never see blue ever again.

*

I tell Vera about what happened, whisper it to her that

night while we're falling asleep.

Jesus, he wants you. I look up from tearing my cuticles apart with my teeth, scrunch my eyebrows at her.

I ask what she thinks I should do about that, rolling over so that our noses almost touch. We're curled up just like every night, the blanket we wove out of rat's fur and strands of discarded hair itching my elbows.

She asks if I like him and I shrug, grateful that she cannot see my blushing, say something like *I don't know, I guess he's cute.* I try to sound very casual and relaxed. She studies me with her eyes, starts talking about *I think he was a glass-blower before, or a woodworker*, and I'm only half listening, thinking about the colors that shimmered on his lips, the way his hands felt against my skin, the shapes my paintbrush made in the water, the sound of girls' laughter in dreams, half-bloomed mouths of seed. I make little *Mmm* noises with my throat and turn my back to her.

She braids my hair with her fingers, humming some song about childhood, or the ocean, something that I guess her mother used to sing to her. Before I can remember the words, I am asleep, circles batting behind my eyelids, blooming like sunspots in the dark.

*

I'm sitting on the floor outside of Coo's office, which is really just the brightest corner of the sewer. Two of the ballet dancers are back, spoon-feeding maple syrup to each other,

giggling every so often and adjusting their girdles, talking in whispers that become screams that become words spit onto the floor, ruining everything beautiful.

They say his name. Ian. Of course I listen. How nice it is to see the colors again, even if it is only in bits and pieces. The men above said it has something to do with ultraviolet radiation, and he's so lucky he gets to be close to the sun, the bottled stuff we get is way too watered-down to have the same effect.

I watch Coo come towards me from out of my peripherals. He waves his stub of a hand around, smiles, gets closer, puts the stub on my arm.

Anya? He looks at me like he already knows what's wrong.

I ask about Ian, look at my hands as though they are incredibly fascinating, ignore the stinging happening behind my eyes.

Yes... He says, slowly, *People have been seeing colors in him.*

Everyone can see them?

He nods. *It's a nice little reminder.*

Yes, I respond, mechanically, teeth grinding inside my jaw, quivering on the outside of it. *A reminder.*

I walk away, ignoring Coo's questions about where am I going and would I like him to reschedule the appointment and Jesus Anya will you stop walking away like that.

*

My heart races at the sound of feet running towards me. Ian. It must be. But when I look down it is only a fat grey rat, scampering across the tunnel to sink into the ground and curl its scaly tail around the half-eaten chocolate bar melting at my feet.

*

The teeth kept brushing against my cheek and it felt like they got pointier every time, like my skin was too rough and made the enamel of them erode into broken shards of bone.

I took the earring out, squeezed a bit of sunlight between two fingers and massaged it into the scab that grew over the scar, held it in my hand before kicking open a mound of dirt, unhooking the metal, burying the teeth inside. I figure that must be symbolic of something. Maybe Vera would call it art.

*

I thought I passed by him, later that day, but his hands did not move over my body.

I fall asleep cold. Vera isn't here to curl up against, and she took the blanket. I'm not speaking to her right now. I'll make up with her in the morning, it's silly. It's just that she really got my hopes up about the colors. I thought maybe since she saw them once, with that man, that there was

something special about what I saw. But when I talked to her about it she laughed and said it wasn't what she thought. Just a side effect from some medicine the policemen made her take, after that one performance, *Woman Remembers How It Felt To Be Born*. She couldn't tell them it was art, obviously, so she let them think there was something inside of her that needed fixing. Now there's this pinkish tint that happens, sometimes.

I remember that performance. She curled up in the center of the sewer, naked, screaming with her knees bent to her chest.

*

That's not what I think of when I think about my birth.

My birth was a red wound, filled with light, and the type of silence that only happens when you're praying. I did not cry. My mother stared at my face, which kept turning blue, and tugged at the doctor's hands, whispering, *Do something. Do something. Do something.*

The doctor did something and I became alive again. My mouth a small *O*, slivering, no teeth inside of it to catch drops of colorless water. Throat wet with arrival, empty gum pedestals.

There is a part of me that remembers how this felt, but I left her in the room with the dripping faucet. I left her at the bottom of a swimming pool, shimmering inside the rotten core of a dead tooth.



Film Plants V

by: Dyan Cannon

Instant Film
3.4" x 4.25"

Hyperhidrosis

John McCracken

I keep having those transparent dreams where I'm
quietly sitting on the edge of a pool.
My feet hang off the tile, wanting to
ask the water if it's worth it. To believe I'll keep
myself afloat, to think that I'll look different underwater.
Do the circuits in our brains spark and flame
if we're laying on the bottom of the sea? What if
I'm what causes our bodies to slow in the slosh of the chlorine?
I start to breathe through my mouth,
just to swallow the air trapped in the water,
not wondering If I was ever
awake.

The Stranger The Better

Rebecca Rist

“The stranger the better,”
she says as she caresses me
effortlessly on the hip.
She smiles with one eye.
Slinking into her dorm room,
her door shuts behind her
while I wonder how she frees
one eye from the other

and what she'd prefer:
for me to knock or not to knock
or to break down the door?
I hope she comes out.

She's so strange, a living fantasy.
So I think logistically
what I'd see if I broke down her door:
She's on the floor naked

playing against herself in Scrabble.
She says, “Wanna play?”
then kicks my ass while she lay
the strangest creature I'll ever see.

“I’m sleepy,” she sighs,
smiles with the other eye
and begins placing dominos
so quickly it’s unnerving.

Placing the final piece
and simultaneously sending it
backwards she turns away
to hang upside down from her bed.
Reading aloud devastating prose,
tears falling from an eye
onto her nose she says,
“From a different perspective I’m sure it’d be funny.”

Propelling the hardcover
across her \$20 rug into my shin
she laughs. I love her
laugh so I laugh too.
Laughing makes her gasp.
Earth’s air is too thin for her.
She couldn’t breathe
so I broke down the door.

She was gone.



True Friendship

by: Barbara Gamiz

Wood
24.5" x 22"



Big Bird

by: Barbara Gamiz

Wood
27" x 25" x 20"

He's Like a Different Person

Ty Pederson

His stomach had been letting him hear about it for the past two hours, but Tucker Widell still didn't see the point in sleeping. His eyes weren't even asking for that much; they just wanted a break from staring at the monitor. They didn't understand how obsessed he was with the life its light allowed him to create. They couldn't. They were just eyes.

But no part of him had been as insubordinate as his hands, which had protested on the job in each of the last three arenas by mislicking, like he was some noob. *'Come on,'* he thought. *'It's only two hours till six, and then it's all downhill.'*

His body wouldn't listen. The promise of an overpowered weapon, Tartarus' Scepter of Infernal Doom, all for guiding noobs through an off-hour raid, meant nothing next to rest, the longing for which, after thirteen hours of binging, had replaced every usual nighttime desire.

Since eleven o'clock, Tucker's bedroom had been unlit but by the glow of the screen. It spotlighted him, tingeing his ghostly skin blue and accentuating his most prominent facial features, a big hook nose and the immortal wart beside his eye, and cast a faint light on the meager furnishings and bare walls.

A human-shaped shadow passed near his pyromancer, but he was too busy slumping face-first toward the keyboard to react. In a flash the shadow transformed into an assassin, who unsheathed enflamed daggers, but it wasn't until Tucker heard the devastating sounds of his character being butchered that he jolted awake and began mashing useless keys. The assassin grunted with each strike, and Tucker's py-

romancer cried out in pain. He panicked and mashed keys more frantically but died before the stun effect wore off.

"Dang it," he said and sat back to wait until his character respawned. He scratched at the flaky crust of the wart and almost tore at it but pulled his hand away. The assassin danced on his corpse and blew kisses to it. It didn't matter what race people selected; in Realm of Conquest, everyone was a troll.

After he'd watched five seconds of the taunting, Tucker set his headphones next to the empty Monster and dirty plate on the wobbly fold-out table he used as a desk. Hundreds of prickly burs needled his leg as soon as he stood, but some invisible saint brushed them off, from thigh to foot.

When his leg awoke, he transformed into the assassin and crept to the door in disjointed lunges that felt stealthy. After a quiet, careful twist of the doorknob, he took a few steps down the hallway and found he was exactly where he'd started, in a room unlit but by the glow from a screen, which cast faint light on the meager furnishings. But this screen squawked. And it spotlighted a drunk, his father, Randy, passed out in the ragged recliner.

Tucker paused midstride to assess the scene but soon resumed skulking. He held up his pants with one hand as he tip-toed past Randy. A troubled snore and the foul odor of a body ridding itself of too much bottom-barrel whiskey greeted him. The television gave off enough light for Tucker to see he was in a shallow, dreamless sleep. He hadn't even taken off his hat. Tucker stole into the kitchen, holding his

breath until he couldn't smell the stench.

A layer of dirt stuck to Tucker's feet as soon as he stepped into the kitchen, protecting them from the cold tiles. Then panic struck.

Not from the close call between his pinky toe and the small broken fan that'd sat on the floor since July, but from the fear of missing Monsters, stolen by his brother Trevor to not waste a minute of Labor Day weekend freedom. Though Tucker had only stocked them since the start of school, Trevor had already discovered drinking Monsters after smoking synthetic cannabinoids took him to what he unironically called "orbit."

Behind a greasy doggy bag and three decaying bananas, Tucker found relief. Whatever chemical experiment Trevor had conducted that night had required no fuel of Tucker's. With two white bread heels, a soggy clump of ham, and a slice of cheese product, he made a mean sandwich. Despite feeling exposed in the scantily lit kitchen, he crafted it with the same care and secrecy he'd employed in getting there, but not one clean plate was in the cabinet, and the dishwasher creaked when he cracked it, but every plate still had food congealed to it, and not one in the stack by the sink was close to clean, but they still clanked when he restacked them and prompted the angry snore of a drunk nearly waking, and it was all for nothing.

He had to use a paper towel. It was a half sheet, so the crust of his sandwich touched the grease on the plate that'd felt cleanest. Holding his breath, Tucker lunged back past his

father. He wiped his feet on the carpet before his room before disappearing inside.

While he ate and killed the Monster, he checked his phone because he was a genuine masochist and wanted to remind himself he'd received texts from only three people in the past week. Then, he returned to the computer to spend some time in other areas of the life he and the computer had built together. On Facebook he watched a poorly lit video Trevor had posted, in which one of his friends lit a fire around a propane tank before another shot it with a gun, sparking a fireball slightly taller than them after which the camera shook violently and the video became a dark blur.

Next, he lurked on Reddit. After wasting time sifting through a few reposts and pet videos, he came across a line chart of Earth and the entire solar system. Around Earth the line suddenly spiked, showing the high frequency of bear attacks, relative to neighboring planets. Monster froth poured out of his mouth, and he buried his head quickly in his arms to not laugh too loudly.

Bright light poured into Tucker's plain, orderly room through and around the aluminum blinds. They were too small to be of use. Dark streaks of clean carpet fibers striped the floor, and the heavy vacuum cleaner responsible stood in the far corner. Tucker was the only one who used it anymore, so it stayed there.

As soon as the sun had risen, the empty cans and dirty plates had begun to bother him. But the dubstep pulsing

through his headphones and the wild swings of Ba'agru's giant mace, a threat of instant death, focused his attention for the moment. He was the final raid boss, Ba'agru, a massive pig who stood on his hind legs in a bone-riddled swamp and wore a necklace of human skulls. One of Tucker's hands worked the keyboard with an elegant flow. The other guided and clicked the mouse in twitches and spurts.

"Another fucking waste," he whispered when one of the healers used a full-heal spell for the raid that could only be used once every half hour, despite the most dispensable noob in their group being the only one low on health. Tucker knew he'd feel much better if he told the healer all the reasons why it was the worst play he'd ever seen, but he, stoically, kept his finger off the push-to-talk key.

The front door shut, ending his desire to whine and replacing it with dread as he realized he'd left his door unlocked. A moment later there was a knock, and Trevor called, "Tucker, you up?"

Tucker continued mashing keys, and Trevor swung in with the door and theatrically staggered around like he was *that* wasted. The act was tired, so Tucker should have known that was all it was, but he worried about his computer and analyzed Trevor in glances. The unmistakable stench of cigarettes and synthetic cannabinoids, a nauseating odor that smelled like incense with a trace of burnt hair, came in with him, and Tucker's nostrils flared, but he said nothing and kept clicking.

"Ah! I can't believe you didn't come out last ni-," he began

raving, but Tucker turned and stopped him with a librarian's voice, "Trevor! Dad's sleeping." He nodded toward the living room. Trevor stared at him like Tucker was the one that was high. Then he wouldn't stop laughing, but he still hadn't said a word, so Tucker ignored him and refocused on the raid.

"Oh my God, dude, your face... 'dad's sleeping,'" Trevor mimicked in a high pitch and purposefully cracked his voice on the long 'e' in 'sleeping.'

"I'm kind of busy here."

"Ooh, R-O-C, yeah, you never get to play." Tucker didn't respond and kept mashing keys. Trevor walked behind him and pinched deeply into his neck, not playfully between two fingers, but with both hands, and Tucker twisted his body away from him. "Stop!"

"What? You don't like the alligator jaws? Ha, remember that?" Better watch out or the gator'll get'cha!" Trevor tried walking his fingers up Tucker's back to pinch his neck again, the way their father had when they were young, but Tucker, again, twisted away.

"Fuck off."

"Jesus, I'm just messin' around." Tucker heard the mattress adjust to Trevor's plopping onto it and knew the comforter had bunched and no longer had a crisp fold aligned with the pillows.

"So what?" Trevor asked. "You just gonna play R-O-C all

weekend?”

“I don’t know. Are you just going to smoke that fake weed crap all weekend?”

“Ha, shit, if a dime sack would last me all weekend, I would.”

Tucker tried to tune him out by refocusing on the game sound. “Whatever,” he said.” Trevor snapped his fingers and launched into the story he’d come in ready to tell, “Oh, man, like I was sayin’, we were out in, like, the middle of fucking nowhere. And Orlen took one of his dad’s big-ass rifles and just blew the fuck out of this propane tank. Dude... it was the craziest shit I’ve ever seen. Garrett had to start a fire around it, but the fuse wasn’t that long, so he had to haul ass out of there, and there was this huge-ass explosion, and the tank flew like 50 feet in the air. It was fucking nuts. I videoed the whole thing and put it up on Facebook.” He waited for Tucker to get the hint.

“Yeah. Everything in that video’s either too dark or looks like you shot it in potato mode,” Tucker said and tried to act serious as he continued gaming but began to smile.

“All right, well, fuck you, too, then,” Trevor returned and rose and staggered back and forth between the bed and door, chuckling in puffs and staring at Tucker out of the corner of his eye.

Ten seconds later they were gasping for air they were laughing so hard. Tucker peeked at him and saw, across the past

year of diverging paths, the Trevor who’d received a three-day suspension sophomore year because he’d acted on an oddly comforting obligation to not let anyone kick Tucker’s ass but him, the Trevor who’d guided him on bike rides to explore wilderness no one had ever seen, the Trevor he’d studied, through spindles he still had to hold for balance, to learn how to walk and talk with giants.

“Hey, it straight if I grab a ten from ya?” Trevor had already opened his wallet when Tucker shut him down, “Let me think, Okay, so you owe me forty already, and I know you’re just going to waste it on that crap. Hmmm, this is tough.”

“Come on, Orlen’s bein’ a tool and is all ‘I’m not gonna smoke you out unless you start throwin’ down.’”

“Trevor, no,” he said sharply. “I’m not paying for your drugs.” Trevor groaned and slumped, but Tucker wasn’t finished. “Why don’t you go ask dad for it?”

“I don’t know why you have to be such a fucking prick!” Trevor shouted and started toward him, and Tucker shrank back, but Trevor passed him. When he was sure he was safe, Tucker said, “Because it’s my money?”

“My money, my money,” Trevor mimicked in a snotty voice. “You know what? Play your stupid-fucking game! See if I ever invite your ass out again. Every time I do, everybody’s all, ‘Nah, don’t bring the Warthog.’ And, you know what? I think I finally get what they’re sayin’.”

He shared this insight in the manner of a parent who had been moved beyond anger to profound disappointment and then stomped out and tried slamming the door behind him, but the door bounced open because the latch didn't slide without someone turning the knob.

Tucker considered shutting it, but he glanced at the monitor and realized three of the noobs were dead. Messages of outrage flooded the chat box window, all from mad noobs wondering what was going on and all directed at him. The bottommost message, the most recent, read, "NoMore-Pheus, are you there?"

Tucker wasted no time responding and regained control of the fight. During brief pauses in it, he reflexively scratched at the wart. Light-hearted and celebratory messages slowly replaced the outpouring of anger, but he didn't read them. The morning as a whole and Trevor's visit in particular had left him nauseous and hostile. Ba'agru's health bar dropped near zero, and the giant pig swung his mace in a last-ditch effort. Eight of the ten in the raid group died. Tucker had forgotten to warn them about that.

The raid group told him all of the sadistic ways they wished he'd suffer, and he smiled for the second time in recent memory. He cast 'Molten Insides' once more. The spell emptied Ba'agru's health bar, and he collapsed into the mire with an out-of-place thud and a deep, agonizing squeal. Expression of disbelief and fury filled the chat box. Then Tucker stole all of the loot and took over the chat box by spamming a string of messages, each of which read, "**GET REKT SON!!!!!!!!!!!!**", with a hotkey before logging out.

By noon he fell asleep, and he slept uninterrupted until the dusky hour of seven o'clock. Displeasure and suspicion showed in Randy's face the second Tucker stepped out of his room and replaced his mental haze with panic. He sought calm and found some in his sudden fascination with the window shades and the way the fading sunlight shone on them.

"What?" Randy said. "You waste the whole day on that computer?" Someone had closed the sections of the blinds in opposite ways. Half slanted up and in. The other half slanted down and in, but the light brightened every slat the same, halfway, albeit on opposite sides.

"Oh, I'm just, kind of, going for some food," Tucker mumbled and shuffled along the wall, next to the window and half-lit blinds, feeling eyes on him the whole time. Gulps from a tallboy answered his non-response first.

Then Randy said, "I made some lunch earlier. Tried yellin' for you to come eat, but I guess you couldn't hear." He laced the guilt trip with suspicion and never took his eyes off of him. Tucker had to angle toward him because he couldn't continue walking along the wall unless he wanted to take army turns to the kitchen. '*Invisible, normal,*' he commanded as he neared smelling distance of his father.

"I thought I said I wasn't hungry," Tucker shot back and glared. Their eyes had only met for an instant before Randy looked away. When Tucker had passed him, Randy clucked, "Uh huh," and then he asked another impossible question, "Where's your brother at?"

“I dunno,” Tucker said and hurried around the kitchen counter. The fading light made it easy to avoid the broken fan and the trash that had spilled onto the floor. The televised noise stopped.

“Ya know, for a while there, we couldn’t... you couldn’t of pried y’all apart with a crow bar. And now? He’s off doin’ God-knows what, and that stupid computer’s drawn you in like a moth to a flame. Heh, ya know what? I bet that thing’ll zap ya if you don’t watch it.”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what it’ll do,” Tucker muttered and droned off into silence. Glugging from the tallboy going bottom up drew more of his interest than the speech had, so much so that he poured too much stale cereal into a bowl.

The foot rest latched into place beneath the recliner, so Tucker put back the cereal in slow motion. He exhaled when he heard the jingle of keys and then relaxed completely because Randy’s voice grew more distant as he announced, “Well, I’m headin’ out for a while. If you’re up a bit late tonight, I might see ya then,” a euphemism for his planning on staying at the bar down the road until it closed. The door shut before Tucker could answer.

Back in his room, he sank in front of the computer, but he didn’t start it. Eating was too much work. His mouth was so dry he had to chew each bite into a paste before he could swallow it.

Four bangs came in pairs. The first two were distinct. The front door banged against the stopper twice. Then, shout-

ing, Trevor’s shoulder ramming through his bedroom door, and the doorknob puncturing the drywall formed one chaotic blur inseparable from what happened.

Tucker rose but had no time to protect himself before Trevor plowed into him and planted him on his back. He flailed and tried biting him, but Trevor grabbed his wrists and used his own arms to restrain his head. Then he drove his knee into Tucker’s solar plexus. His palms were burning and slick with sweat. Tucker nearly slipped an arm out of his grip.

The panic triggered by primal instinct kept him from formulating thoughts and turning them into cries for help, but his pained, wordless shriek didn’t last long anyway because Trevor won the struggle with one of his arms and shoved it into his mouth. Trevor watched the others and only turned his crazed eyes on Tucker when he tried fighting back.

“Stop! Just stop!”

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

“It’s almost over. Just stop!”

“Should we get this?” A strange voice asked.

“Yeah,” Trevor said.

It didn’t end as suddenly as it had started. Trevor took his time releasing his arms and lifting his knee off his chest, only doing so when Tucker had lost the will to fight. Carrying the bulky equipment slowed them down. The odor of incense with a trace of burnt hair lingered long after they’d

left.

Tucker rolled onto his side. He gasped for breath between sobs. Tears blurred his vision, and his head throbbed with an aimless rage that blocked out pain and any other emotion. He just lay on his side, gasping and sobbing, and watched the blurry forms fade.

They'd taken his tower, monitor, cables, headphones, and cell phone. They'd even taken the modem and router. For some time he lay still, expecting help to arrive. Pain came first. Then questions flooded his mind, but they were ignored for the sensations, the pang in his chest, the burning on his elbows and face, and the feeling of blood dripping from his cheek. His fingers went straight for the blood. The immortal wart had been scraped off during the struggle. The possibility, no matter how slim, was reason enough for him to sit up. He felt through the blood for the open wound and ran his finger over it and felt its bumpy edge, in which he knew the wart lived on.

"Dang it," he said.

Echoes

Eli Steiger

As a child in the forest
I met a wall
asking to be broken
despite my attempts
to break it down
It only ever
 echoes

Zeno's Bullet

Steven Chung

The tracks of rain after each shot.
Drink, live three days longer even if
the terminal velocity of a drop
never reaches the speed of a bullet.
Sheets of rain against a hand,
a sheet on the grass. Voices cracked
by some human sound and a heel
left in the mud. Parents drank
this water when it was a river:
drink this before it slips through
my fingers. Find a throat to pour
into. Abandoned footprints,
shivered prairie, colder body.

Rangers used to roam these nightfalls.
Littered casings. Distance cut in half,
then half, then half. *Drink*. The space
closing and closing. *Drink*. The space
collapsing and collapsing. Drainage.



The Searcher

by: Perry Chandler

Acrylic in Canvas Wrapped Panel
24" x 32"

When I Was Thirteen

Fernando Izaguirre

When I was thirteen, my
father told me that in America
mexicans don't write poetry
porque no saben hablar inglés.

I didn't know what to say,
where to look, my lips trembled
like water over a fire.

When I was thirteen, my
father told me that in America
mexicans don't go to college
porque no pueden pagarlo

I didn't know what to say,
where to look, my lips trembled
like water over a fire.

When I was thirteen, my
father told me that in America
mexicans work in the fields
porque no tienen papeles.

I didn't know what to say,
where to look, my lips trembled
like water over a fire.

When I was thirteen, my
father told me that in America
mexicans can't have dreams *porque*
el color de su piel es oscuro como el lodo.

I didn't know what to say,
where to look, my lips trembled
like water over a fire.

When I was thirteen, my
father told me that he was
leaving to *méxico* for work,
pero nunca regreso.

Ten years later, I graduated
and my mother said, "Mijo,
lo siento que tu padre no está aquí."

I didn't know what to say,
where to look, my lips trembled
like water over a fire.



뭐 싶어?

by: Estefania Garcia

Safety Kut Relief Print
6" x 9"

Exploration

Elizabeth DeBunce

ankles backs of knees breasts
the private places now flush with the rosy
glow of machinery
you scoop your hair back from your face
and let it slope down your back
my turn

the flashlight cuts into you:
a cream outline in the soft
black space
you stare at me as i trace you, the clothes
slipping away as the light caresses
you smile as the light touches
your clavicle
your skeleton shining through,
the cellophane fingers of your ribs pushing
and pulling with your breath
rearranging freckles

we are unsteady
molecular
radiant as dust motes caught on fire.
lips hips tongue
the beam hits the walls,
white-washes the world behind
the lids of our eyes now
so close we huddle in
a single beam
lips hips tongue
you click it on and off again, slower slower
ending on off



Arte Calderon

by: Vivian Calderón Bogoslavsky

Glass

15" x 8" x 11"



Arte Calderon

by: Vivian Calderón Bogoslavsky

Glass
12" x 8" x 7"

Noe Tries to Keep It Cool

Jennie Frost

Noe hopes he didn't embarrass himself too much the night before. He remembers pomegranate and cherries, the lick of red wine. Sangria, like the kind in France, but not as soft. Bottled individually, four packed, boxed like minivan children. Bubbly. Effervescent. He recently learned the word effervescent and its many uses, and he hopes he used it the night before. He hopes someone heard him say it, and that they looked at their friends and raised their eyebrows, that they thought they could be so lucky to have someone who knows the word effervescent and its many uses at their party. He hopes he held the bottle properly, that when he was hauled off to bed he did it tactfully, the way everybody ought to, not too fast. He remembers his hand grabbing things before he reached for them, how being was, for a moment, similar to that of a video game on high difficulty. He thinks of life as a video game with its many difficulties and how he can't choose easy like he can on a video game. He thinks about the many friends he had over as a kid who learned to play on difficult, how it was easy for them, even boring, how they eventually went to other kids' houses with harder video games, the ones with the thinner TVs and the newest console. Noe is not good with change, but he is ok with resolution. He sits up in his bed, not hung over, not sick, the taste of an effervescent grape's blood on his tongue. He knows that for a moment the night before he had smiled at someone so long that they got uncomfortable and went inside. Noe is not surprised anymore, especially not by himself.



Warrior Spirit

by: Jennifer Lothrigel

Digital Photographic Print
18" x 12"

The Swallows

Amber MV

When I was a child I told my spiritual father
that I had moments of insight,
flashes of understanding, like the wings of swallows
swooping into a city with a message to tell
that humankind must remember.
It was beyond explaining to grown-ups,
though I knew I had to help save them.
My spiritual father said,
*“Remember these moments that come to you.
Remember, write them down,
Or they will slip away like birds.”*
And I watch the way my thoughts fly
like they do not want to be captured,
cannot be told once and for all time
in the tradition of writing.
I follow the swallows out to the fields,
a pair of lovebirds chasing each other,
friends of the light.
How carefully close they come to the dark earth,
the tall grass brushing their scintillant feathers like breath,
one word of beauty before leaving,
a reminder to humankind
who is forgetful.



Oil Man

by: *The Bearded Lady*

Combination of Pencil, Watercolor, and Photography
8" x 10"

Monument

Jeremy Simmons

My elevator to Hell was falling apart. The shabby contraption was all chains and bars and iron plating riveted together with artful shoddiness, just the sort of thing you'd expect. The iron was rusting almost to nothing in places. As I plummeted into the depths, a dull light grew until I could read the signs screwed into the inside of the elevator cage. "Abandon Hope, Ya Jerks!" and another which hung from a single screw, "Always Room for More Christians!" Only the squeak of the loose sign swinging back and forth kept me company. I noticed a deep humming all around me that grew in volume as if I were descending into a machine.

I should clarify. Moments before my rattling carriage ride into Hell, I had died. You'd be surprised how quickly the details of how or why blur and fade the moment you leave the vale of tears. The moments after were a series of dizzying moves: A pair of wispy spirits (angels?) led me to a door and I felt a concussive understanding that going through it wasn't a choice. I twisted the cold brass knob and stepped through but all I found on the Other Side was an elevator. I made a mental note to lodge a complaint. I didn't need the aesthetic of the chains and rust to let me know it went to Hell. That was where I wanted to go anyway. I had business down there. For 22 years, my father had been in Hell, of that I was certain. I'd come to find him. Figured I'd just ask around.

The elevator stopped with a sickening jerk and rattled for a few seconds afterward, waking me up. I stood up and stepped out (the door had opened for me; how courteous, I thought) into a dun-colored world, tumble-down and empty. I hadn't known that there could be degrees of emp-

teness, but the designers here had managed it. The air felt stuffy, clammy. Icy sweat beaded on my skin and dust caked over that. Silence pressed in on my eardrums until I became uncomfortably aware of my heartbeat like a clock in the wilderness. There was a road leading away from the elevator and I followed it. All of Hell had a fly-blown look, as if one morning everyone awoke and found management had left the night before. Where was the symphony of suffering, where were the machines of torment, or the lake of fire? I'd heard specifically about a lake of fire. I felt let down.

I followed the road for an hour or more but saw no one. The ground was gritty, suffused with bits of bone like confetti. Once or twice I saw shadows skitter away and hide themselves behind rocks. The road led up over the crest of a ridge and I saw what might, with some liberty, be called a city. It squatted dead-center in the caldera of an extinct volcano. The city looked like a bloated beehive in a tornadic shape spinning upward from the plain, hanging there beyond all reason. Darkness swirled around the city like a fog. As I got closer I nearly passed out from the stench. A low murmur, constant and unintelligible, passed for sounds of life; a million voices twisted into a single skein of eternal abidance. Scattered across the plain, at the foot of the city, were the ghastly machines I'd expected to see in Hell. Machines of torment and horror left to rot, rusting in huge mounds of steel, pitted and stained, with what, I didn't dare to imagine. I stopped and stared upward at the city, aware of myself as a tiny speck in its enormous shadow. My heart almost stopped just looking at it. Grimy windows glowed with honey-colored light, others puckered in darkness. I saw people, or shades of people, flitting here and there

across its countless levels, all moving at shutter speed in an anxious nightmare. I shouted for anyone to hear, but no one responded. It wasn't their fault, I guess, since each time I opened my mouth to call out the very air escaping my lungs felt shoved back inside, taking my words with it. This was a silence reluctant to be broken. I tried again, and then again until I fell, wheezing and hacking. As my retching subsided, I stood and tried once more. For whatever reason, this time it worked.

"Hallo?" Nothing. "Can anyone in there hear me?" I paused, trying to catch a breath. Hacked a couple of times. Phlegm...how appropriate.

"What is this place?"

For a long time, the hive city absorbed my shouts. Sucked them in, chewed on them and spat them out in weird echoes. Finally, an elderly man wobbled to the edge of a nearby balcony and searched the air for my voice.

"Down here!" He squinted at me, his toothless mouth hung open for a moment.

"You're not...from around here, eh?" He arched an eyebrow.

"Just arrived."

"Where is your guide?" he asked, sounding confused.

"There was no guide. I'm looking for my father." I swallowed hard. "His name is Richard." I can't explain why I felt

reluctant to give his last name. It felt like I was ratting him out.

The man toyed with the few strands of hair on his chin. "We have a lot of Richards. Well...I suppose we have. I don't get around much."

"Does anyone?" I muttered.

"Heh?"

"Nothing. Can you help me?" He didn't respond, just murmuring "No guide...no guide..." to himself. No urgency here, I thought. Why would there be? They were here forever, after all, and eternity was either the longest or the very shortest stretch of time, depending on your personal cosmology. Eventually the man, who told me his name Rng, scuttled away and fetched another man who looked me over for a few seconds from the balcony, before letting down a rope ladder. It was a rudely-woven jute rope that cut into my hands as I climbed, but I didn't want to complain. Standing in front of my silent companion I reached to shake his hand -I don't know why- and he stared right through me, as if utterly unfamiliar with the tradition. His eyes had a flicker of light in them, as opposed to Rng who had looked more like a ghost. He had a peculiar accent I couldn't nail down. When I asked, he told me the city was called Monument, and he led me inside. We walked in silence for at least an hour, him leading the way through a maze of corridors and staircases.

"What's your name?" I asked.

“Gregor. You are...Doug?” I nodded. ”I heard you shouting. Everyone did.”

“Everyone?”

“Everyone in the city, yes. The voices of Outsiders reach us all.” He led us down another interior avenue filled with the reek of guttering candles and rancid cooking oil. I felt I might never be hungry again.

“You have a normal...ish...name. What’s up with that other guy, Rng? How does one get a name like that?”

“We’re not all the same, you know?” Gregor said, his eyes darkening. Having struck a nerve, I changed the subject.

“I need to find my father. His name is Richard. Richard Gundarsky. When he was alive he was a cop, um, a policeman.”

“If you think he’s here, then he probably is.” Gregor moved at a surprising clip, sandaled feet slapping against whatever unholy material had been used to build the hive city.

“Where are we heading?” I finally asked.

“To the Archive. If there’s any record of your father, we’ll find it there. No promises, son. It’s a pretty shabby place, I don’t know if it’s been updated in decades.”

I began to feel thirsty, as if I’d never had a drop of water in my life.

“Tell me about your father,” Gregor said suddenly.

“He was on the job, ya know? A street cop. He was okay as a dad I guess, I mean...he provided for us an’ all. Except ma.”

“He treated your mother poorly?”

“Hit her a couple of times, yeah. But she hit ‘im back just as hard. Knocked out one of his canines. She was a piece of work, too. Made for each other, I think.”

Gregor seemed to digest this for a moment. “How did he perish? Did she kill him? We get a lot of that here.”

“Nah, he died chasing a perp, er, a criminal, one night in a factory. Got his arm caught in some belts and a big machine that packaged donuts just pulled him in. Gears and stuff. He never had a chance.”

Gregor nodded politely as we walked.

“Ma always said those things would kill ‘im. But I bet she didn’t mean it literally.”

“She was right, it appears,” said Gregor, deaf to my attempt at humor.

We took an abrupt left turn and alley opened onto a sort of indoor field, fifteen hundred yards across, at least. Reminded me of Central Park, but ugly as sin.

I whispered, quieted by awe. “What is this place?”

“The plaza. Well, one of them. Monument has a hundred and nine, last count. The Archive is on the far side. Not far now.”

We walked side by side for a while. Gregor, I noticed, seemed glad of the company. I asked him about Hell. There was a decided absence of demons, torture, that sort of thing. He shrugged and told me that one night the entire executive staff abandoned their posts and Hell fell quiet. No one knew where they went. Bound as ever to their existence, the damned gathered up what they could scrounge and built huge cities like Monument which was, I learned to my horror, only one of many. Hundreds, perhaps. My heart felt as if it would break. How could I possibly find my father in a haystack of a hundred cities? Gregor tried to comfort me, saying that it seemed significant that the elevator had brought me to this one, this city, but the folly of my quest, my arrogant plunge into the abyss to find my dad, glared back at me. I stared despondently at the honeycombed buildings around me, filled with countless souls who even the Powers of Darkness had abandoned. Was this some kind of final insult? I asked.

“I don’t think anything here was meant to happen. Even when it was functioning. You must remember that ever since the pain stopped, we don’t feel things the way you do, the way mortals do.”

“I am dead, you know.”

“But you have only been here a short time. After a while, apathy is the only luxury you’ll have.”

I pondered his words for a while, and we sat on a bench. Gregor looked exhausted. I was beginning to understand. Everything here was more difficult, even walking. The air itself sponged away my energy. As I ran my mind along the edges of that observation, I realized why Gregor’s words had affected me. They had reminded me of my father. Apathy. I remember being a boy and seeing my dad flat-out in his Barcalounger every night with the air in the den reeking of the cheap cigars he bought by the box at Kirschner’s, while the TV whispered away about Rutgers once again failing on third down. I had hated him for it, for cutting the world off like that. At some forgotten mile marker in his life he’d stopped caring. He’d run off the narrow gauge into the soul ditch: toil and rest with nothing in between. He let that fucking chair swallow him up so he wouldn’t have to function. In a flash of understanding that punched the air out of me, I saw it. The blueprint of his mind was blurred and crossed out and in that moment, I knew I could forgive him. Because I pitied him. I knew, furthermore, that I had to forgive him. The man had been in Hell even when he was alive. At least down here he didn’t have to make excuses to anyone, and there was nobody he could let down. Then a loud crash from the buildings opposite startled me out of my trance. I looked over at Gregor, who was staring at me.

“What was that?”

“Place is falling apart,” he said. “You were thinking about your father right now.”

“Yea, I was.” Gregor stood up.

“You can find him now, alone. You won’t need me.”

I shook my head. “What are you talking about? What about the Archives?”

He smiled. “See for yourself,” and pointed across the plaza to a ruined building, collapsed in on itself maybe a century ago. “There are no archives, not anymore. There is nothing but forgetfulness here.” He paused. “I knew you would show me your father. Now you have.”

I stood up and faced him, still shaking my head.

“Close your eyes, Doug.” I did as he asked. “You can see the path now, can’t you?”

I was about to dispute this, and then I saw it. I nodded.

“What will you do, when you see him?” he asked.

“I don’t know.” It was absolutely true, I didn’t have any idea.

He stared at his feet for moment. “I remember my father, or at least I remember his hands. Thick, wide hands. Wasted on a commissar but he found ways to put them to use.” He rubbed his chin while he spoke. “I suppose he is here.”

“You never looked for him?”

“I think I did, when I first arrived. Like you. When I still had questions and...when I still thought there were answers.”

Breezes stirred the scant knots of brown grass that still held on across the plaza. I asked Gregor why in such a huge city I had seen almost no one.

“Must be half a million here, at least,” I added.

Gregor told me that not everyone can see everyone else. We can only see those who are very much like ourselves, he said. This selective vision acted like a mirror for the condemned. No matter how many faces you see, you only ever end up seeing yourself.

“But I can see you,” I protested. “Are we so alike?”

“Perhaps. I was chosen to be your guide, after all.” With that he turned and walked away. I felt sad to see him go. At some distance he appeared to fade, like a chintzy movie effect. Around me lights sprang to life across Monument’s obscene layer cake of dwellings. I closed my eyes and searched for the direction, the path I’d sensed before. I turned and walked into a wide corridor that led out of the plaza into darkness. It must’ve been an hour, maybe two that I searched, struggling to keep on the path while the city faded behind me. The air smelled of rot and damp. It took a tremendous effort to hold on to myself. The further I traveled the more it was as if my insides were being pulled out of me. Soothing voices in my head persuaded me to let go, they said the suffering would be over if I just let go.

I resisted with everything I had, but that pool of strength was dwindling. I tried to think about my father and about finding him, what I might say and that helped a little. I was sweating and tears striped the dust on my face when I finally found him.

The knot in my stomach, recognition, grew until I almost bent over from the pain. There he was, laid out in that god-damned Barcalounger, a Dumont perched on a stump at his feet, rabbit ears and all. There was no picture on its screen, just a shimmer of static. He lay there motionless, bathed in its cathode glare. He wore the same god-awful plaid shirt and Farrah slacks he always wore on Sunday afternoons, now in rags. His feet were bare; chapped and filthy. His eyes were black, like glass balls the color of night and the glow of the TV flickered on them, as if no light came from inside them. I called to him but he didn't stir, not a damn muscle. Hurt feelings flared back to life at that. They came back and hit hard.

"Dad?" I said softly.

Why softly? Was I afraid of bothering him while he watched TV? Ridiculous.

I shouted. "Father!"

Nothing. The TV continued to hiss and crackle. I paced a slow orbit around his chair, calling him by name, even trying 'Captain' once, his policeman's rank. It was frigid in that empty place. I wrapped my arms around myself, fighting off tears until it popped into my head what grandma

used to call him. I put my hand on his shoulder.

"Hey there, Bugsy."

As though I'd uttered a magical password, my dad's attention gradually panned toward me. His head turned and his eyes rolled up, tracing a line along my hand up my arm until he found my eyes. His mouth opened, dry as an attic and for a moment nothing came out. Then finally he spoke.

"Doug boy...what's the skinny?" He looked to be trying a smile, but the skin of his face was tauged as old leather, stretched into a permanent deadpan. Did the man even know where he was?

"I came to see you, Dad." I took a breath, trying not to cry. I didn't want him to see that. "It was a long road, ya know?" He nodded, and slipped back down into his chair. The leather squeaked in complaint. He eyes were locked onto the TV again.

"You want to watch the game?" he croaked, pointing at the snowy screen that flickered in unison with his quivering hand. Maybe he saw something there, but I doubted it.

"Sure," I said, beginning to understand the futility of my errand. "Who's playing?"

Neither of us spoke for a while, we stared at the empty TV screen and listened to the white noise together. Just another father and son moment in Hell. I got up and walked over to the Dumont, messing with the knobs until, frantic to find a

picture, I shook the fucking thing and yelled at it. I cursed the dark air until it grew even darker. Couldn't they at least let him have a channel or two?

My anger spent, I took a breath and set the TV back on its perch.

"You're not very patient, are ya Doug boy?"

"No, never have been," I said with a forced smile. I walked over to him and knelt down by his chair. A smoky darkness surrounded us like a fence, I didn't know if we were still in Monument or in the waste outside the city.

"You're very angry," he said, almost a question.

"Yea, I guess I am." As I spoke his hand crept onto my shoulder. A tentative touch, almost clumsy, attempting an act long forgotten.

"Why are you angry, Doug boy?" I started crying again, I couldn't stop. I was sobbing and shaking from it, which seemed to make my dad stir a bit more.

"Is this about your mother?" he said, robotically.

"What happened, Dad?" I'd rung a bell. "Why did you give up on us?"

He sighed. A long hiss of breath, like air released from a sealed chamber.

"The world got small, Doug boy. The world got so small." His voice was barely more than a whisper. He spoke like another man inside this shell, trying to get out.

"Build it up, break it down. Build it up again. Didn't even know the...shape of it."

A freezing wind rose out of the wastes, it made me shiver.

"Brick after brick...after brick."

"What about us?" I said, the tears returning. He didn't respond. His eyes looked like he was crying, but no tears. He turned back to the TV.

"Terrible call on third down."

A polite cough came from behind me.

It was Rng, at a respectful distance. I walked over to him.

"Why is he here, like this?" Rng craned his head a degree or two. "I don't mean here in Hell. I mean here...way out here. Alone with just this fucking broken TV."

"This is what your father brought. This is his own construct."

I shook my head, fed up with all these excuses. No one took responsibility for anything here.

"Can't you guys get him a few fuckin' channels? Some-

thing?” but Rng didn’t respond, didn’t register my emotions, or my anger. I knew I was just yelling at him because he happened to be in front of me, there was no profit in it. I asked if there was any way I could speak to my father, if I could wake him, so to speak. Rng replied that I could probably do so, if that was my wish. But he also hinted that my dad’s condition--his illusion--was his only defense against the suffering of Hell. He was insulated, it seemed, by staying insensate to everything around him, except that TV. Maybe he saw something on that screen that I hadn’t. It was tempting to believe that.

“You can break his illusion. Possibly.” His subtext was clear: I could shatter his illusion if I wanted to, but did I want to leave him exposed to Hell like that? Was there any purpose to that, aside from petty cruelty? I remembered Gregor’s words, about seeking out his father when he still believed there were answers but there were none. I could feel what he must have, in that moment, standing there by dad’s chair. And I knew that I didn’t want to break dad’s trance, I couldn’t do that to him. To leave him defenseless and exposed to Hell forever.

“I think I’m done here,” I whispered, and Rng nodded. I looked at dad for the last time, knowing he’d have no memory of my having been here. I put my hand on his shoulder (he didn’t seem to notice) then followed Rng, who was already walking away. When we got back to the rope ladder, where I’d climbed into Monument, he bid me goodbye. He told me to follow the road back to the elevator, it would be waiting for me.

“You don’t belong here.”

I clomped, exhausted, up the road feeling the crushing loneliness of Hell bear down on me, my footfalls stirring up the malignant dusts of the waste. The pain of seeing my dad stubbornly cling to me. In my head I replayed one of his rants from a Saturday afternoon, his brand of wisdom.

Pain is easy to talk about. Pride is something else. Everyone thinks they are what they are because of brave choices they made or some crap like that. Complete horseshit. Carefully inserted between possessions, or during commercial breaks, his words sounded rehearsed. I remember thinking that, even as a kid. Yer either lucky or ya ain’t. I mean yer brain is half a degree to port and yer Albert fucking Einstein, but tilt it over to starboard and yer a circus freak microcephalic sideshow with a drool cup. It was obvious what he was driving at, I wasn’t his son for nothing. I didn’t want to believe it, knowing how the man had ended up, what he’d lost, but it rang true. I couldn’t help it.

The elevator was waiting for me, as Rng had said. I stepped in and the door clanged shut. Up my iron carriage sped, rattling and shimmying as it had before. I wondered how many folks had ever made the journey back up. Maybe I was the first.



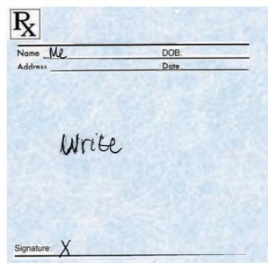
I Break Mirrors With My Face in The United States

by: Abdiel Perez

Collage and Acrylic Paint on Canvas-board
16" x 20"

R_xeminders

Emma Sheinbaum



You know too well how frustrating it is to have all of your anxieties at the surface, all buzzing around just under your skin like a swarm of bees...threatening to sting, but just buzzing. There's a ringing in your ears that might not even really be there but you feel it there and it's calling to the bees' disturbed humming. You start to think, at age eighteen, that this constant hive of anxiety living inside of you is not normal.

You're pacing around the living room because you can't stay still but you want to stay still so to feel like you're at rest, you move around.

Your dad realizes he forgot to give the cat her medicine so he goes to do that. That was the wrong thing to do.

The bees grow agitated and the ringing in your ears turns into the din of your screams as a kid running around the house from your parents, sliding across uneven hardwood floors, as they tried to give you medicine for whatever virus you were sick with at the time. *It'll make you feel better!* They kept calling after you, but you knew it wouldn't do what they say it's supposed to do. The very idea of taking something those doctors had ordered would get you even sicker.

You already felt sicker. Eventually they would grab you, hold you down, force the medicine into your mouth, offer a chocolate Hershey's kiss wrapped in silver, but later they would see it all again. Your body couldn't take it. It refused to.

You can't keep living like this, Emma. Your wringing hands and jittery knees agree with the distant discussion your parents are having by your side. Their voices echo even though they're in the same room as you.

I really think you should take a walk. Your mom's voice starts feeling closer. *Stuart, remember my 4am walks when I got really bad?* He does and so do you. You remember hearing the door open and close at those hours for weeks almost every night.

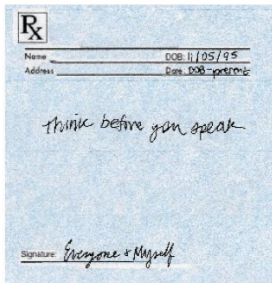
The snow on the ground tells you that you don't want to be taking those walks like she did. You realize how much writing energy you get from the sense of drowning in yourself and how sensitive and clear it makes you feel. And you feel ashamed for making this realization. You've been living with both the swarming bees under your skin and the words you write to quiet them for so long they are a package deal now, it seems.

It will be only weeks later when you will notice that *you* are not *it*, that *it* does not have to control you, only if you let it. And writing it out of your head, out of your aching, is just one of the ways to help yourself.

Instead of grabbing your coat and boots, you grab paper but your fingers are too shaky and unstable to grip onto the pen. The paper doesn't feel right anyway. Too slow.

And so you're here, finger-tips swarming over the keys, taking the sting out, calming the bees down, allowing your skin to readjust. Having seen this before, your parents realize you found your breathing exercise, your 4am walk, and know they can now sleep.

When you can't sleep and you can't stay awake, you write. *Maybe this is just me*, you think for a long time. *Maybe my neurons are meant to be this sensitive. Or maybe I'm just sensitive to everything, to myself.*

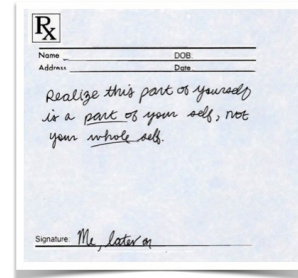


People are told, they do not listen. (Repeat for a lifetime.)
It became a lifestyle for you...

Think before you speak.
Think before you act.
Think before you move.
Think before you think.
Think, and never stop.

Thinking precedes, thinking dominates, thinking follows.

It never stops. It can breathe underwater, it's not afraid of heights. But I can't and I am.

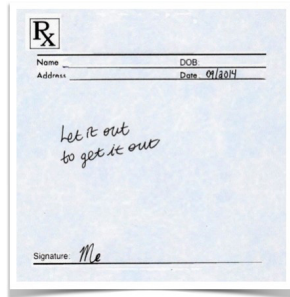


You remember the first time you learned your label. Your mom was late to pick you up from your fourth or fifth or maybe sixth session with Dr. Cheryl and it was raining but you waited outside on the concrete sidewalk anyway because you didn't want people to see you wandering, wondering who you were and why you were there. You held the paper in your hand, folded like a hot dog bun, and realized you didn't know what you were holding. *Give it to your mom*, Dr. Cheryl would remind you, and you blindly did.

Now you open it, expecting to see numbers and codes, but instead you see a two-column list of disorders. You see the ballpoint check mark next to GAD, and your first reaction is *I know why now*, and realize you didn't know what you thought it would be.

At first, you let it wear on you like a prescription bottle label. Then, you try to get as close to a balance as you can. And eventually, you learn to accept the checked box, the

diagnosis, the label without making your whole self stuck to it. You aren't it, it isn't you—you simply experience it.

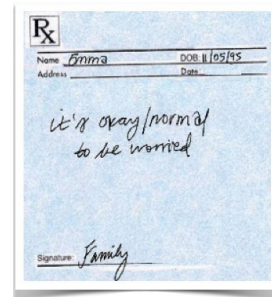


Let yourself slip into one of those spells.

Lie on the floor. Lie in bed. Lie on a couch. Lie. Lie to yourself. Tell yourself you don't deserve anything good in life because you never let yourself take it in without tainting it by convincing yourself: *this will be balanced out, it has to be*. So have that first thought, the one that is always there, in the shadows with its eye on the sun. Let it strengthen its roots. Nourish it. Feed it. Let it grow from a seed to a sapling to a tree, and let it branch off into leaves the colors of fire that constrict, almost consume, wooden veins. Let your eyes dry before you go downstairs.

Tend to the weeds that sprinkle the tree trunk, the ones that feel like rude annoyances of optimism—*this is not forever, this is not the ending, this is not you*, they whimper. Tend to them when the sun hides behind storm clouds the colors of your eyes, your blue your gray, so they can flower, can grow their roots under your chipped finger nails after days of digging too deep inside your mind (*that* mind). They will be comfortable there.

Feed the weeds so their roots are watered with hopeful promise instead of fear.



You wake up from an induced, difficult sleep, not quite ready for the day with tension in your neck and a fluttering pulse. It takes you several bursts of unnatural energy to pick yourself up out of bed littered with pillows coated in cat fur and immediately rest yourself on the beige carpet. It's at least a start, being able to move right away without paralyzing your legs numb thinking about all that could go wrong if you just got up. And all of the things that could go wrong if you didn't. Your mom asks you if something's bothering you. *Not really*, you say as you take two white Excedrins from its bottle, one of many pill-bearing vessels on the kitchen counter. *Just anxious, in general*, you sigh.

All of the orange bottles (a few for each household member except yourself) are scattered across the slab of green granite in the middle of the small kitchen. You don't know why they haven't found a better organization method... Each morning it's a puzzle for them to figure out whose is whose. Before guests come over, Mom takes all of the bottles into her arms and scoops them into the drawer under the sink. *Such a mess*, she mumbles every time.

You watch her read stickered labels with a sense of longing for the way they tried to make themselves feel better.

*

You never understood and still don't understand how a day that was simply comfortable wouldn't be an especially good day. Your parents always seemed to understand that, with Mom always saying to us, *No one's ever happy with what they have, no one's ever happy.*

A day without nauseating pangs in your neck and your head, abated internal conflict between body and mind sounds like a fine day to you. You wonder when the last time, if there was a last time, you felt comfortable like that.

You start to think that maybe living like this is not okay.

*

Pressing the old iPhone so forcefully to your cheek, you can almost feel your mother's words like a heating pad against your clammy skin, your cheeks burning under the early September sun. You try to block out the hollers and squeals coming from the lawn in front of your dorm, where your hall mates wait for you to go to dinner, playing Frisbee in the meantime. Their sneakers sweep across the blades of grass so smoothly. So lightly. Maybe it just *looks* like they're gliding because of the blurred film of tears distorting your perspective.

It's getting worse. It's every day, you say. And you try to name the last day you didn't take at least two doses of Advil or Excedrin

to try to curb the engulfing aches. You can't. *I used to be able to know where it's coming from, why I feel like this...like a big test coming up, or thinking about all of the "what ifs."* She listens and doesn't say anything. She understands. *But it's getting hard to try directly finding the thought-source like Dr. Cheryl taught me to do. It's just getting...more physical.*

What do you want to do about this? You know you can't keep fighting against your own body anymore. You are losing.

You're skeptical about taking the next step: doctors with the power to sign little blue papers. You've always hated science. You think maybe bringing it into this isn't such a good idea. But you were always open to seeing someone. Sitting on the couch. Discussing your mind, trying to make sense of it, maybe even if you don't feel like you're fixing it but instead living with it. You've regularly sat on Dr. Cheryl's (the psychologist it took you two tries to find) olive green couch for a couple of years now, holding one of the velvet pillows. Maybe you should just keep doing that and wait for it all to click.

You're afraid to break the routine with a little orange bottle. You're afraid this has become part of your personality (and often an integral part of your writing process). You don't want to erase all of the anxieties that have been lodged in you for so long. They've grown so comfortable, evicting them would be cruel. Damaging, even. You're afraid, and you aren't considering that this is your anxiety telling you to be.

No more nights poring over an off-white, lineless paper, crisp with dried tears, sprinkling new ones to glaze the words you pen. You can't feel where they're coming from but seem to

know where they're going. No more finding pleasure in feeling so drained and fresh after purging these feelings through ink.

Will it change me? You finally say into your phone, breaking the long silence between

Mom and yourself.

Have I changed since I was put on them? She asks in response. Is she asking you for a real answer? You don't have one.

Promise me that I'll still be me, you plead with her. Because who are you without your anxious thoughts, veins filled with nostalgia for the past and things that never happened but wish they did? How could you stop hoping for a happier past?

I can't, sweets. If it works, you'll just feel like a different you.

On a different galaxy, your leaping friends are hungry for some food after running around for so long. Before you go to join them, you let your forehead rest against the coarse bark of a tree, your breathing as slow as sap dripping down the trunk. Breathing in the smell of hot trash from the dumpsters next to you, you're trying to focus on the question of whether you want to give yourself a break from your own mind or keep letting yourself slip into the familiar and natural, keep letting yourself accept this part of you as all of you. You worry that the harder you try to swim away from something inside, the faster you drown.

At this point, you felt your friends take energy from you, make you feel overwhelmed by their constant activity and their

denial of ever feeling down, ever feeling like taking a break for yourself was necessary. These friends weren't keeping you balanced, and they made you feel *too* alive. There was just too much, too often. And you knew they weren't making you feel like this on purpose, but you knew this wasn't right for you. At this point, though, you still felt you needed to try to make it work. You needed to try proving to yourself that you could do it, you could *be normal*, thinking that they were the normal, that there was a normal.

And a couple years later, you will come home from a whole day with different friends, ones you've loved and still love and make you feel loved, and you will feel so alive, but not too alive. You will write in your journal, smiling to yourself, *I feel so energized even though I should feel exhausted being around people all day. I feel so light, so live, but not too alive. Being with them makes me feel better with everything—circumstance, etc. And myself, with myself.* It will just take you three more dosages, two more years, to feel more like yourself than you have ever felt. Before now, you thought this—the anxiety, the paranoia, the aching—was part of you, was all of you. Before you accepted the fact that something more was wrong, that you needed to start helping yourself, you thought you knew yourself, but the self you knew was being smothered by something that you still feel lurking but only in shadows and back of the brain thoughts. They can be proved wrong.



The first time you went to the eye doctor to get tested for glasses, you were in sixth grade. You were noticing Mr. Smith's green board with his loopy white handwriting, recalling ancient world history, getting whiter and fuzzier with each day of taking meticulous notes. For a while, maybe a few weeks, you thought it was just his handwriting. He was, of course, notorious for his scrawling words albeit his captivating teaching and skill for teaching middle schoolers how to take notes. So you asked him if you could sit up front. To stay better focused, rather than admitting it was the material itself out of focus. And you thought it was working for a while. You didn't mind squinting, didn't mind taking a little longer to copy your notes. Until your eyes felt like they had headaches, and the skin that crinkles in the corners of your eyes began to feel tight even when you were no longer pressing your eyelids as close as they could get without closing them. That, and Mr. Smith noticed you struggling with your eyes, with his chalked words, and asked you to try glasses. *They'll help you, they'll make this easier, they'll make everything easier.*

And when you went to the eye doctor, they said you barely needed them. But you didn't believe the *barely*. At that

point, the green board at the front of Mr. Smith's history classroom had turned white with letters smudged by your vision. Your other classes probably looked the same, too, but you can only remember that one. But they prescribed glasses for distance anyway, saying it couldn't hurt to try. You got glasses with thin blue metal frames, and you returned to your seat in the third row, and everything was so lucid it was bright. It was readable, and you could hardly remember ever being able to read anything so clearly, read faces so surely.

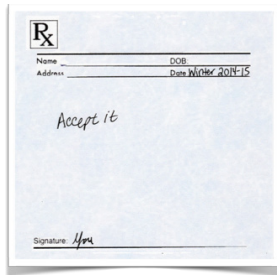
The first time you went to the psychiatrist, Dr. Elizabeth, you were on fall break from your freshman year at college. Your head was throbbing, your neck was pinched, your heart had been racing for as long as you were aware of having a heart beating. You felt her look at you as she took notes on her computer, look at you thinking, *How has she waited this long?* You notice you're projecting, but you do it anyway. This is what you need to convince yourself to take this step, to help yourself feel better.

We'll start you on the minimum dosage, she says after scrolling through family history and your history on a Word document, probably titled with your name. *It's not even a clinical dose, but maybe you'll feel a difference.*

And when you're home for winter break your first year of college, you see your orange bottle sitting among the kitchen counter cluster, hear it rattle when you drop it against the green granite, looking for your name to signify it is yours, it is for you. And even though five milligrams isn't even a clinical dosage, it makes your body feel like it

is breathing, your mind like it is going at a pace you can manage, your thoughts easier to be alone with. *If this little helped so much*, Dr. Elizabeth said, *let's try ten*.

After two years of increasing and decreasing your medication before you get the right dosage, you look at the green bottle of Excedrin in your dorm room drawer and realize you haven't opened it in a whole week. One week without a single neck ache. And then you notice that whenever you talk with Dr. Cheryl over the phone, you feel like you already know what she's telling you. You feel like you're actually getting better. You feel like you can finally start to help yourself get better.



You learn to accept that the little chalk white pills you take with a Snack Pack pudding every morning is actually making a difference—a good, light one that makes you feel like you can finally breathe in, then out, then in, then out every time. You can finally stop shaking, stop aching—you finally feel like yourself without the other stuff and start to wonder if you can even remember a time where you were yourself without the worries, without the restless nights, without trembling all the time. You wonder if that's why you were afraid: because that was all you knew.

You learn to accept that adding this routine, these ten milligrams (then fifteen, then twenty), to your life didn't change you, they brought out the best parts of you and quieted the tensions and gushing rapids of doubts and worst-case scenarios inside your head. You aren't afraid to feel alive anymore, because living was no longer debilitating. You aren't afraid to help yourself feel okay.

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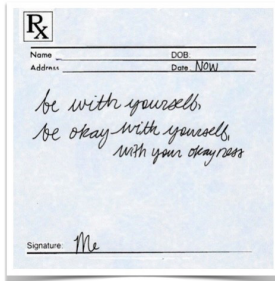
Your mom tells you and keeps telling you, *Medication is a beautiful thing, and why would you suffer if you could stop suffering?* Your new psychiatrist with the cherry wood coffee table and view of a parking lot says that one day you will need to learn how to deal with life without your daily pill, because you don't have to. Not if you don't want to. She says if it helps, then why wouldn't you take it?

You accept that you will pack it in suitcases and place it in wooden drawers wherever you go, and that is okay. At first, you hid your own little orange bottle in your desk drawer. You hid it from the people who blamed you for her problems as if your own were contagious. You hid it from your new friends, because this was freshman year at college and you didn't want to scare them away.

But then you start accepting the checked-off box next to *Generalized Anxiety Disorder* on the sheet of paper Dr. Cheryl hands you for the insurance company after every session.

You will have to increase dosages when you feel you need to, and that will not be easy, but it will be okay. You will be told

to be more aggressive with your as-needed medication, because that is what they are for: for you to feel okay, to feel balanced.



On December 30, 2015, at 12:40am, you wrote in your journal:

I'm afraid of balance. I'm afraid of being happy, of finding what I'm looking for because I have a feeling (I always have, always do) it will be balanced with something bad. I've been told it's like a self-fulfilling prophecy, but I feel it so strongly, so physically, that I have to believe it. I'm even nervous to write any of this because I feel like things are being jinxed and foreshadowed and things seem to want to be balanced, but I don't want balance. I have so much love around me and in me but I'm just so scared to see it, to weigh it on the scales. What if my happiness and my love is my fault? What if their pain is my fault? What if my pain is my fault for being happy? Why are my guilt and happiness linked? Why am I so afraid? Why do the big things feel so black and white even when black and white aren't technically opposites? And why do they feel so black and white when I can see how colorful the kaleidoscope I live in is? Is light any less painful than dark? Is everything going to be okay? Am I going to feel okay?

And now you write this, prescribe this, to yourself:

Balance is scary. But only because you are afraid of it, not because it is actually something to fear. You want control, you can read it. You can remember it. You want to believe you can't be happy because you would be the one preventing happiness, not something out of your control. You still want control, but you don't have to feel reliant on it anymore.

When you damage your car on the side of the road and scream at your mom over the phone, you scream that you don't have time for this that you can't deal with this because you just don't have time for this as you bang your forearms against the wheel to drown out your crying and impatient screeching. After people you care about, people who seem to care about you, bring strawberries and off-brand Lucky Charms as the sky leaks drops of rain between sun rays, you are breathing evenly again.

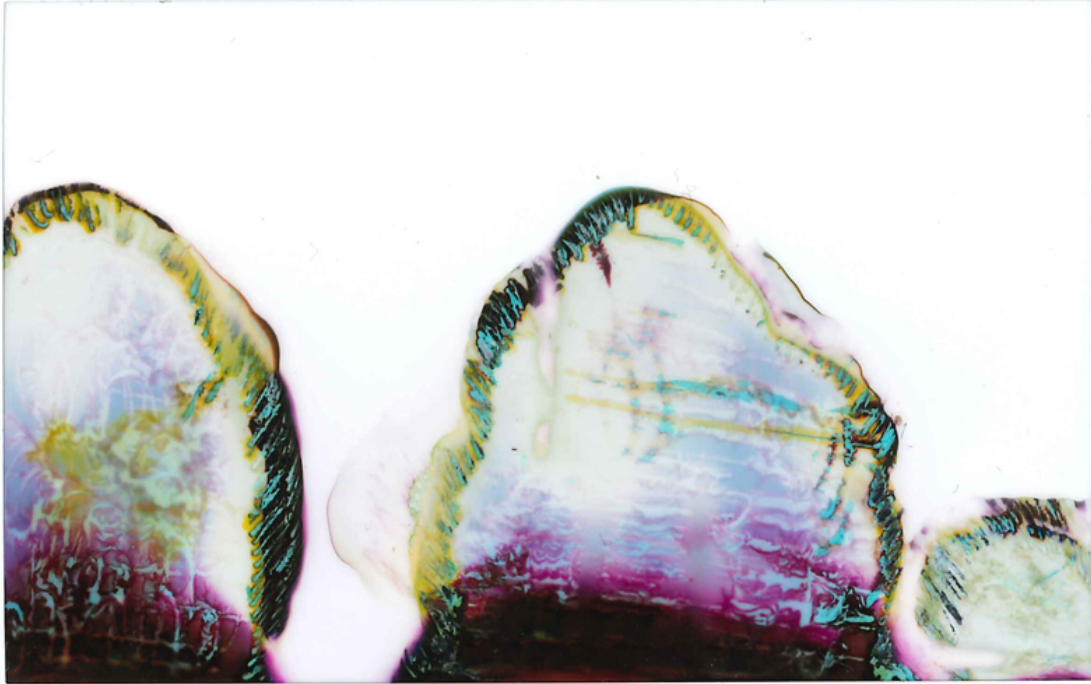
You are realizing that no one or nothing is giving you time, time that seemed to be cut short by this inconvenience. You are realizing that you make the time—all of it: the times you are afraid of, the times you wait for, the times you lunge for, the times you want to get out of, the times you never want to let go of, the times you feel like you don't deserve to feel okay and the times when you are okay with feeling okay. You want to be more than okay, but you recognize where you are now.

When your dosage seems to be right, or closer to it, you think: *I feel okay, not just okay, because feeling okay is more than I would once imagine feeling.* And after a couple of months of this okayness, you want to feel more than okay. Maybe this is why you accept your psychiatrist's suggestion that you take twenty...But you second guess yourself. *Am I selfish for wanting to feel better?*

Better than okay?

You need to know that you are not the doubt, that you cannot always control the doubt, but you can talk with it, you can let it lie to you, you can lie down next to it, and spoon feed sweetness into its soil. But you need to know when to dig the weeds that wrap around warped wood, that block bark from sun and snow. Need to know that these weeds, these doubts and anxieties, are still happening. That you are still happening, this is all still happening, and you just keep making more time, digging up more weeds from the roots you have finally started to tend to, that you are still thinking.

Know that you may not be able to breathe underwater, but you can still feel your heart beating beneath the surface, and you may be afraid of heights, but you can always keep climbing and growing closer to the sky, lifetimes etched in rings and in words to keep track of it all, to remind you that you aren't the weeds that keep trying to grab hold of your roots. You are rings and rings of growth.



Film Plants VI

by: Dyan Cannon

Instant Film
3.4" x 4.25"

Seen, Unsaid

Emma Sheinbaum

*Women will expose
their legs to feed
mosquitos, says the
homeless man laughing
to himself on the M train
platform. Family will steal
from you, he says in a voice
that sounds microphoned but
isn't, Again
and again, and they will call it
a custody battle. Strangers try*

to find your eyes to find
the common reaction: Yes,
I hear him; Yes, I find it strangely
funny too but no,
I am not laughing either.
And *he* is

laughing, but there
is nothing funny about
what he is saying, or his
dirt-smearred winter coat
in May or the way he is pacing between
people on the platform, people who
are either staring at their phones to
avoid his eyes, or people who
search for others' with whom to share
this moment but at the same
time, wishing it wasn't happening, or
rather, wishing it was happening
in front of them.



Exploration of Totality

by: Riley Embler

Glass, Wood, and Metal Cable
58" x 26" x 2"



Exploration of Totality

by: Riley Emblar

Glass, Wood, and Metal Cable
58" x 26" x 2"

To Hold a Will-o'-Wisp

Sarah Harder

follow the disembodied orb
curling through your palm
like baby hairs, past the cottonmouths

and crocodile eggs and spider webs
tattooing themselves on your skin.
They say death brings bloat, but you

just feel a shrinking in your bones.
You forget when, exactly, your nerves
disconnected from your spinal cord,
when your ribcage forgot it was in love

with your chest and began peeling sky-
ward. Let the wisp crawl into your gums
and nest like cavities in your incisors.

They will pretend to be your diaphragm,
tell your muscles when to hold
air like a cradle, when to forget what is living.

Is this how molars fall from their perches,
believing that they, too, could return
to the fissures they grew from?

La Autovía de acceso a Cádiz

Jelly Zhang

“*Toni*,” came her voice over the audio system as they drove over La Pepa, its rhythm and clipped accent patterning oddly with the *popopop* of the rain hitting the car. “*Qué haces hoy? Is la novia keeping you busy?*”

Cornelia’s boyfriend ended the call before the woman could get another word out. He’d forgotten to turn off the Bluetooth connection. She looked over, at where he sat very still in the passenger seat with the eyes of a cornered animal.

“Great,” she said, and dropped a hand on the horn, and let it sit there, and sit, and sit, until she was able to hear it over the roar of blood in her ears. This being Spain, it set off an echo of honks from the surrounding drivers before being obliterated by silence. “You’re the first guy to ever cheat on me.” She grinned, and it was a relief! Those words, long a suspicion hanging within her chest, were no longer just a myth, and she felt them shatter her ribs as they tumbled out.

“I can explain,” he said after a beat, and it was the worst possible thing he could’ve done, at the worst possible time.

*

Don’t go for the guy across from us, the one in 231, the friend whose apartment she was sharing had told her, her first day in the city, and her mind flitted back to that conversation now, and she felt she had to smile... That Spanish guy will break your fucking heart. He is just your type, but he will break your heart.

Antonio was looking at her with concern. Her eyes kept themselves glued to the road, but he never fully vanished out of her peripheral vision. Her parents had entreated her to marry a man in her program, one of the McGill University guys, preferably Chinese, though one of the locals could do too, but really anyone who had a university degree and a good job, a real job, not like Antonio’s derisory fast food delivery gig. And now she was, what? Twenty-nine next week. Not married. Had it been three years of her life that she had wasted with Antonio?

Why don’t kids listen to their parents? she wondered. Why didn’t my parents stop me from going? She wanted somebody to blame.

*

It was Cornelia’s dream to go to Spain ever since the sixth grade, when she’d done her school project on Granada. “*No other region in Europe is so romantic, mysterious, and atmospheric*,” she remembered reading, her nose an inch away from the page. At night the arabesques of the Alhambra lingered like smoke upon her eyelids. And fifteen years later, she had set off, with the same faint-hearted determination as that ogling sixth grader—well, Cádiz wasn’t Granada, but she had friends who lived in the city, and it rained less here. And then after Antonio invited himself into her life she’d never found a reason to leave.

*

Antonio was half-Spanish, half-French, and handsome

all over. He was so, so tan, tanned in a good way like Apollo on the summer solstice: only in Spain could you get that kind of tan. He had one of those expressive faces that anybody could see through in an instant, a character in a telenovela, wonderfully sentimental the way she had pictured Spaniards to be. He loved to talk of the past, but also of the future, of the children they would have together and the names they would have. In university, the only men she had considered were the Yifans, the Jean-Baptistes, the emotionally-constipated med school students; perhaps those were the kinds of men she was destined for. Well, what? She was a goody-two-shoes Chinese-Canadian girl, and it was hard to imagine being married to a guy named Antonio. For that matter, it was hard to imagine a guy named Antonio being married to a girl named Connie.

“You *told* her about me.” She had to pull over, then, and pinch her nose hard for a few seconds to stop the wet sensation rushing up her skull.

*

And, you know, Cornelia was a fastidious woman; she’d just really fucked up with Antonio. She had done all her homework, but what were two tabs on Antonio’s checkered social networking profiles and a couple of tweets that ran something along the lines of, “*@antoniofff126 is a cheating asshole, put him on your blacklist girls,*” what were they compared to those green eyes?!

Wasn’t this the reason she had set her rules? It was fear of the worst that saw the introduction of the dating contract,

the online profile vetting, her policy of not having sex until a month had passed. Against these odds, he had still managed to make her screw herself. No—he’d *allowed* her to screw herself. In some remote, sleepy backwater of his mind, he must have known that this would be the outcome all along.

“*Naranja,*” began the attempt that started out okay and turned desperate. “No, Connie, you know I still love you... *Connie.*” As if saying her name enough times would save him. “You are what matters to me! One chance, you have to give me one more chance.”

The world outside the window was bleak as fuck. Rain pummeled the windshield, which was fogging up at the corners. It was about the coldest day she’d ever experienced in Cádiz. *I can’t believe we’re breaking up with the weather like this.* It felt too tragic to be real, like something that happened to movie stars and not people in real life... but in a way it seemed a fitting conclusion for her stint in Spain. In Québec, right now, there was snow on the ground and ice on the trees, but that didn’t happen this far down south; all they had was the rain and the sorrowful *sushush* of the windshield wipers.

Antonio, still trying to plead his case: “I swear it was just once! Once. Look, I, it’s almost Christmas, Connie, next week, I already picked your present, don’t you want to see what it is?” That expressive face had turned tearful, fast. “What about my parents, can we still go see them? They love you. Please *naranja?* Please?”

Her anger, having taken its sweet time, now rolled through her in waves, the same way everything else came to Cádiz—from the Atlantic, or the Mediterranean by way of the Straits—and like everything else, it had a salt watery tinge; she could taste it at the corners of her mouth. “Shut the hell up!” she yelled in English. “What are you, a kid?”

Antonio wailed, and he wouldn’t stop even when she banged her hand on the steering wheel and it hurt just as much as anything. The sound hammered into her heart. It was too awful, she had to leave.

She stopped the car on an overpass. The ground was slippery with the tears of the saints. She had a feeling he could die there, if she got out and pushed him down. It was just for a moment, but she felt it.



Houston We Have a Problem

by: Callie Parrish

Acrylic Paint on Canvas
18" x 14"

Space-Creators: Interviews with Houston's Art and Literary Community Leaders

Marissa Isabel Gonzalez

When people consider cities where artists and writers flock to, they don't think of Houston. Most may think of New York City and night owls perched over their work, or San Francisco and Allen Ginsberg's, "the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness." When I was first starting out as an art student at University of Houston, I believed that New York City, or San Francisco, or even St. Paul was the place for me—not a city built on oil, medicine, and the Rodeo. During my first semester, my sculpture class took a field trip to BOX 13 ArtSpace, a studio not far from the university. It was an old building I had seen all my life, settled on the corner of Harrisburg and South Cesar Chavez Boulevard. I admired the two-story building, with its white-barred windows and the artwork that was always installed for passersby. I had never realized the building interior was divided into multiple studios for multiple artists. The artist hosting us that day—a man whose name I have forgotten, but whose figurines and sketches plastered on the wall I have not—shared information with us that altered my idea of Houston: we didn't have to go to New York City to find an art community. We could find it here. Our art community was blossoming.

And it continues to blossom! Art shows in warehouses, writing festivals at the Menil, studios and conferences and people who care about art and writing—Houston might thrive on oil and medicine and the Rodeo, but it also thrives on all of our creative minds coming together and interlocking our brain-matter to make blistering creations dancing overhead.

This set of interviews is in commemoration of Houston and

the inhabitants who have created spaces to bring together inspired minds. These are not just community members, but space-creators who have started significant creative organizations around the Houston area.

MIG: As someone who is part of, and trying to bring together, a community for the arts, what are your thoughts on community in terms of what it does, and has done, for yourself and your peers?

Uncommon Colors



***Jordyn Chaffold** is a marketing major here at the University of Houston. He raps, sings, and takes photography/videography. He is the co-founder/president of Uncommon Colors, an organization that provides a platform for creative expression across all forms of art. He appreciates people's talents and tries to help everyone find their voice.*

Having a sense of community is important, and Uncommon Colors is that community. There are several communities on campus that are separate and stagnated. The purpose of Uncommon Colors is to find the commonalities between those communities and bring them together into one major community.

Right now, the University of Houston is considered the 2nd most diverse school in the nation. I can personally attest to the truth in that, as well as the problems that arise because of it. Our diversity is segregated, and to say that is disheartening, but it's the reality. Human nature attracts us to people who are similar to us, and it creates an endless loop of inherent segregation.

Uncommon Colors is the counter to this ideological way of life. We praise diversity of not only culture, but diversity of opinion and diversity of talent. We don't put art into a box; we allow art to define what a box is. This outlook allows for any type of person from any walk of life to bring their expertise to the table. If we need help financially, we'll find someone who is good with numbers, or a mathematician; that is an art. If we need help designing a website, we'll find a coder; that is an art. Art isn't something that you define; it's something that defines you. With this outlook,

our organization has grown exponentially: we have painters, poets, singers, dancers, rappers, graphic designers, photographers, sculptors, anything you can think of. The catch is none of these people are art majors, and that's what makes it so special. People who have these obscure talents may go unseen because of the stigma that art isn't a "real" major. We've created a community where not only art majors, but non-art majors alike can come together and thrive on each other's creativity.

Generators Playground



***Bao Pham** is an artist and musician born in Houston. In his early work of 2012 he emerged into the art world shortly after playing music around Europe and finding a heavy influence in street art throughout Barcelona and Berlin. He came back to Houston determined to*

create an atmosphere suitable for music, graffiti and so much more: A microfest concept like no other. This later became the Generators Playground, which opened up doors for him to grow a bigger body of work with more opportunities to help the local scene.

As an individual that does these shows under the theme of “artists helping artists,” I feel that it’s essential to make it for artists by artists as well. I push to innovate the way we do shows in Houston by making our first fully immersive experience with the Generators Playground. We push the bounds of art by going beyond just street art, film, performance art, and fire spinning. We are now blending radio stations to create a live dialogue between the city and its inhabitants. They will find themselves in a scavenger hunt that will also be a story line in which the city itself is interacting with the people in a profound way. Forcing them to explore more urban areas is also encouraging people to get out of their homes and live vicariously through such jejune endeavors.

Writespace

***Elizabeth White-Olsen** is the founding director of Writespace, Houston’s newest literary arts organization. She has two Master of Fine Arts degrees in Creative Writing, one from Vermont College of Fine Arts and one from Texas State University. She has taught writing at Texas State University, Writespace, and Inprint and currently teaches at Rice Glasscock School of Continuing Studies. She is the author of the poetry collection Given*

Words and writes for the Houston Chronicle and Arts + Culture Texas magazine.

The Pleasure and Paradox of Community

I.

If you want to know whether community is important to writers, find a good book and read its acknowledgements page. Here, you will usually find anywhere between fifteen to a hundred and fifty people thanked.

Believe that community isn’t necessary for writers? Think that books arise hermetically from the minds of lone, solitary geniuses carving out their stories on the fringes? Think again.

No great book has been produced without its writer being nurtured and strengthened by his or her surrounding literary community—meaning the fellow writers, editors, agents, and readers who inspire us to write.

II.

One’s community is always helpful—even when it is seemingly being unhelpful. I know this because this paradox happened to me.

One day I received a call that my twenty-one year-old cousin had died as a result of a gunshot wound.

My cousin shot himself. On purpose. Two months later, my father died of a heart attack on the couch where we used to watch TV. Between these two events, my grandmother, the loving matriarch of our family, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. A few months later, she was gone, too.

Grief was like a force of nature—a tornado, a hurricane over which I had no control. Like a disease. I was in the midst of earning my M.F.A. in Poetry at this time, and I would find myself crying, say, in the middle of a discussion of a John Ashbery poem. I tried to stop crying, and then to pretend it wasn't happening, but inevitably a prickle of attention would spread through the room until finally, I could tell I was distracting our professor. I would then rise, stride toward the bathroom, hide in a stall, and collapse into the dark well of grief.

I had to write about these lost ones, but the poems that came from me demanded to not be “poetic.” My classmates, though, liked to read and write “poetic” poems—ones that experimented with language, instead of making literal sense. But my world no longer made sense, and the solace I sought through words demanded that sense be made. I couldn't read Ashbery or any of the other poets whose work subverted meaning. I found myself turning to lesser-known poets who wrote with familiar and solid logic, like Jane Kenyon. My pain was so intense that as a reader and as a writer, only still, expected words, solid words with no play in them, could carry me through

my grief.

My classmates were not fans of my poems. Before, this would have mattered to me. Writing was a way for me to achieve, a way to gain others' love and approval, but pain broke me beyond the habit of using my writing talent to strengthen my ego. My writing was now important to me. To *me*. And it was now important to me because of how it could change me, not because of what it could gain me. Thus, as my poems slowly and silently healed my grief, they also healed deeper brokenness.

Each week my classmates hated the grief-shot poems I brought in for review, and each week—with growing exhilaration and defiance—I wrote them anyway. Soon, I had enough poems for a book. Several months later I got to hold my own book, *Given Words*, in my hands, and to know I was different because of it.

I thanked my husband in the acknowledgements page of *Given Words*. But I should have also thanked the community of poets who continued to read my poems, even though they didn't like them. I should have thanked them for offering me a sounding board through which I could discover myself.

III.

I write these words with every breath, every thought, and every word I speak currently devoted to creating

Writespace, a literary arts institution that supports writers through creating writing community in Houston and beyond. Through hosting writing workshops, editing consultations, and literary festivals, I now get to give back to the writing community that taught me to compose good sentences, to always find the right word, to strive to create unique pieces—and, more than this: to the writing community that taught me to trust my instincts. Perhaps someday I will write a book about the founding of Writespace. And on its acknowledgements page, I will thank every writer who walks in our doors to enter in the thrilling adventure of writing amidst the pleasure and paradox of community.

To find more information about these organizations, please go to:

Uncommon Colors:

www.uncommoncolors.com

Generators Playground:

www.thegeneratorsplayground.com

Writespace:

www.writespacehouston.org

The Silence Screams the Truth

Liana Stampalia

Silent Anatomies

Author: Monica Ong

Poetry Collection

Kore Press, 2015

ISBN: 978-1-888553-69-7

Through themes of gender, race and satire, Monica Ong uses an ekphrastic approach to tell her own life story in delicately worded poetry. Diagrams of human anatomy lead us through the book and poems such as “Metal Lungs,” create analogies between the functions of the human organs and broader topics such as immigration. She connects ideas that typically do not relate to one another in a way that causes her readers to find the similarities for themselves.

Ong has a way of providing you with the basic information that you need to grasp key points, but she writes in an open-ended manner that lets you draw your own conclusions about how each story is supposed to end. In short verses she offers us a range from fun and carefree to heavily insightful themes: touching on her father’s favorite dessert, and what it means to be a certain gender in a specific part of the world.

A book with a similar mission to *Silent Anatomies* is *A Weave of Women* by Esther Broner. It includes descriptive poetry that touches on the themes of sexism and racism. Unlike Ong’s focus on Asian culture, Broner focuses on a group of Jewish women facing the struggles of a society that is dominated by men. Both of these books strive to show their readers what it is like to be the minority in a culture simply due to the gender or race you were born as.

In a poem written like a letter to Ong’s mother, “Bo Suerte” provides us with a family photo that appears to consist of a nanny, four daughters and three sons. She says:

Hidden like your graceful arms in a brother’s long sleeves. Your boyface gazes at me. I place flowers at your feet, wet with pus. For the daughter, you, but not only you.

In this poem Ong explains to us that her mother has been forced to dress like a boy in order to preserve the family’s image, and that “the fact of five daughters was the immutable kind.” Although it is not precisely stated, we are able to come to the conclusion that gender plays a large role in her family’s social status. Upon further examination of the picture we see that the ‘son’ wearing the long-sleeved shirt is actually Ong’s mother. By using only one family photo and a carefully worded poem, Ong is able to make us see the repercussions of a child who is of a family that has more girls than boys. This also points out the inequality between genders in that part of the world. Ong continues to reinforce this theme throughout the book through poems like “Perfect Baby Formula,” which explains the want to give birth to a baby boy over a girl.

In an easy-to-read, almost comical approach, Ong tackles the struggle of race and the privileges one race receives over another through her poem “Whitening Solution.” Her creative invention is a spoof on a skin care product; instead of cleaning, the product will change your skin tone to white and remove all facial features that reveal your ethnicity.

Ultimately, the product will change your race entirely. She says:

Studies have shown efficacy in elevating social standing, while lowering incidents of racial profiling by 27%. Pooled analysis of single females who have undergone this whitening treatment reveal a 45% higher success rate in securing marriage proposals.

Using a satirical approach, Ong manages to point out the flaws in a society where race affects your ability to get married along with where you stand socially. Through her words, we are able to see how the Caucasian race is superior in the world in which she is living.

Images are used on almost every page of the book and many of them are meant to act as a satire of something else. Ong is unconventional in her ways, layering a diagram of a human organ on top of a prescription pad with a Chinese recipe written on it as seen in “Profunda Linguae.” She has spotted a consistency in the language of a medical prescription and a recipe; effortlessly combining the two to share an idea.

A large section of the book uses medicine and cleaning solutions to explain a theme in society that she feels needs to be discussed. She gives us an image of a bottle of pills, such as in “Silent Treatment,” or a bottle of liquid with instructions on the front. The poem is structured in a way that mimics the instructions you would typically read when using the medicine or solution.

Overall, *Silent Anatomies* breaks the rules of traditional poetry as it uses personal images and diagrams while discussing difficult topics, such as gender and race. The topics vary with each poem, but the constant themes of family and culture help the book come together as a whole and gives the reader insight into Ong’s life.

Henry the Great, Katherine the Forgotten: A Mixed Review of Lenny Banovez's Production of Shakespeare's *Henry V*

Angela Montez

Henry V

Director: Lenny Banovez

Author: William Shakespeare

Play

July 30, August 3, 5, 7 2016

Houston Shakespeare Festival

At 8:15 pm, on August 5, 2016, director Lenny Banovez's third staging of Shakespeare's *Henry V* took to the stage of Houston Miller Outdoor Theater for the 42nd season of the Houston Shakespeare Festival. *Henry V* chronicles King Henry V's war campaign for the French throne. The play has battles, politics, and even romance. However, the essence of *Henry V* is a presentation of the power of language, of which Henry V is able to strategically utilize to motivate his army and woo his future queen, Princess Katherine of France. It is his skill as a rhetorician that makes him an incredible king and the hero of the play. Brendan Marshall-Rashid's rendering of Henry V captured this spirit. Conversely, though, the staging of Susie Parr's Princess Katherine was not as endearing. Though a lovable character—demure, kind, and beautiful—how Katherine was portrayed minimized her political significance. Therefore, though Marshall-Rashid's acting accurately captured Henry V, Banovez's production failed to accurately capture Princess Katherine's importance, because her usage as romantic relief undercut her political significance.

It makes sense in a play titled *Henry V* that the story would focus mainly around Henry. It was wonderful to observe such an integral character developed so favorably. In Shakespeare's script, Henry is a master with language and

performance; he knows how to intertwine the two and use them successfully. This quality is beautifully captured by Marshall-Rashid in many of the scenes. It is most strikingly captured, though, in two of particular: the Crispin's Day Speech, and his interaction with Katherine. In the Crispin's Day Speech, Marshall-Rashid, as Henry, entered the stage and immediately began interacting with the other characters. When he said, "my cousin Westmoreland," he talked to him, and when he began to speak to his whole army, he interacted with them, walking amongst them and touching their shoulders (VI. iii. 21-69). In doing so, Marshall-Rashid brought Henry V's words to life. The rhetoric of the Crispin's Day Speech was meant to bring the army together by creating a sense of shared glory and equality; Marshall-Rashid's body language and actions reflect that. He was portraying Henry as a king of the people and a hero. He was physically enacting Henry's power over language and the power of language itself.

It was a quality of Marshall-Rashid's that was equally observed in the calmer, more romantic setting of his interaction with Katherine. Here, Marshall-Rashid's tone and body language shifted. He intentionally seemed a bit flustered, shaken, bashful, in love. His "I love thee, Kate" phrases and other words of wooing seemed filled with urging and sincerity (V. ii. 101-290). He acted much like an endearing, yet slightly awkward, teenage boy, who was asking his true love to go out on a date with him—except in this case it was not for a date, but marriage. In fact, Marshall-Rashid's ability to portray this was so fantastic that "Aww's" and "Woo's" rang out from the watching audience when he and Katherine kissed. He successfully embodied Henry's language. For not

only does he use it to woo Kathrine, but to woo us, the audience. Marshall-Rashid had everyone feeling the romance. Therefore, in both these situations Henry V was able to flourish as man with powerful abilities over language, over the characters, and over us.

With such a stunning performance, perhaps it was too easy for the importance of Katherine to get lost. This is not to say that it was Marshall-Rashid's fault; an actor cannot be faulted for being good. Instead, the omission of Henry's vulgar comments about Katherine to Burgundy (V. ii. 293-335) and Katherine and Henry's too romantic, too smitten kiss should be criticized. It undercut Katherine's political importance as a woman. It shifted the tone of the play away from the political and the power of language and into the romantic. Indeed, *Henry V* does end in a marriage, but it is not necessarily romantic or consensual. As Katherine told the audience in French, their marriage was her father's decision (V. ii. 257). However, this was easily overshadowed and forgotten because Susie Parr's Katherine leaned into Henry's kiss, and touched him sweetly and gently. Overall, there was an impression that she had a crush on Henry and that she wanted to kiss him, despite just before the kiss telling the audience that it was not the custom of the French to kiss before marriage. As the princess of France, it was unlikely that she would forgo a French custom that easily or quickly. However, Susie Parr's Katherine does. Resultantly, the audience was lead to believe that this was 'true' love. Hence, the "Aww's" and "Woo's" seemed appropriate. In this way, *Henry V* underwent a Disneyfication. The performance became about happy-endings and true love: the hero got the girl because that was how it should be rather than because it

was a necessary political measure that only Katherine could fulfill.

Is this enough to have made Branovez's production a failure? At least three-fourths of the play was about Henry V, and Marshall-Rashid did a great job. However, that does not mean the production was perfect. That Katherine's political importance was not made more apparent, from a feminist lens, was a major failing of the production. That there was a change in tone from political to romantic should also be noted. They are important features of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and their misportrayal made this production of *Henry V* less successful. Overall, though, Branovez's production was good. The faults in the production were not enough to condemn, but they were enough to note as misleading to an audience.

"And the rest are the residue years."

Irina Lutsenko

The Residue Years

Author: Mitchell S. Jackson

Novel

Bloomsbury, 2013

ISBN: 978-1-62040-029-6

Book in hand, pencil in book, I get on the plane, ready to read *The Residue Years* by Mitchell S. Jackson for my *Introduction to Creative Writing* class over spring break. I am going to Portland, Oregon. I turn the book in my hands and read every word on both covers, as I always do. By an amazing coincidence, I am going to the city where the author grew up and where this semi-autobiographical novel is set.

"America's whitest city" is yet another victim of the crack epidemic, which the author personifies and exposes through the life of a family. The novel is a simultaneous narration by two people – Grace (mother, addict) and Champ (son, dealer). Yes, simultaneous, but, no, it's not confusing. The author finds an effective approach to presenting these two perspectives in an organized way. The two main characters tell their story strictly in turns, with each chapter being told by either mother or son. The reader always knows who is talking because each chapter starts from a short line said by the narrating character. Additionally, each starting line functions as a kind of title, but is also included into the text of the chapter. The lines tend to be laconic and abstract, like, "*But what if this is?*" or "*That's a good question,*" which is a great way of expressing what is going on in the characters' minds without giving away any details of the story line. This kind of organization is especially appealing to people

like me, who like everything to be clear and cohesive, with, perhaps, a tinge of mystery.

Another thing that is appealing about this novel is the author's use of language – skillful, captivating, imaginative. Mitchell Jackson uses literary devices that are characteristic of poetry more than prose. As you read the examples of his ingenious metaphors and comparisons, you have to remind yourself that it is prose, not poetry. This is the way he speaks about options in life: "*Act too slow and they put on track shoes and sprint right the fuck off.*" Or, he uses the following phrase to say that his brother was crying: "*his eyes leaking Oregon raindrops.*" Or, this is the way he speaks about drinking his Slushie noisily: "*... making a symphony of sucking down my Slushie.*" The examples are endless. By using this metaphorical language, the author makes simple truths and mundane things sound strong and vivid.

Mitchell Jackson is also great at using another poetic device to make things sound stronger – word repetition. For example, "*Back when we were straight. When we were living with great-grands in the house on Sixth, home, back when Mom's checks kept me and KJ laced in new shirts and laden with toys, back when she kept a corporate job that paid bonus, back then Mom came home at the same time day in, day out.*" Or, "*... I drop the bit, and stomp and stomp and stomp until I've crushed it all to dust.*" This word repetition brings rhythm and beat into the text, as well as emphasizing key ideas. "Back" helps to emphasize the idea of remembering and missing the past; "stomp" enhances the idea of destruction and probable hate of the thing he is destroying.

One idea echoes throughout the whole book, “*life has options.*” Champ repeats it a lot. So what are your options if you are a black person growing up in “the whitest city in America” during the crack epidemic? What are your options if you are a mother of one? Do you deal? Do you use? Neither? Or both? The quote on the front cover of the book says, “... *full of impossible hope.*” The author fills the reader with hope for the characters to opt for the right thing to do. Can they? Will they?

As I was reading the book, soaking in the language and listening to the echo of hope resonating in me, I could not help picturing Portland. The Portland I saw was not the same as the Portland I read about. Even the city of roses, blooming and colorful, is not immune to a nation-wide disease, which Mitchell S. Jackson did an exceptional job of describing.

Not Merely a Tomb: The Truths and Fears of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' *Skeleton Tree*

Dylan Gallimore

Skeleton Tree

Artist: Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds

Record

Released September 9, 2016

Label: Bad Seeds Ltd

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' new record *Skeleton Tree* is as excellent and crushing as initial reviews proclaim it to be. However, these same reviews are failing to truly plumb the depths of a record that represents so much more than a eulogy of the leading man's tragically deceased son.

It comes on the heels of the death of Cave's son, Arthur, who last year fell from a cliff to his death. This tragedy has been entered by legions of critics into the legendarium of tragic events that so torture artists as to inspire them to produce timeless art. It's become a woefully memorialized catastrophe, central to the origin story of this record and the most unfortunate, consequential event of Nick Cave's life and career.

And for obvious reason. Simply put, *Skeleton Tree* is an eight-song progression of brutal, unforgiving morbidity and nihilism. It is melancholy in the way a fire consuming a childhood home is melancholy. It is as hopeless as the sudden death of a young man. Its songs are dense, trudging ballads that tighten like a slow vice around the heart, sonically synthetic and somber. Even in the few moments that come closest to qualifying as uplifting (the lyrics in "Rings of Saturn;" the music in "Skeleton Tree") *Skeleton Tree's* songs are, at best, only the memory of a single sunbeam as it slips beyond a very murky, very distant horizon.

However, from a purely lyrical standpoint, there are noticeable absences that initial reviews have mostly overlooked. Most principally among absences are Arthur Cave, his memory and his death. For all the critical chatter about the imprint made by Arthur Cave's death on *Skeleton Tree*, he very rarely shows up in the lyrics in an explicit way.

Keen reviewers are careful to point out that these songs were written before Arthur's death, thus they are not explicitly 'about' him or his death—though, they charge, he and his death echo within the somber music and haunt the drone of his father's voice. This is unquestionably true; while "Jesus Alone's" first lyrics contain an eerily premonitory reference to the nature of Arthur's death, the tragedy and subsequent grief can really be only found in certain lyrical sound bites: "I will miss you when you're gone away forever...just breathe, just breathe, I need you," moans Cave in the hysterical final moments of the monolithic "I Need You;" quiet chants of "and it's all right now" close out the record. These moments are desperate, grasping and unimaginably lonely, and it is extremely likely that Arthur Cave's memory is present in them, as critics have insisted. But it is not a foregone conclusion—it is not clear that these lines or many others directly address Arthur, no matter how badly listeners expect or morbidly wish them to. Indeed, Cave, Sr. addresses many of the records' lyrics to an opaque 'you' or, more frequently, a female character; the record is rife with references to dresses, supermarkets, and "my one true love." Cave's tone is wracked with grief over Arthur's death, but more often than not, his lyrics simply aren't.

It is equally or perhaps more likely that, in these lonely lyrical soundbites, Cave is speaking to himself. Indeed, if aloneness is as looming a theme in *Skeleton Tree* as critics have so thunderously proclaimed, then this theory cannot be ignored or easily explained away. It is as possible that Cave is addressing himself as it is possible that he is addressing his son.

Of course, both possibilities are remarkably sad. But while one boasts an anticipatory sadness—a father is filled with sorrow over the death of his son—the other boasts a near-lack of all feeling—following his son’s death, a man concludes that life is meaningless and empty, and realizes that was so even while his son lived. The latter scenario explores the bleak emotions of a man so helplessly broken, so unsure of his own purpose and existence that all he can utter to himself is, “Just breathe, just breathe,” “it’s alright now,” “there are powers at play more forceful than we.”

Thus, *Skeleton Tree* is not a devastatingly sad, somber masterpiece solely because Nick Cave’s son died. It is a devastatingly sad, somber masterpiece because sons die, and their fathers are left to struggle onward on life, their quiet pain an anchor dragging them to the bottom of a dark, dead, lonesome sea. Nick Cave is at the bottom of that sea now, and his songs to us are individually powerful and convincing five-minute-long arguments that, really, we are all drowning alongside him and always have been. *Skeleton Tree* is filled with sorrow, because to exist is to be filled with sorrow.

To truly cherish a record as openly, humanly fearful as this, we must insist on understanding it for what it is, despite our desires to understand it for what we anticipated or expected or morbidly hoped it to be. *Skeleton Tree* is not

merely a eulogy. It is not merely a tomb. It is not merely a shadow of Arthur Cave’s life or the sonic offspring of Nick Cave and his grief.

It is a bastard, alone and crying out from the darkest corners of a wrecked man’s heart and mind; a confession of a hopeless revelation, and that makes its conscious, wandering lostness so much more agonizing. It is a thorough, well organized and pronounced argument that, despite our best efforts to convince ourselves otherwise on a microscopic, second-to-second basis, “nothing, nothing, nothing really matters.”

Skeleton Tree’s morbidity and sorrow are so penetrating and dire that it’s no wonder so many initial reviews have failed to truly explore the record beyond its context. But we must understand this masterpiece for what it is, not merely for what we morbidly expected it to be, and that means facing *Skeleton Tree’s* most brutal truths as fearfully, as willingly, and as resignedly as its maker has.

Nothing really matters. Just breathe.

Vivian Calderón Bogoslavsky - Arte Calderon (Art)

Vivian is a Colombia Native born to Argentinian parents. She holds a bachelor's in anthropology with a minor in history and a postgraduate degree in Journalism from Universidad of Los Andes in Bogota, Colombia. She has studied art for over 13 years with a well known Argentinian art master as well as studies in Florence, Italy, and Fine Arts & Design in USA. She was in Madrid, Spain for one year painting and having art exhibitions and today she is in Colombia exploring her art. Vivian has shown her work in both individual and collective shows in the United States, Spain, and Colombia. She has been published in multiple books, magazines and webpages, and has received multiples awards. Web Page: www.artecalderon.com

Steven Chung - Zeno's Bullet (Poetry)

Steven Chung is a high school student who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. His poetry and essays appear or are forthcoming in *The Financial Times*, *Rattle*, *inter|rupture*, *Potomac Review*, *The Margins: Asian American Writers' Workshop*, *The Missing Slate*, and elsewhere.

Dyan Cannon - Film Plants V and Film Plants VI (Art)

Dyan Cannon was born and bred in Houston, TX. Drawn to science early on, she found herself interested in the correlation of urbanism and nature. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design and Photocommunications from St. Edward's University in 2013. She hopes to further her urban research in graduate school.

Perry Chandler - The Searcher (Art)

Perry Chandler is a undergraduate Painting student at the University of Houston. Perry's work is based around the ideas of memory loss, anxiety, storytelling, and isolationism in the search for knowledge and peace within one's self. His work typically presents classical portraits of historical imagery fluidly mixed with abstraction and color theory giving his work a feeling of time that has passed, while at the same

time searching for a future to be remembered. Perry was awarded the Grand Prize in Lawndale Art Center's "Big Show" in 2013.

Elizabeth DeBunce - Exploration (Poetry)

Elizabeth DeBunce is a writer from Southern Oregon who is currently majoring in English and Classical Studies at Lewis & Clark College. She enjoys listening to The Mountain Goats, and writing about eggs, whether metaphorically or not. Her work has previously appeared in: *The Zine*, *The Gold Man Review*, *Words Dance*, and *The Timberline Review*.

Riley Emblar - Exploration of Totality (Art)

Riley Emblar is currently a junior in Glass at the Rhode Island School of Design. Their piece, Exploration of Totality, marks their first foray into the world of glass art. Using the repetition of a multistep process involving wire frames, blown glass, and cold working to create a series of similar forms, Riley explores the reflective and illusory potential of glass. To see more of their work, please visit <https://www.behance.net/rileyemblar>.

Jennie Frost - Noe Tries To Keep It Cool (Poetry)

Jennie Frost is a Jewish, Appalachian poet from Maryville, TN. She is a creative writing student at Tusculum College and her poetry has appeared in *Anomaly*, *Kudzu*, and *Political Punch*, an anthology on the politics of identity from Sundress Publications. She is a two-time winner of the Curtis Owens prize and beginning in January, she will serve as the Writer in Residence at the Sundress Academy for the Arts.

Dylan Gallimore - Not Merely a Tomb: The Truths and Fears of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' Skeleton Tree (Review)

Dylan Gallimore is a Philadelphia-based, New Jersey-born writer. He is the screenwriter and producer of the upcoming

independent film “*The Demon I Cling To*,” and his poetry and fiction have appeared in *The City Quill*.

Barbara Gamiz - True Friendship (Art)

Barbara Gamiz - Big Bird (Art)

Barbara Gamiz is from Mexico City; her artwork shows a high contrast pallet, graphic texture, and assorted layers. She studied at Glassell School of Fine Arts where she achieved her certificate on painting and photography. She is currently studying at University of St. Thomas-Houston. Her artwork was published in *Swirl* magazine in 2012. She participated in a group exhibition in Mexico City, juried exhibitions at Lonestar College, Memorial City Mall Gallery and Glassell. The artist likes to experiment with different theories, techniques, and ideas to achieve her goals, and her passion is expressed through her art making.

Estefania Garcia - 뭐싶어? (Art)

Estefania Garcia is a junior general art student at the University of Houston. She has recently exhibited her artwork at Insomnia’s Monster Show X and at the University of Houston’s School of Art. This is her first time publishing her work in a literary magazine.

Marissa Isabel Gonzalez - Space-Creators: Interviews with Houston’s Art and Literary Community Leaders (Interview)

Marissa Isabel Gonzalez is a senior creative writing student at the University of Houston. She is *Glass Mountain’s* reviews editor, and has to at least mention the journal once a day to soothe her inner advertiser. She likes to write fictional stories about Houston and its inhabitants, as well as hoard all of her beloved characters. Once she graduates, Marissa hopes to immerse herself in the writing community. This is her first publication.

Sarah Harder - To Hold a Will-o’-Wisp (Poetry)

Harder is an undergraduate student at the University of

South Florida studying English with an emphasis in Creative Writing. She has been published in a few literary journals, including the *ARTlines 2 Poetry Anthology* and USF’s *Thread Literary Inquiry*. Harder has also begun working as an editor for the *Thread* this fall.

Fernando Izaguirre - When I Was Thirteen (Poetry)

Fernando Rafael Izaguirre, Jr., is a senior at the University of Houston majoring in Creative Writing and minoring in Mexican-American studies. His poetry has been published in various print and online magazines such as the *Rio Grande Review*, *Metaphor*, *Red Fez*, and the *Merida Review*. Fernando is a poetry editor for *Red Fez* and is currently working on a poetry collection. He lives in Anahuac, Texas.

Jennifer Lothrigel - Warrior Spirit (Art)

Jennifer Lothrigel is a photographer and poet residing in the San Francisco Bay area. Her work has been published in *Narrative Northeast*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *The Apeiron Review*, *The Tishman Review*, *Corvus Review*, *Five Poetry* and elsewhere.

Irina Lutsenko - “And the rest are the residue years.” (Review)

Irina Lutsenko is a teacher of English as a foreign language from Saint Petersburg, Russia. In 2015-16, she was a teacher of Russian and a non-degree student at the University of New Haven as a participant of the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant program. Over 10 years in the profession, Irina loves teaching and writes a professional blog. After taking an Introduction to Creative Writing course at the University of New Haven, she discovered a new side of writing and is now making a foray into writing poetry and creative nonfiction.

John McCracken - Hyperhidrosis (Poetry)

John McCracken is a current undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He enjoys working in the

Creative Writing Program and is currently pursuing the major and a certificate in Gender and Women's Studies. His work has appeared in *Illumination Magazine* and *UW Flash Fiction*. He is a devoted staff member and editor for the organization, *The Madison Review*.

Angela Montez - Henry the Great, Katherine the Forgotten (Review)

Angela Montez is an undergraduate, double major in English Literature and Anthropology at the University of Houston. This will be her first publication. However, she was the recipient of the University of Houston's Spring 2016 Excellency in English Award and is a member of Sigma Tau Delta. She enjoys reading and studying literary criticism, poetry, modernism, and postcolonialism. Professionally, she hopes to become an English professor. As for now, she is enjoying her time as a student: reading, running, eating, and working at the University of Houston's writing center.

Amber MV - The Shallows (Poetry)

Amber MV holds a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing and English from Southern New Hampshire University. Find more of Amber MV's work at www.theleafypaw.com. She lives in western Washington state.

Callie Parrish - Houston We Have a Problem (Art)

Callie Parrish is a mathematics student currently conducting research in theoretical chemistry/physics. She is very intrigued by quantum trajectories and wishes to one day find a general way of finding out where quantum anomalies come from and to study their behavior. She was told by financial aid that her research takes care of her capstone and that she would not receive any more funds for her BFA in painting because apparently that's a waste of money. When told that there is no market for somebody with both a mathematics degree and an art degree, she rebutted with that she will create a market and demand. And devote her entire life

convincing the world that mathematics and art are the exact same or at the very least equivalent. But was then slapped in the face with laughter and no more funds. She's always met with such reactions up until she makes the impossible happen. But when she moves onto the next idea, she's met with the same hostility and everybody thinks she's crazy again.

Ty Pederson - He's Like a Different Person (Fiction)

Ty Pederson was born in Houston but raised on its outskirts. Though he's always told tales, he suppressed his literary aspirations until he was in his twenties, when the addiction took over and he decided to try writing seriously. He hasn't figured out how to start but is waiting for an epiphany while completing a B.A. in English at the University of Houston.

Abdiel Perez - I Break Mirrors With My Face in the United States (Art)

AJ Perez is a 21-year-old boy from Houston, Texas. He began creating collages in his 9th grade art class, and has since created a plethora of work in and out of the academic setting. He is currently a double-major in History and Painting at the University of Houston. His three favorite words are access, author, and abject. Website: aj-perez.com

Rebecca Rist - The Stranger The Better (Poetry)

Rebecca Rist is a senior physics major and premedical student at Colgate University, as well as the alpine ski team captain. She has a poem, "The Song After Next" published in *Glass Mountain*, and another poem, "An Electronics Project" published in *Outrageous Fortune*. Additionally she has had a poem and short story appear in *The Colgate Portfolio*.

Jeremy Simmons - Monument (Fiction)

Jeremy graduated in 2016 from the undergraduate writing program at the University of Cincinnati. He has been writing for over twenty years and has recently been writing for the *Hong Kong Review of Books* and *The Existential Gamer*,

among others. Jeremy is currently working on his second novel.

Emma Sheinbaum - Reminders (Nonfiction)

Emma Sheinbaum - Seen, Unsaid (Poetry)

Emma Sheinbaum grew up in Montvale, New Jersey and is currently a junior Writing major at Ithaca College in upstate New York with minors in Honors, English, and Counseling. Her creative nonfiction was published in States of Mind Literary Magazine in Ithaca, NY in 2016. On campus, Sheinbaum has been published in Ithaca College's *Stillwater Literary Magazine*, *The Mirror Magazine*, and *Symposium: The Honors Undergraduate Scholarly Journal*. In Spring 2016, Sheinbaum was awarded first place in the Personal Essay category of the Ithaca College Writing Contest facilitated by the Writing Department.

Liana Stampalia - The Silence Screams the Truth (Review)

Liana Stampalia is from Saratoga Springs, New York. She is a current junior at the University of New Haven with a major in music performance and a double minor in communication and creative writing. Liana's focal point of interest is in young adult fiction and she wishes to pursue a career in writing once she has completed her degree.

Eli Steiger - Echoes (Poetry)

Eli Steiger is a 25-year-old writer residing in Cleveland, OH. He is a junior, studying Creative Writing and Philosophy. He is the author of many unpublished poems and short stories. He has four cats. That is too many cats. His interests include long walks on the beach, romantic candlelit dinners, overthrowing the bourgeoisie, and existential dread.

The Bearded Lady (AKA K. Garner) - Oil Man (Art)

The Bearded Lady is a parent, spouse, UH Creative Writing Student, PCOS surviving, IHH battling, friend, poet,

illustrator, journalist, and performance artist whose work has appeared in *OutSmart Magazine*. This piece reflects The Bearded Lady's struggle with religious hypocrisy, that battle between what is spiritual and what is the system.

Connor Walden - For Your Pleasure (Art)

Connor Walden is a senior at The University of Texas at Austin and studies art and marketing. Although Connor considers himself a sculptor, he has been published in two publications with his ink drawings: the "Rio Review" at Austin Community College and the "Analecta 41" at The University of Texas at Austin.

Jelly Zhang - La Autovía de acceso a Cádiz (Fiction)

Jelly Zhang lives in Calgary, Alberta, where she is struggling to survive the school year. This is her first work of fiction to be shared with an audience. Literature is her passion; biology and chemistry are her side-hoes.

Merideth Melville - If A Confession Falls and No One is Around to Hear it, Does it Still Make a Sin? (Nonfiction Winner)

Merideth Melville lives in Houston, TX by way of Wantagh, NY (with stopovers in El Paso, San Antonio, Dallas and Austin, where she earned a BS in Radio/TV/Film from UT). Four sisters, three film businesses, two ex-husbands, one bankruptcy, a twelve-year-old son and a new relationship with an old flame provide plenty of fodder for her non-fiction writing. Check out her website/blog, MothersTuckersLounge.com

Victoria Marino - Red and Blue (Nonfiction Runner-Up)

Victoria Marino was born in Philadelphia and grew up in Broomall Pennsylvania. Currently, she is a senior at West Chester University studying Communications. Her favorite book is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and she is extremely passionate about writing.

Diantha Sneed - The Trees Were Calling Your Name (Fiction Winner)

Diantha Sneed grew up with a story-telling father and she has always loved telling stories. Recently she started participating in writing workshops at Inprint in Houston. Connecting and collaborating with other writers has inspired her, and she plans to continue this work. She lives in Houston with her husband and two children.

Erika Walsh - Teeth For Seeds (Fiction Runner-Up)

Erika Walsh is a junior at Ithaca College, where she studies Writing with a minor in Women's and Gender Studies. She was raised on Long Island, NY. Erika penned her first short novel, a groundbreaking narrative detailing the life of a family of blueberry picking robots, when she was four years old. Besides writing, she enjoys learning new things, making collages, deconstructing social norms, riding bicycles, looking at the moon, contributing to the takedown of the patriarchy, and petting cats.

Brooke Lightfoot - To Be Half & Half (Poetry Winner)

Brooke Lightfoot graduated from the University of Houston, May 2014, with her Bachelors in English Literature. She was a finalist for the 2012 Gulf Coast Undergraduate Fellowship in Poetry. She also served as an Editorial Assistant and then Business Manager for *Gulf Coast Literary Journal*. Her poetry has been published in *H_NGM_N* journal and photography has been published in *Houstonia Magazine*.

Hakeem Hopper-Collins - momma's megazord (Poetry Runner-Up)

Hakeem Hopper-Collins, pen name hakeem anthony, is a senior Writing Major at Ithaca College, with a creative writing concentration and African Diaspora Studies Minor. He considers himself to be an afrofuturist and breakbeat writer, getting most of his influence from Hip Hop music.

For Your Pleasure

by: Connor Walden

(Cover Art)

Sotol blossom, mortar, and a bottle of Hacienda de Chihuahua (which is a liquor made of sotol, similar to tequila)
28" x 4" x 36"



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