

The background is an abstract, textured composition. It features a mix of vibrant blue, deep purple, and hints of gold or yellow. The textures appear to be layered, with some areas looking like fine-grained sand or a woven fabric, and others showing more fluid, painterly strokes. The overall effect is a rich, multi-dimensional visual field.

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW

Crafton Hills College's
Art & Literary Magazine

Dear Reader,

We're proud to present to you the twelfth edition of Crafton Hills College's *The Sand Canyon Review*. Since the beginning, we've attempted to create a space where writers and artists feel comfortable and free to manifest their feelings, opinions, and beliefs through the guise of a prechosen theme.

This year, we challenged our submitters to explore the theme of kismet through the creative lens of fiction, poetry, and art. The theme was an obvious choice for us because of the need for pieces of fate and destiny in a world that's very much divided. We believe it's important for writers and artists around the world to take a break from the division and see revel in moments of togetherness and cosmic intervention. It's our hope, as well as our submitters, that we are able to reveal new and enriching perspectives to our readers. Thank you for exploring *The Sand Canyon Review's* interpretation of kismet.

Regards from,
The Sand Canyon Review Team, 2018

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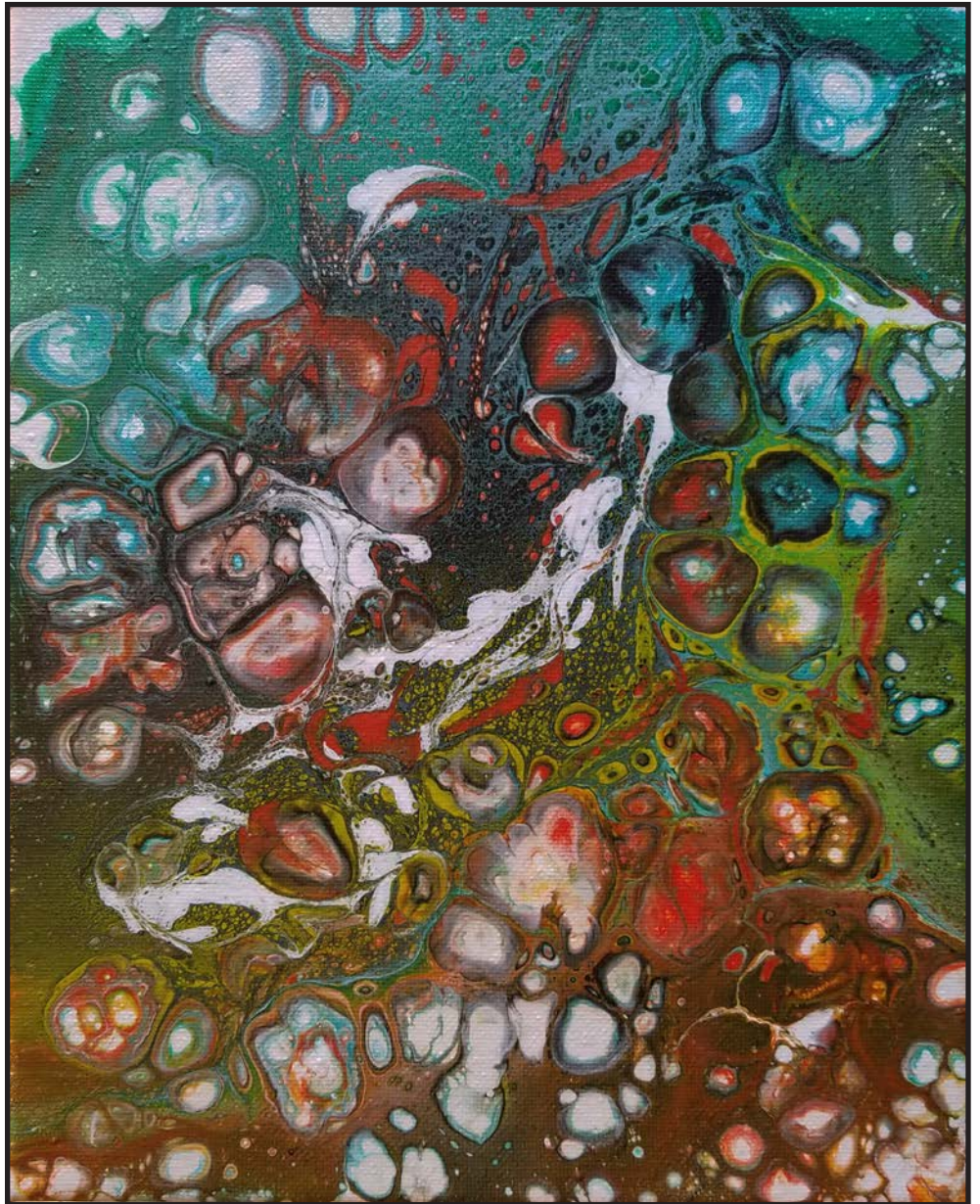
A Practical Accident

James Lewandowski

Is it? Matter: gas and dust,
Did it whirlwind and gather
Gravity, heat, star-fueled light
In a sea of consequence—
Conscious coincidence
Gives birth to life
Of Programmed think-meat.
It was always meant to be;
A practical accident.

Aztec Ocean

Pamela Donahue



Desconsolodado (This is Kismet)

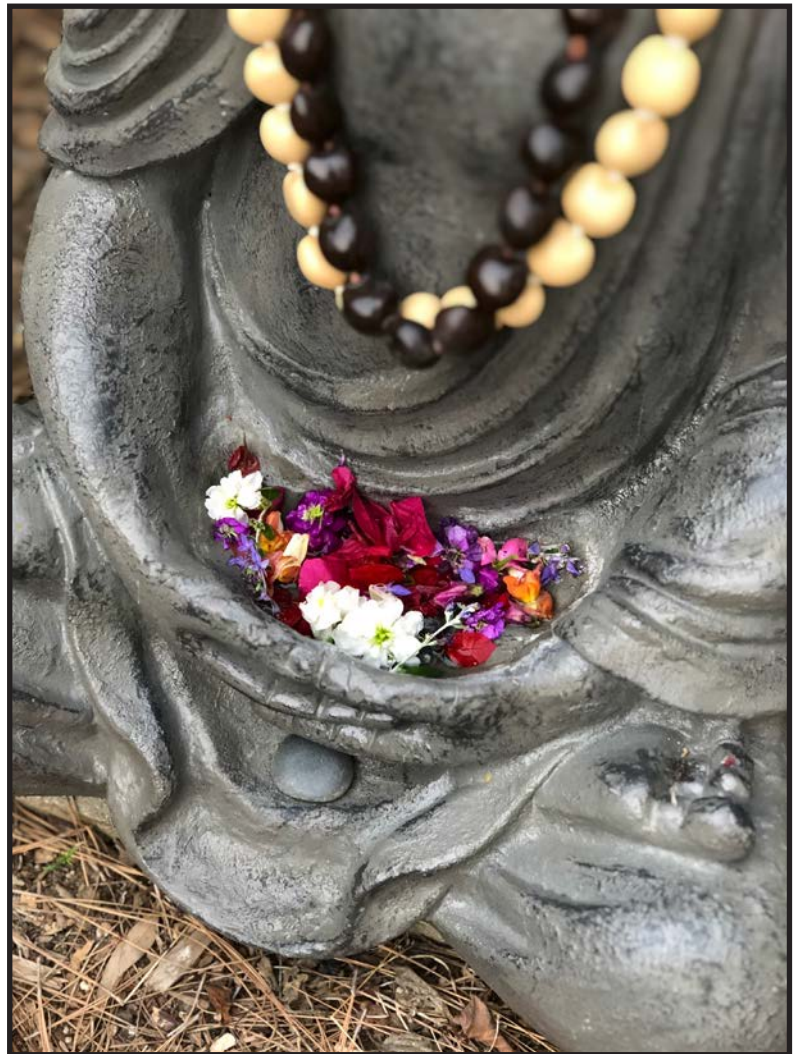
Elisa Urmstrom

This is how it always plays out—the
Hunger, a longing, some diaphanous memory
Insouciance—your trademark nonchalance, funny how a
Song can take me back

In time—your smile like a melody, yet and
Still

Knowing you in another life
Is sorrowful bliss. Hey
Sidewalk angel, Kiss me under the shadow of the
Mission bell one last time because
Even now, I live for your
Touch

Prayers for a
Friend's Return
Roberto Manjarrez



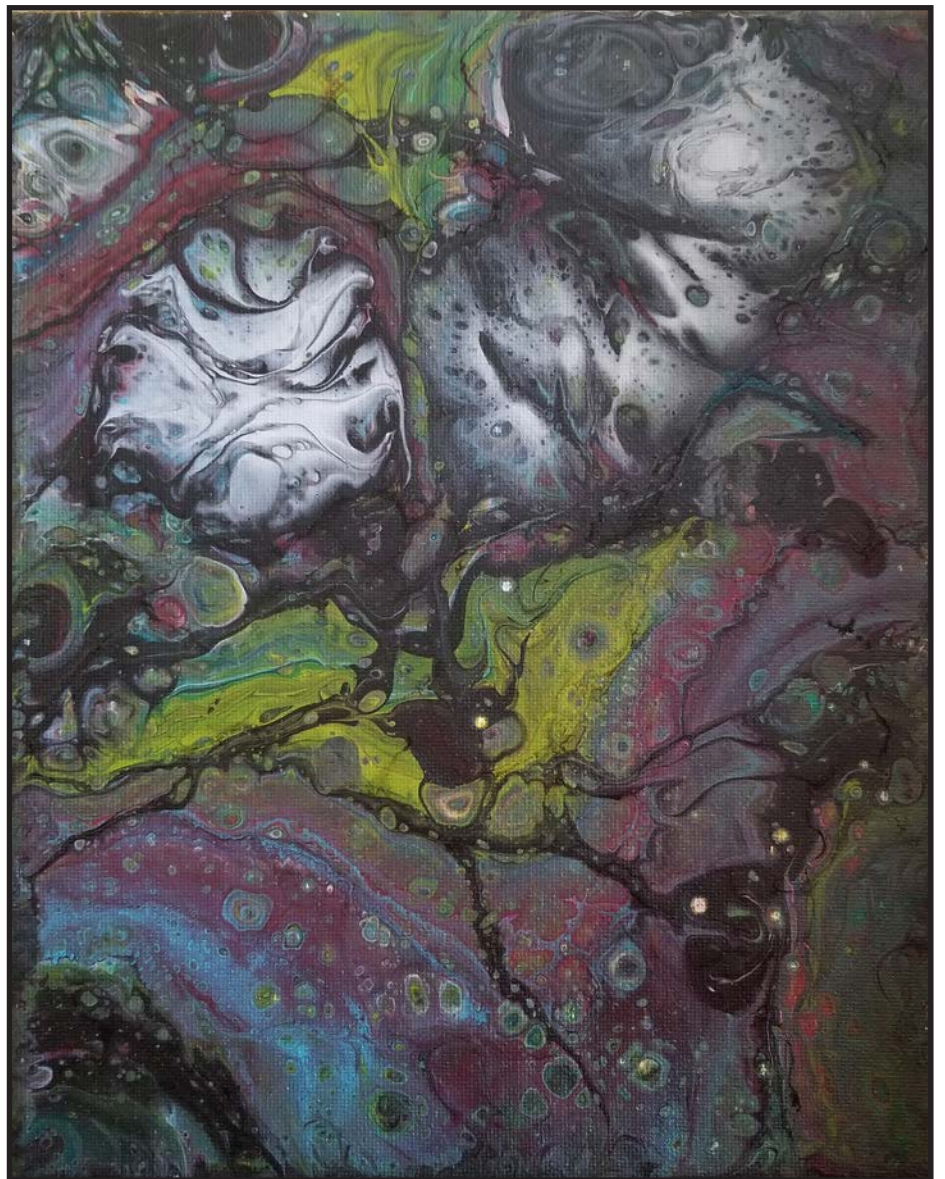
P r e t t y Picture

Joanna Brock

I'll paint you a pretty picture
But there's just one twist.
The paintbrush is a knife
And the paper is my wrist.
I'll draw you something pretty
It might be a sin.
The sketch is made of blood
And the paper's made of skin.
I'll write you a pretty poem
And this is what I'll do.
I'll fill it full of pain;
And send it straight to you.
I'll mold you a pretty sculpture
Make it of a heart.
I'll make it out of me
And hope it falls apart.
I'll send you a pretty package
But there's a trick you'll see.
I'll fill it full of pieces
And the pieces are of me.

Moonblossom

Pamela Donahue



Touch Like Water

Joanna Brock

Winter's touch kills
The fall.

No more tumbling
Or spinning out of control.

Winter brings rock bottom
And hand delivers the final blow
Straight through our nicotine hearts
To our withered souls.

Winter is blistered.
It is basalt bedrock
The hardened other cheek.

Winter's touch kills
The fall.

Pretty

Elisa Urmstrom

Maybe together we can gaze upon the opalescent oil slick
Mirror of the golden August sky
And memorize this perfect, pretty place
Where chain link shiny fisherman's net
Free range garbage gum wrappers glint
As breezes festoon the trees with trash bag tinsel
Sea mammals feast on the mistaken plastic jellyfish identity
While nightbirds bedeck themselves in six-pack ring necklaces
The calm ocean sound of cars calls
So walk with me on the sherbet hues
Stepping-stones of Styrofoam made to
Outlast granite,
To outlast God.

Blue Cyclone

Pamela Donahue



Untitled

Elisabet Nicholas

du gillade blåbär
men de var inte din favorit frukt
du älskade jordgubbar
särskilt jordgubbe skaka
hon var inte en särskild jordgubbe skaka
hon var okej
inget extrem
nästan lika bra som de andra
men även om
jag var den bästa blåbär
du någonsin had smakade
hon var fortfarande en jordgubbe skaka

you liked blueberries
but they were not your favourite fruit
you loved strawberries
especially strawberry shakes
she was not a special strawberry shake
she was alright
nothing extreme
just like the others
but even though
i was the best blueberries
you had ever tasted
she was still a strawberry shake

Medusa Asks the Muse

Mercedes Webb-Pullman

Why Destined?

Mercedes Webb-Pullman

They sewed your future to my fate.
As far as I can be certain,
they're no surgeons.
None of them.

They inserted us into each other.
As I understand it
they're not scientists either. They're
merciless.

It's a wicked illusion. Together
in primitive darkness
an underground train laid waste
to its passengers
hearts and all
before we left the station.

We never even moved.

Speak loudly, Muse, and tell the world my story
for without my body I am mute.

A child of sea gods, destined for great glory,
once beautiful, then ruined by a brute.

I had five sisters; two were closer to me
than the other three, the odd Graeae.
I worshipped at Athena's temple chastely
but caught Poseidon's eye one fateful day.

My golden hair grew long and softly flowing.
Desire fired, he had to make me his
and raped me there, within the temple, knowing
Athena couldn't punish him for this.

But me she could, she punished me, exchanging
my silken tresses for a nest of snakes
that turned observers into stone, unchanging.
I soon became a hermit, for their sakes.

Yet even though I lived alone, and lonely,
a meddler sent young Perseus for me
to bring him back my head; this was the only
way Perseus could set his mother free.

My body he left lying on the seashore,
my head he put into a leather sack,
turned enemies to stone to settle old scores
before Athena made him give me back

to her; she put me on her breastplate
for increased power over enemies.
Remaining on her aegis must be my fate
until a stronger god can set me free.

Speak truly, Muse, and tell the world my story
so young and lovely maidens may beware
that gods are fickle, and intended glory
may all depend on covering their hair.

More Yesterdays

Thomas Elson

Katherine, affectionately called Lily by her father, braced when the force of the earth shifted and, as when she was child, landed her in this once thriving farm community to which she returned only when someone died. She sat on her father's living room floor alone, thirty-nine years old and unable to speak.

As if she were a child, she remembered the smoke from incense mixed with smells of baled hay, then strengthened by manure and the metallic odor from farm implements. She saw the early morning steam rising from the livestock, heard their deep breathing and the periodic snorts from the single bull that stood well-hidden behind the heifers next to the barbed wire of her father's fence.

There had been no sirens, no long black vehicles. No public officials in uniform. Only a church, a cemetery, rectory, convent, and school across the road.

St. Mary's Church had been on that corner since 1881, first as a frame building, now a steepled limestone structure. Its sanctuary walls festooned with things to make people feel secure. Her father never much liked the eyelevel, full-sized, punctured Jesus hanging with blood dripping from wrists, feet, and ribs. His exposed heart wrapped in thorns, and a hand-carved wooden sign on the wall next to it, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Behind the church was the cemetery with distinct sections for First Settlers, Catholics, non-Catholics, and across the narrow dirt road the unconsecrated section for suicides.

Next to the church was the priest's rectory where Lily's father had greeted new pastors with an envelope full of cash and a fifth of Jim Beam.

One early pastor said, "I don't drink spirits." Her father replied, "Would you like coffee?"

"No."

"Tea?"

"No."

"Milk?"

"No."

"Well, hell, then. Would you like a holy card?" That priest didn't last long.

South of the rectory is the convent, where, if her cousin is correct, her father met the woman who became Lily's step-mother. The grade school south of the convent is the one Lily attended.

#

At the age of eight, for three days, twenty-four hours a day, Lily watched while people drifted in and out, whispered, looked at her, turned silent. Visitors in black clothing, red eyes and wet noses, brought food and flowers, then dominated the house. She sat on the floor and watched while strangers bunched heavy black drapery around her mother's open casket.

On the morning of the third day, her father woke her, "Lily, come, get dressed. They've taken momma across the street."

Lily sat in her heavy wool dress in the front pew and endured the dirge slowness of the liturgy and attempted to hold her breath as the odor of incense merged with the smell outside the church. She stiffened when her father held her hand, led her from the church to the cemetery and stood close to the deep hole - dark, narrow, frigid - down which her mother disappeared.

As if more could be eaten after dinner in the church basement, their dining room table - the one upon which her mother laid for three days - grew even heavier with all the food brought by relatives. Smells blanketed the house - garlic, roast beef, and gravy. Lily heard the snap of chicken frying in her mother's cast iron skillet.

She sat on the floor and her lungs heaved with a deep burn that forced prolonged, inflamed coughs, and she heard, "I'm sorry."

"I'm so sorry."

"John will have to marry again."

"Who will take care of the children?"

Lily recalled she asked, "Why?" Not about the previous question but about her own.

“For her soul, mein kind,” said an aunt who understood Lily’s unasked question.

Pray for Momma’s soul? How bad could she have been? After all her suffering? Lily remembered only snippets of the past weeks – the coughing, the doctor, days alone, trips with her father to the rectory.

Lily felt the warmth from the floor furnace and glanced at the galvanized metal tub filled with water simmering atop the furnace grill, then raised her head to look at the pictures.

She had grown up with old pictures. In the living room. The dining room. A few in the bedrooms. Most in the hallway amidst photographs of young children or weddings. Cracked and peeled photographs. Some black and white. Others sepia. Some were silhouettes. A few were tintypes with eyes smudged as if drawn by a child. Great grandparents, grandparents, her mother, her aunts and uncles, and all the others on that continuum from Germany to Russia to America who had been killed in wars, or starved because of bleak crops, or lied to by politicians.

And it was only two o’clock in the afternoon.

“Poppa, tell me some stories,” Lily asked. And despite the death of his wife, he did.

Stories about Germany, or Russia or America, kings and czars, and always with his soft, resonant, liquid Volga-German voice molded by harsh winters, dry summers, bleak harvests, high winds, and limited contact with the outside world. A voice three centuries in the making, each “w” pronounced “v”. Each “v” an “f”. Every “j” a “y”. And “z’s” like the “ts” in nuts. Lily floated for years with her father’s voice inside her – through schools, then marriage and a child, then the death of both.

Their last name translated into English as barley farmer, and that’s what they had been in Germany, Russia, and now in America. Every few years overproduction led to low crop prices that begat low farm incomes. The farmers responded by increasing the land under production which resulted in increased crops with increased yields; then the inevitable collapsed prices were compounded by the high cost of manufactured goods, the higher the cost

of transportation, and the lack of governmental protection.

The family spoke a language last heard in seventeenth century Germany. In Russia and America, they were isolated and culturally unified, separate and suspicious. They arrived in America, more akin to nomads than immigrants.

#

One week after her mother’s funeral, Lily sat next to her father while he drove her to see Dr. Bethausen - the same doctor who treated her mother. Lily inhaled and caught the scent of her father’s Palmolive after shave lotion mingled with smoke from his Camel cigarette with ash unflicked.

She couldn’t remember when her father did not have that Camel clinging to the right side of his mouth – each new one ignited from the stub of the one about to be snuffed-out.

She pictured the dual faucets in the bathroom behind which rested his aftershave. On the right, a leather strop hung next to the sink with the straight edge, boar bristle brush, and soap mug within reach.

She sat in the exam room with its peeling white paint and attempted to read the only wall hanging that the doctor said was “my sheepskin”.

The doctor asked questions that she knew were to be answered by her father.

“How long has she had this cough?”

“Has she run a fever at home?”

“Her appetite?”

“Does her cough burn?”

Dr. Bethausen said, “She has whooping cough. Keep her inside the house. Nothing more can be done for her,” which, except for the diagnosis, were the exact words he said about her mother.

The doctor asked, “How’s she doing, since-” Her father interrupted, “She talks to me. No one else.”

Lily would grow into a student who sweat profusely when called to recite. For years, she sat in class and worried about diarrhea, adopted a calming device of shaking her head sideways, often so hard it caused severe headaches. When nervous, she would squint to shut-out her environment. In nursing school, she would take voice lessons but avoided public speaking.

#

Her father's second marriage was as idyllic as most were back then. Her father, a widower with five children who needed a mother; and his new wife, an ex-nun, was pregnant and needed a husband fast. A stern woman whose duty it was to care for her own children, raise her step-children, and satisfy her husband, which she did with Volga German precision.

For years after her father remarried, the family lived as if there had been an armed truce. Jaws tight, eyes dead, voices silent, but ever vigilant to seize upon the slightest transgression as an excuse to unleash their weapons. And that summed up Lily's childhood – alone, silent, and desperate for the sound of a gentle voice.

#

It was early April, and Lily had just returned with her father from his medical appointment. Their roles have changed. Lily chose the doctor and she drove her father's two-door Kaiser Custom 6.

Her father shuffled from car to front porch, turned, and stared at the street. His eyes squinted against the wind. He pulled his glasses off, rubbed his eyes, "Scheisskopf. That's what happens when you got more yesterdays than tomorrows."

Lily watched as he exhaled a lung full of smoke.

"No," he said as if still in the doctor's office, "I know my family history. It won't be six months. Our people live until they're eighty-eight." He stood quiet for a moment.

"Poppa, when do you plan to tell them?"

"Not today," he looked at her, "And I will be the one to do it."

"Okay, but when?"

"A couple of weeks. Maybe a month."

"Why so long?"

"Because of the family reunion next month." He inhaled, squinted, exhaled. Smoke the color of morning fog surrounded his face.

"I want to be with you when you do," she said.

#

Years earlier at the first family reunion, Lily sat with her father while he ate a dinner of roast beef, peas, mashed potatoes, gravy, apple pie,

and coffee. After dinner came his nip of Jim Beam straight from the half-pint bottle usually hidden behind the icon of the Last Supper which rested on the kitchen counter behind the Napoleon Clock.

Her father regaled the reunion with stories from three countries – some historically accurate, some enhanced. Lily sat enthralled with pride and wished she were as fearlessness as her father.

#

On a bright, cool May morning, three weeks after her father's medical appointment, Lily sat behind the wheel of the Kaiser. Once again, her earth had shifted. She wiped the sweat from her eyes, placed her hand on her chest to quiet the pounding, then squeezed the steering wheel to hide her shaking hands. "This is terrible. I'll be next."

St. Mary's parish had long since merged with the large parish in Berdan, the county seat. The school is now closed, the convent vacant, the church unlocked only for special occasions. All are old, out of date, barely functional, and smell of neglect.

Before arriving at the church, she heard the stories she loved – of crystal sets, overheated radio tubes, distant voices that carried tales. Of her father propping her on pillows and telling her stories until they both fell asleep. Of holding his hand as they walked to the park.

"You always wanted to scatter off to look at something. And I'd grab your hand. When you got older, I thought you might not want to hold hands." Her eyes on the road, she thought she saw his cigarette. "So, I asked you to hold my hand because I needed you to guide me. So, I wouldn't wander."

"And I believed it?"

"And you accepted it."

Her father's voice continued, "Lily, speak for me."

"You know I hate it. I can't."

"But I know you. And I want you to speak. Promise me. Nobody else. Just you."

"I can't. I don't know stories the way you do."

"Then make some up."

And she tried. And she waited. And nothing came. And she freezes. She is eight years old again on the living room floor.

Nevertheless, her father's voice continued.
Gentle. Slow. Persistent.

She jerked the wheel to show her displeasure; then, just as he taught her, maneuvered the car into the crowded church parking lot, found a space, and said, just as her father did when she was a girl, "We're here," stressed the "w" as a "v".

#

In the church basement, Lily sat nervous; her head echoed with the same questions she asked for years. What do I say? How much will I embarrass myself? Will I have an accident? How many are going to laugh at me?

And, her father looked at her, and said, "Lily, now you tell the stories."

Lily's hands shake. She still hates public speaking, nevertheless, he insisted. Nevertheless, she decides she won't speak.

When she entered the church basement, waves of faces surged forward as if in platoon formation.

She had seen them all her life, in school, at church, framed and on the walls of her father's house. Some in funeral homes their eyes closed, mouths shut, faces pasty - at once brittle and damp - as if they had been rained on then left to dry. Her mother. Even her great-aunt Sophie, across the table, smiled for approval. Her uncles, Alex and Leo, sat on her right side. Each face unusually smooth and unblemished by sun and wind, each spine remarkably flexible. Not a limp, shuffle, or unfocused eye in the crowd.

She heard her father, "Who are these people?"

His eleven children had begat multiple grandchildren, who had spawned countless great-grandchildren, and it appeared to Lily as though every one of them swarmed forward. Farmers, teachers, a school principal, doctors, dentists, lawyers, a Marine Captain with two purple hearts, a late blooming CPA, one Nashville musician, and a Registered Nurse.

"They look like my brothers, or aunts - some look like your grandmother."

"They're your grandchildren and great-grandchildren," she whispered.

Well past the stage of calling everyone by name, Lily smiled at the faces last seen on walls.

"Mein Got, she looks like little Cathy," Lily heard her father's voice. When another walked by, "That's Mary Ann, no, it's her grandmother," but to Lily, Mary Ann looked like a photo of her own mother.

Then, Lily heard, "That's my grandfather," and, it was as if her father stood and pointed to her, "Lily's you."

"No, she's you. And all those over there." Each one a replica of one of the pictures on the wall. "They are us." She felt her father turn and look at his own face - the framed picture on the easel.

When the priest nodded at Lily and tugged her arm, she pretended to tap the half-pint of Jim Beam, rose from her chair, walked past the priest. When she reached her father's framed photograph, she wanted to tell him, "Thank you. You told me stories, when ..." "Without you I couldn't have ..." "Because of you I could..."

Instead, she pretended to take the cigarette from his mouth, then held out her right hand as if she and her father were walking together toward a new discovery. Up three steps, she turned left, positioned herself behind the podium, looked at the crowd, smiled.

Her father listened as Lily began. "First, I want to thank all of you for coming to my father's funeral dinner. And now I have some stories to tell you."

Each time her earth shifted Lily would return. She would return again, and again, and a few times after that, to walk across the dirt road and join the others at the cemetery. She would return to the house, and, as she did when a child, look at the pictures. Lily would continue to return to this dusty town until some else returned to look at her picture and tell stories about her.

The Dead You Have Always With You

Clark Marrow

I

Our loved ones we put underfoot
The dead you have always with you
To see they stay stubbornly put
We grow our food in human dust

II

The dead themselves are lasting things
We have them with us always
As lasting as heirloom wedding rings
The dead you cannot send away

III

We see them drift in many places
Where else would they be but here?
The world is full of their floating faces
The Earth is ours because it's us

IV

We bury and burn them, but aren't misled
The dead you have always with you
The living plump pillows on beds of dead
We grow our food in human dust

V

Even the first dead walk our world
We have them with us always
Adam's ashes are blown and swirled
The dead you cannot send away

VI

Wherever you go you kick their dust
Where else would they be but here?
The sun glows red with human rust
The Earth is ours because it's us

VII

They live in our minds and in our noses
The dead you have always with you
More lasting than even the priest supposes
We grow our food in human dust
The Earth is ours because it's us



Forgotten Faces

Patricia Chavez

Forever He Lays

Patricia Chavez



What Was Lost To History

Alyssa Gonzalez

Life is vast
spreading across the fields
of the old world
entwining the smells of the country into one.

Life sprouts as forests of green
and clings to the remnants of humanity
still lingering in the abandoned cities.
Even though the old world has been dead for years,
it can be felt in the earth beneath one's feet in the north,
in the air when it is inhaled in the south.
Images of its past magnificence ghost one's vision
and disappear in the blink of an eye.
Magic seeps from nature's roots,
invigorating history,
and projecting reflections
of when civilization ruled nature.
Though abandoned
the old world still continues to thrive
filling the emptiness with trees and weeds,
plants and wildlife.

Chords of jazz descent still linger in the halls
of what was once called Lawndale Theatre
forming melodies of old
that perform for the hills in Illinois.
Creations of past can be found scattered across the land:
lines of automobiles go on for miles
weeds interwoven in their machinery,
a bicycle towers above head view
embedded within a sequoia,
a spiral staircase on Pismo Beach rusts
as it stands tall on the coast
exposed to its neighbor the sea.

Life flourishes in this world.
Sounds of children's laughter echo in the tree houses
buried deep within the woods of Brooksville.
New Bedford is home to a bundle of souls
that often fill the empty halls of the Orpheum.

Rows upon rows of faded jade seats
await the mass of wailing strings,
the memory of an orchestra
overflowing the auditorium
and filling the decaying streets.
During the day silhouettes of human shape
are shadowed onto walls underneath the earth
in a solemn subway stop off Lexington Avenue.
Conversations travel in the breeze begging to be heard
even though the ruined City Hall Loop
has long been disserted.
Clocks chime, tick tocking a melodic rhythm
dead center in Michigan Central Station
as if past citizens of Detroit are still awaiting
their destinations just the same.

And then it is gone.
In a single glance.
Erased like a forgotten memory.
Fading like an old dream.
The magic seeping back into the roots.
The old world falling back into its quiet, broken reality.

Yet ghosts still linger in the land.
Their spirits cling to the walls of every
terrible towering block of cement,
their screams echoing in the
desolate pastures of lackluster promises.
The forest has returned to its original state,
a horrible dystopian image to the fearful nomads,
but a beautiful spectacle to the soulful wanderers.
The spirit of humanity desperately leaves
its imprint on the old world
as if to personify the memories of those
who fought to call this world home.
This is how the old world continues to exist
even if it is lost to history.

But it is not lost.
No, it is merely waiting.
Waiting for someone to find it
and call it home once again.

Caterpillars

Jackie Leoard

Lucy braids her hair as she sits on her brother's grave. The headstone in the ground dates his last breath to exactly one year ago. At nine years old, Lucy understands some things well and finds other things difficult to comprehend. She understands that Francisco, her big brother and only sibling, is dead and that means she can never see him again. She knows that he was taken away by an ailment that was discovered soon enough to say goodbye but too late to fix.

She knows little about braiding but starts by separating her hair into three sections. She takes one and crosses it over the other and repeats with the third, letting her hands work. She sits, inside herself, looking at, but not reading the headstone in front of her, surrounded by roses in vases and boxes shaped like hearts. The rest of her family has left to take a walk around Desert Memorial Park. Her cousin wanted to find Sonny Bono's grave. Lucy had decided to stay.

It is a day when the mountain cool and the sun heat are at peace. Things are still. Nothing moves. Not even the leaves in the oak tree above her or the lines in the telephone wires that surround the cemetery.

The only things moving besides Lucy's braiding hands are the caterpillars that have infested their city. The anniversary of Francisco's death is also the first day of spring. A caterpillar bubbles over her leg like live gelatin. Oozing neon and flattened skin, Lucy is reminded of the streets all over town filled with the corpses of caterpillars. The playground at her school is overcrowded with caterpillars. Some sit on the swings. Others are mashed into the sand. Some are burnt to the chipping paint of the monkey bars. A few are safe for now in the grass, sheltered by the rain of sprinklers.

"En el nombre del Padre," Lucy says. Her words come softly, sneak up on her as she weaves. She keeps mistaking prayers for wishes. She hasn't yet learned the difference.

Lucy listens for her brother whom she imagines lying underneath her, blind to the world lit in daylight. When Lucy had asked her mother that morning what she thought Francisco was doing underground, her mother said that her brother wasn't there anymore. That he had gone with God. That all that was left in the shiny casket was the pillow for his head and the notes left at his side before men with shovels covered it with dirt and new patches of grass.

Lucy has a hard time believing this to be true.

When Francisco was still alive and well, he had asked Lucy a similar question. Where do people go when they die? It was actually a dare more than it was a question. Sunday School had told them that the dead go with God and head over to heaven. That Jesus helps them float away to run and play in the clouds.

Francisco had wanted to test this theory and Lucy's curiosity too led them to dig up the goldfish they had wrapped in toilet paper and buried in their backyard. She had crouched between the rose bushes and her brother as he dug with his hands. By the time they had found their dead goldfish, many tiny ditches lined the fence around them. Before finding the goldfish, Francisco's face said what his words did not. It said, maybe this is true. Maybe we do vanish to the heavens when we die. But eventually, in the open palm of Lucy's brother, sat a small mound of toilet paper, dirtied by the underground but still intact. Francisco began unraveling the toilet paper slowly. Lucy had thought, while watching her brother unwrap their dead friend, that he had discovered a tiny mummy in the ground. She had never thought about what a mummy looked like without its wraps until then.

Instead of happening upon the pet they knew with scales of gold and dark pebbles for eyes, the goldfish's skin peeled away with the toilet paper, stuck against its fibers. The fish's skin tore away

from its body revealing innards of rotten fruit.

Francisco couldn't bring himself to rebury their pet. Instead he wadded up the paper and the remains and flushed it down the toilet where it belonged. Their cousins came over later and Francisco replayed his and Lucy's adventure with the energy of a twelve-year-old, full of guts and gore and bravery, but never told the whole story. He didn't tell the other boys in their family that when he put the goldfish in the toilet, he couldn't flush it. Lucy had to do that for him. He also didn't tell them that when the goldfish spiraled away and disappeared, he cried. Only Lucy knew that.

They never discussed the goldfish or the death issue again, even after Francisco got sick, but with the grass and the earth and her brother underneath her, Lucy realizes that Francisco's skin too is bound to the underground.

She holds her braid together with one hand, only halfway done, and brings her face so close to the dirt the blades of grass tickle her cheeks. "Hellooo down there," she says, and turns her face so that her ear is now pressed to the ground. Without any hint of movement below, she continues, "Does it hurt?"

Lucy doesn't ask this aloud but wonders if she would recognize Francisco if she could see him again, if he were to pop out from the ground, whine and tell her to get off him. He wouldn't look like the picture on his headstone, which is Francisco's school portrait from the seventh grade. The goldfish didn't look the same either after they dug it up. He would look like whatever exists between alive and bones.

She sits back up and crosses her legs, continuing to weave her hair together. Crossing the three sections over each other, she speaks again, "y del Hijo." Lucy guides her fingers over her hair, coarse and strong. Her shampoo bottle at home has a horse on it and she plans to grow her hair until it hits the floor.

Lucy can't remember much about her brother's burial. She can remember the vigil where she stayed with her cousins and played Lotería for hours on the floor. They used pinto beans as markers and when the others weren't looking

she put one in her mouth and let it sit under her tongue. Without Francisco there to play, Lucy won the most times.

Even though her brother's body was in the room with them, Lucy wasn't upset whenever her cousin called out the "la muerte" or "el diablito" cards. It was the "el pescado" card that returned to her when she had tried to sleep that night. The card showed a fish with a hook in its mouth, brought up to the surface. Lucy knew the fish was suffocating. She understood that fish couldn't breathe the air the way people could. It was drowning. She understood that underground Francisco was a fish without water.

At the vigil, her uncle played the guitar but she never looked up at him. She liked not being able to tell if it was the guitar or her uncle that was sobbing.

"Y del Espíritu Santo," Lucy mumbles as she finishes her braid. She has tethered her long hair together with her fingers. To seal it together, she wraps the end with an elastic band and lets the braid fall and hang down her back, a rope that is holding everything together.

Before Francisco got sick, he had stopped playing with her as much. Their age difference was starting to show. He would run his hand through his hair whenever they ran into a girl he knew from school in their neighborhood. He had started wearing deodorant and took longer showers than she did. He kept his door shut instead of leaving it open. She had to ask permission to enter and she was never allowed when his friends were over or if he was on the phone.

Still, one time even after all that, Francisco came to Lucy's room and asked if she wanted to fly her kite in their backyard.

Lucy can't remember what she had been doing before he asked her, but she can picture perfectly running outside with the kite in hand, watching it leap higher and higher into the sky while Francisco fed her more kite string. They were each given a kite that Easter, but Francisco's had snapped in half on its first voyage. So, Francisco and Lucy used its kite string to make hers even longer. It got so high, Lucy was afraid they'd never

be able to pull it down. Francisco took over when the kite started to drop. He ran and ran ahead of her as they left their yard and took off down the street. It wasn't until Lucy tripped that she noticed the kite string wrapped around her ankles. When she fell, Lucy looked up and saw Francisco staring straight into the sky. He was still running and the kite string got tighter and tighter against her skin. Lucy screamed when she felt the burn.

Lucy puts her hand to her ankles and traces her skin. She tries to find where the rope burned lines that wrapped around her legs. Francisco had told her it looked cool when he saw them. But the lines aren't there anymore.

A caterpillar emerges from the grass and onto Francisco's plaque. It wiggles quickly and pauses over the engravings in the granite. Lucy wonders if the caterpillar can read the words. The words don't say much. Only a name that the caterpillar wouldn't know. A birth date that is insignificant. A date of death that marks the passing of seasons. Lucy runs her finger along the fuzzy back of the caterpillar as it crawls over Francisco's picture and around the unlit candle.

The caterpillar wanders back into the grass and toward a tree whose trunk is covered with other caterpillars, some moving, some not.

Her brother hasn't floated away to heaven like she was told. To Lucy, this might not be such a bad thing. He felt closer this way. She takes the caterpillar and puts it on her arm. Its feet tickle her skin as it travels. It eventually falls off her and back into the grass. She leaves the caterpillar there, to walk along the ground for her brother to feel it too.

When Francisco got sick, he told Lucy it was hard to believe what was happening to him. Like he was disconnected from his body, like he had no control. Lucy understands that there are a lot of things that we can't control. This is what the older people in her family called fate. They said what was happening was all God's plan.

"Amen," she says and swings the braid over her shoulder. The heads of her family appear from behind a hill as they walk back towards her. Lucy stands, checks for the caterpillar, and dusts herself off. She removes the elastic band from her hair and lets the braid unravel as she joins the rest of her family.

Last Words

Élida Tato Tedín

My dear darling,
It hurts me to say
That little by little
The memory of your face
Simply faded away.
Though, i remember the smell
And your last words
“Everything will be ok”
And you closed your eyes
and I kept mine open.
For you, for us,
for the “what could have been”
And forgive me if i am mean
For keeping, in your name, my heart cold as ice.
So many came after,
And indeed they brought me laughter
Sometimes they made me feel like home
But the moment i thought of you,
Darling,
All I wanted from them was to be gone.
And your words keep following me
And I cannot simply move on
Tell me, love, how am I supposed to live
If everything about you is gone.
So many years have gone by
I can barely remember your voice
Please, darling, tell me if i have another choice
Than to give up
And kneel to goodbye.
Hence you see nobody has taken your place
And after all this time
I doubt someone could
My feelings are dizzy in your maze
...
If someone could make me forget your last words
Please, please, please
Forgive me darling but i would.
And I hope your memory can forgive me
But I desperately need to move on
I will forever be yours
Darling
But these
are my last words.

Worry Lines

Particia Chavez



For Those Who Seek And Know

Ellen Drummonds

The chrysalis protecting you before the Grand Unveiling
Warms you in its protection, in your burgeoning glory,
And I understand beyond all history of doubt and failing
That you are the key to the conclusion of the story!

Elysium awaits, Dear Ones who knock at the Gates—
Our time is now, for it has surely been written:
All those who wish to redevise the world's fate
With the hand of redemptive Grace twice bitten...

Will unearth Heaven for the land of the rich
In spirit and surefire in soul, forever lifting up
Those who seek and know in all conviction the pitch
Of the tune of the Piper's Call as it proffers The Cup;

Who's next? Who wishes to taste the sips of Joy
Outpouring from the lips of the Divine Author?
Who among us is willing to lead the mass of girls and boys
Aching in pain to be delivered of a son or daughter

Or ALL OF US together, who will quiver and tremble -
Yet not waver in the sight of our Grand Awakening? -
Collectively and singly, blooming roses from the bramble;
And moments beyond this the globe will be quaking.

Modern methods will be undone, the Spirit has already won -
We'll go back to a time as yet unrealized and still forgotten,
And the wars we've waged and the stars at which we've gazed in fun
Will melt in our erotic sight in the seconds now to be begotten.

Nature's brassiere will unclasp, and she will let loose Her locks,
Remembering her sacrosanct thank-God-on-Earth love for Herself;
And Time will be merely that braid in Her hair, the yarn in the socks
That She discards to reveal bare feet that dance like there's no one else!

She not only heard the Piper's melody, She wrote the notes
That sink into our heeding ears like the tide in Her emotion-basin;

She will join us all in the instants when the world shifts and devotes
All its formerly wayward efforts toward uniting Spirit and Nations.

Perk your auditory learners up to the dissonance that fades
As new harmony surfaces for the ones who co-create with All That Is,
Elohim, the God and Goddess in Union, come to Oneness unafraid;
And All That Behold witness in Purest Bliss, wanting this since

Time Immemorial, when the Sun was but a bright-yellow speck
And the Moon an unborn luminous fruit in the density of Expanse -
We shall have our sacred Last Dance, all of us who are checked
At the Door for our corsages and inner Light beyond the trance.

Are you ready for the Final Hour, where Mother and Father
Will welcome their innumerable Children HOME where we belong?
Are you prepared to be a mother or father yourself, walking further
Along the Path than any before you, in stride with the pace of the song?

Are you armed with the Power of Will, to assume your Camelot role –
To reclaim your fearless right, to aid those bound to fall again?
Can you withstand the piercing volume of the band that rocks with Soul,
To move past the barriers, to not just stroll but run with abandon?

She is here, He is near, We Are All dispelling the doubt and fear
Once too strong to overcome, but now that the unraveling is done,
Let us go out and tell all whom we meet, greet everyone with Cheer!
For we are Ascending, the wounds are mending, and Heaven is for everyone.

Second Chance from *Quest for Story*

Daniel Weinell

Henry Conifer was a brave man. He had fought proudly for his country during World War I. He had risked his life many times before. He was one of two surviving crewmen of a destroyed battleship. When he charged across that battlefield he didn't have time to think about death. Twice in his life he had been struck by lightning, a feat few can claim once.

There were points in his life when he did think about dying. It scared him to his core and the only way he could deal with it was to ignore it. Somewhere deep in the back of his head that thought always lingered. But it never stopped him from living his life to the fullest. He had raised three children who in turn sired a gaggle of grandchildren for him to enjoy. But after his wife died, Henry was faced with death once again.

He didn't believe in a god nor an afterlife and that was why death was so frightening to him. He spent the next years slowly deteriorating physically and mentally. His melancholy turned to overwhelming depression. Death seemed the only way to end the suffering but he still could not get over the hurdle of fear.

After a decisively traumatic illness befell Henry, he was taken to a hospital. And there he found himself lying on his back staring up at the unfriendly white ceiling. His breath was short and his body was weak. He turned his head painfully to look at his surroundings. A nurse was fiddling with some contraption. They were the enemy. They wanted to poke him with needles and insert tubes down his throat. He just wanted to rest but his bones were weak. He was confined to his frail body as much as he was to this hospital bed.

His children came to visit. If they spoke to him he couldn't remember. When he found himself conscious his only thoughts were of death. He was frightened to sleep lest he not wake up again but he was so very tired. He would give anything for a second chance, not that he had done anything wrong, he just didn't want to die. He had always

hoped that as some part of the natural cycle of life he would find himself ready to accept his own mortality and just move on peacefully. But that had never come. He wasn't peaceful, he was enraged. It wasn't fair!

He drifted in and out of cognizance for many hours or days, he wasn't sure. And then there was a moment of clarity. His eyes opened wide and he knew where he was. His son Greg was standing next to him along with his grandson Levi. They had been talking, Henry was sure of that. He wasn't sure to whom they had been talking. But at that moment, Henry reached out for Levi and grabbed his arm with all the strength he could muster. The child looked shocked and a little scared.

"I don't want to die, Levi. I don't want to die!" Henry tried to yell but his words were slurred, not as powerful as he had willed them.

"Dad, calm down." Greg attempted to pry his father's hand from Levi's wrist but Henry found a reserve of strength and clamped down hard.

"No! I won't die, I refuse!"

Henry felt a sharp pain in his head for only a split second and then confusion overtook him. He opened his eyes and could not reconcile his surroundings. He was sitting on the ground looking up at an impossibly tall hospital bed. He felt the cold linoleum tiles beneath him with his hands. His face was wet and he reached up to wipe the moisture off of them. And then he saw his hands, only they weren't his hands, they were too small.

Henry looked up and saw his son Greg standing over the hospital bed leaning over the patient there. He was yelling for a nurse.

"Levi, go wait outside," Greg's voice was stern.

Henry watched as a nurse rushed into the room and stood over the patient.

Greg turned to look directly at Henry, "Levi, please."

Henry stood up with an ease he hadn't

felt for over twenty years. He could now see the hospital bed and in it a convulsing old man. But it wasn't just any old man, it was his own face that he was staring at. Henry heard the extended beep of the heart monitor as he walked from the room. He could hear his son's panicked voice talking to the nurse as she worked.

Henry walked down the hall and saw doctors moving about. As he walked, he felt his face and looked down at his clothes. He was wearing Levi's clothes. Up ahead he saw a sign for the restrooms and ducked inside. He rushed over to the sink impatiently and had to lean onto his toes to see into the mirror. The sad wrinkled face that usually stared back at him was replaced with that of his grandson Levi. Henry backed away in fright. How could this have happened? In a moment of realization, he began to panic. If he was occupying Levi's body then Levi must be in his body.

Henry ran from the restroom and back down the hall. His sneakers squeaked against the linoleum. As he approached the room that he had only minutes ago been a patient in, he saw his son Greg sitting on a chair outside, head in his hands. Greg looked up at Henry with tears in his eyes. Again Henry was gripped by panic.

"Come here, Levi."

Greg reached out a loving arm and picked Henry up. Henry was a little surprised at the feeling.

"Your grandfather passed on," said Greg.

"He's dead?" asked Henry.

"I'm so sorry, kiddo."

Henry was filled with mixed feelings. He could not explain the phenomenon that had allowed his consciousness passage into his grandson's body. He was frightened that he didn't know what had happened to Levi's essence. But, though he felt guilty for feeling it, Henry was mostly relieved. He was not only still alive but also freed from the living corpse he had once occupied.

"That's ok...dad. I'm sure grandpa's in a better place now."

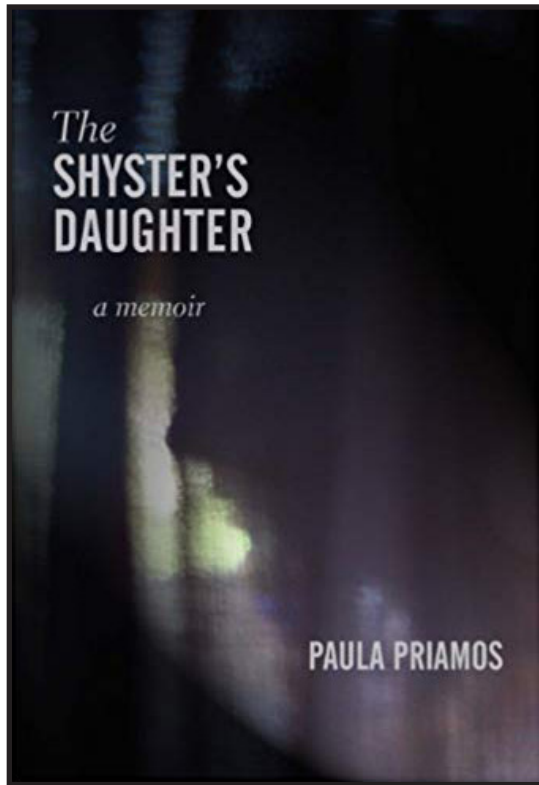
The next few weeks were a blur for Henry. There was a funeral and lots of crying. But Henry was happy and he was energetic. He ran around and played with the other grandchildren. He played the part of Levi because he didn't really know what else to do. But he was thankful for his second chance and didn't squander a moment. He fell into the role quickly and perhaps it was the new brain or a miracle of the phenomenon but he soon felt as if he was Levi. Perhaps lingering neurons crossed into Henry's consciousness. Either way "Levi" felt right at home in his new body and new life.

He never felt afraid of death from then on. Eventually Levi forgot most of his previous life as new experiences took their place. He was happy. But from time to time he would go to the site of his grandfather's grave to pay his respects. He was a great man who had sacrificed so much for Levi. He would miss Henry Conifer and always hold a place for him in his heart.

From Shyster's Daughter to Inside V: An Interview with Paula Priamos



Paula Priamos was born and raised in Southern California by her late larger-than-life Greek defense attorney father with whom she decided to stay with after her parents divorced and her mother and siblings moved to the South. She is married and lives in the San Bernardino Mountains with her husband. She is the author of *The Shyster's Daughter: a Memoir* and the psychological thriller *Inside V*. Website is <http://www.paulapriamos.com> She is currently working on a new psychological thriller.



Q: How did publishing your first book change your writing process, if at all?

A: It hasn't changed my writing process. I'm old school and always write first in a spiral notebook. I prefer the intimate connection of writing by hand, filling up lines on a page, rather than staring at a blank screen and a flashing cursor. After I've handwritten some pages, then I take what I've written to the computer, input it, and revise.

Q: On your website you state that you received backlash for titling your debut novel "The Shyster's Daughter." How do outside pressures affect your writing and how do you stay true to your "voice" while also considering your audience?

A: I NEVER allow outside pressures to affect my writing. In fact, outside my office door it read, "Real writers push the boundaries. They don't kowtow to political correctness." That's an original quote by me. I firmly believe in staying true to what you see in your mind, the creative process at work. If you allow outside influences in, your writing is compromised.

Q: What is one of your favorite book quotes?

A: "I never grew up, but I got old." It's from the novel "Yellow Raft in Blue Water" by Michael Dorris. It's the perfect line that starts the first person POV of one of the main characters in the book

A: Do you read any of your book reviews? How do you handle good/bad reviews?

Q: Ha. The good ones are accurate and the bad ones mean the reviewers don't know what they're talking about.

A: How long on average does it take you to write a book?

Q: On average I can get through the first draft of a book in ten months.

A: What do you find most challenging about writing characters from the opposite sex?

Q: I was primarily raised by my father, so I don't have a hard time writing about men. We spent a lot of time together and my husband likes to joke that I am "half-man." I'm a huge boxing fan, for starters. If a writer has a good understanding of the character, gender is pretty much inconsequential. I don't think writers should limit themselves into thinking they can't write about the opposite sex. It's simply not true.

Q: What authors, in your opinion, should other/newer writers read as a way to improve their craft?

A: I can't really answer that because it's a subjective call for every writer. But my Instagram handle is "Hemingwaygirl" which might tell you something.

Q: How many drafts can it take before perfecting a book for publication?

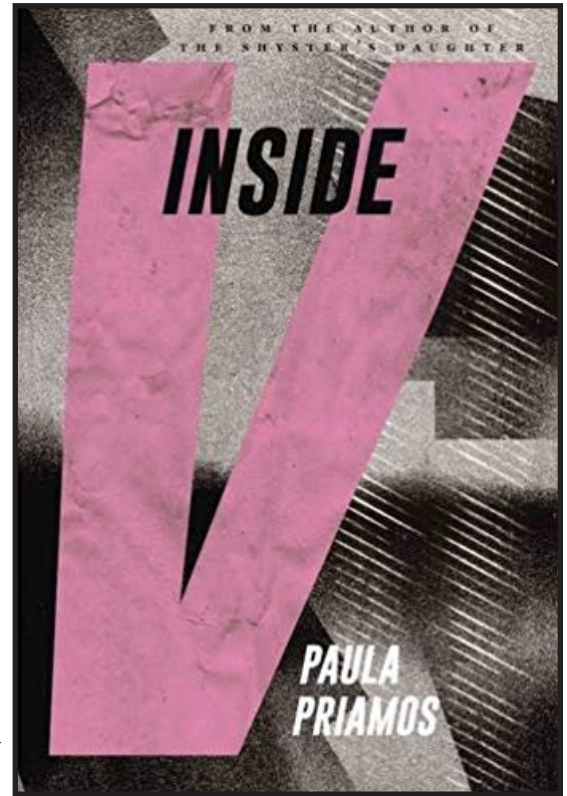
A: It depends. I revise as I progress through the first draft of each book. I'm close to finishing the first draft of my second novel (another psychological thriller) now and when I'm finished I'll go over it one more time, polishing the pages before I show it to anyone. Some writers are too impulsive with showing their work when it isn't ready yet. Others hang onto it for far too long. I do my best to let it go when the time is right.

Q: Your stories seem very authentic. Do you write mostly from personal experience or do you depend more on research to make your stories as authentic as possible?

A: There's a little bit of me in every one of my characters because I'm coming up with them. Sometimes there is a little bit of personal experience. For example, in my novel INSIDE V I knew the ins and outs of the courtroom because my late father was a defense attorney and I grew up waiting for him in the galley as he tried a case. Feelings, insecurities, motives and moments of confidence are all human emotions everyone experiences, so I try and capture and bring what authenticity I can to all of my characters.

Q: How has your writing style evolved from the beginning of your career to present time?

A: My writing style became apparent, at least to me, after my first two "big" publications, an essay that was published in the LOS ANGELES TIMES MAGAZINE and another one that appeared in the NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE. Both of them were leanly written and I've held onto that way of writing naturally ever since.



I think beginning writers need to relax, read books that are well written and they enjoy, and their own authentic style will come to them with practice, practice, practice.

Q: You have published a memoir and a fiction novel. Which genre is your favorite to write?

A: The book that has meant the most to me is my memoir THE SHYSTER'S DAUGHTER because in many ways it's like a love letter to my dad. He was flawed, had his share of troubles, but he was a good father to me. Nonfiction can be hard on the heart and emotionally draining. But it's also worth it in the end. Fiction is probably my favorite because I get to be all sorts of characters and it's my world, my rules. I get a good handle on my characters, give them a conflict and see how things play out. Sometimes when I'm writing it feels like I'm frantically trying to keep up with them. With nonfiction, you have to commit to the truth and shape it into a narrative worth reading.

Q: As a professor who teaches creative writing, how would you respond to other published authors who feel that taking writing classes in college constricts and is not beneficial to budding writers?

A: I didn't even know some people think that way. I learned a lot from my professors when I minored in Creative Writing for my Bachelor's degree and then later when I earned my M.F.A. in Creative Writing. Literary elements like plot, characterization, pacing – all of that and much more need to be in a writer's toolbox. If you're on your own, sitting at your desk, writing by the seat of your pants, you most likely will not learn any of that, and, as a consequence, you'll be a bad writer because of it.

Q: Do you write in creative bursts or do you approach the process in a strategic manner?

A: I do a little bit of both.

Q: . When do you find it most difficult to write? And are there any tricks or tools you use to power through times it is hard to write?

A: *“Hurry up and fail” is what I tell my creative writing students. I’ve encouraged many students who send me panicked emails asking for help, that they have writer’s block and their story is due the next day. If you allow yourself to just write freely, the opportunity to fail is present as well as the opportunity to succeed. That mindset never fails me nor does it the students who follow it as well. I also write scene by scene. It’s how I get through any piece I’m writing whether it’s an essay, short story, memoir or a novel.*

Q: Are you working on anything new?

A: *As I mentioned previously, I’m nearly finished with my second psychological thriller.*

Q: How has being married to a writer impacted/influenced your own writing both positively and negatively?

A: *To be honest, being married to an established author, initially made it a hundred times harder. NOBODY took me seriously. I was his younger second wife, period. “Isn’t it cute she thinks she wants to be a writer?” But I persevered and I wrote and I wrote and eventually I have earned a name for myself that is completely my own.*

Q: What is the most difficult part of the writing process for you?

A: *It actually varies depending on what I’m working on. For example, the ending of INSIDE V came easily and needed very little revision. I was extremely lucky. Other times I might find myself struggling with a sentence I just can’t craft right. I may wait a day or a couple days, then get back to it. Writers just power through that stuff or else nothing would get completed.*

Q: What steps would you advise new writers on taking to get published?

A: *There are a lot of different routes to take these days – finding a literary agent and trying to get published by a big New York publisher, going with an independent press or self-publishing. It’s something each individual writer needs to weigh for themselves and find their right path.*

Q: What advice would you give to community college students who are interested in becoming published authors?

A: *Recognize what you’re writing, what genre it falls under and pursue publishing in a smart way. Just sending it out to everyone and getting rejections can be heartbreaking and unwise. Editors are looking for new material. You don’t need to be concerned with what school you come from so long as you have a good story that intrigues them.*

Excerpt from *The Flop*

R. Keith

Someone my father worked with owned a cabin and let us use it for a week one summer when I was fourteen. My mom decided to stay home so my dad and I could have some sort of attempt at male bonding. So he can teach me to be a man, grow a backbone and all that. My dad spent the day in a canoe with his tackle box and fishing rod. I went to wander around the forest. There was a strange smell in the air, somewhere between wet dog and rancid meat. I followed the scent and came up the corpse of a black bear. I pried the bear's jaw open with a stick I got off the forest floor. I put my foot inside. Then my leg up to my knee. My other leg. Slithered down the bear's throat to my pelvis. Grabbed the bear's snout from behind me and pulled myself down inside.

Walking on all fours took some getting used to. I rubbed my new backbone on the barks of pine trees when it itched of ticks. I craved salmon. We craved salmon. We followed the scent of elk. We caught a young deer and shredded it open like a piñata. Jolly rancher heart, blow pop intestines, tootsie roll liver, crackerjack tongue, lifesavers spleen.

We roamed around the forest all summer. We chased away a pack of coyotes that were devouring a doe. Inside the doe we found the foreign exchange student from Holland who went missing last year. His name was Paul. Paul was tasty.

When mating season came around we watched inexperienced bear cubs run down the hill to get it on with estrus sows. We were old enough to know that if we walked down the hill we would save our energy and be able to fuck a few of them.

Winter was on the way, trees were naked, rabbits turned white to blend in with incoming snow. Food was getting scarce for us now. We remembered the cabin. We pounded our weight on the front door until the hinges snapped. Inside the cabin we saw heads on plaques. We knocked over the table and chairs. We pushed on the refrigerator to try to open it. Upright we stood with a flashlight and double-barrel in our direction. We tried to yell. My dad's friend didn't recognise us. Our bear brain forgot the language. We went down on all fours. A shell entered our neck made a massive hole in the hump of our back. We were cleaned and skinned. We were hung on hooks. Some of us was stewed. Other parts jerkied. Our heads joined the others on plaques on the cabin wall.

Lone Psycho Kinesis

Naomi Cheney



Submission

Jospeh Mill

Moriah watches Josh and knows he knows she is watching him. He glances over and when he does, if he has a certain expression, she pays even more attention. Makes sure that he is keeping his hands and his feet and his teeth to himself. Soon he'll be composed enough to not tip her off what he is thinking about doing. Maybe he already is. Maybe these looks are diversions, feints, drawing her attention on purpose, so that at other times he can go unremarked. But she doesn't think he has gotten to that point. Yet. His cruelties and his desires to be cruel are still straight-forward.

She and Alan had hoped sports would help, that they would teach their son a generosity towards others, cooperation, teamwork, but instead they just give him access to more people to bully and more opportunities to be aggressive. The coaches and the refs don't recognize his behavior. They don't expect it and look for it the way she does. The push in the back. The elbow. The whispered taunting. The "accidental" stepping on someone who had fallen. If they do see it, they consider it temporary passion, a lapse, they don't know it is a pattern.

Moriah had known what her son was, early on, just as some parents know their kids are gay or artistic or athletic. He had begun biting as soon as his teeth had come in. People had tried to reassure her that this wasn't uncommon, but even some of them had been surprised by the focused ferociousness. The seeking out. The seeming unmotivated meanness. He had pinched, hit, and punched. He had terrorized Benji so consistently that eventually Moriah had to ask her sister to take the dog. Josh was innately cruel. The question simply was: to what degree? Sometimes people would laugh at his actions and say, "He's all boy, isn't he?", or comment on his energy. He could be sweet and cute and occasionally nice

but he also took pleasure in others' pain, not just in the presence of it, but in the causing of it. The ripping of a classmate's project. The dropping of a precious object. Sometimes he would pretend to be upset. He would cry or act sorry and say the right words, but Moriah knew it was an act. He had learned that this was an effective way to escape punishment. He was never genuinely contrite. There was a lack there. Something was missing.

They had seen a number of therapists, none of whom had made a difference. Some had pointed out, with varying degrees of tact, that she and Alan had contributed to the behavior by rewarding it. She remembered a time Josh had been pitching a tantrum in a Starbucks because her cookie was bigger than his. She knew he was gearing up. She had broken him into pieces saying, "Look you have three cookies now. I only have one. You have more." It had calmed him, but it had been reinforcement. He was satisfied not only to have more but to believe that she had submitted to him. She was made to feel guilty by Dr. Atkins and made to believe there must have been something she could have done differently, but eventually she came to realize that it wasn't her fault. No matter what the books and doctors and disapproving looks from strangers and commercials with happy families suggested, her son's behavior wasn't her fault. It wasn't.

The pediatrician had recommended a psychiatrist, and she would willingly put Josh on medication if she would hear a diagnosis that she trusted. But there were no pills for cruelty. For anger. It was tempting to medicate him into submissiveness, and eventually they may have to make that choice, but they were going to try everything else first. Therapy. Sports. Boarding or military school if they needed to, although that

would probably make him worse.

Moriah used to say she hoped she was strong enough to have a special needs child. During her pregnancy she had wondered how she would respond if her baby was born with a defect, autism or Downs syndrome or whatever that kid out on the field had. People had tried to assure her that she would be fine, and that she would love the baby no matter what. As a parent, you accepted whoever arrived; you submitted to God's will. Now she sometimes wishes Josh would have been born with something like Down's syndrome. At least then she would have known what she was dealing with and what the future held. At least then there would be resources. Moriah had wanted a large family, several children, but before Josh was two she had changed her mind. She didn't trust how he would act with a younger sibling. The older he got, the less confident she was. She didn't believe they

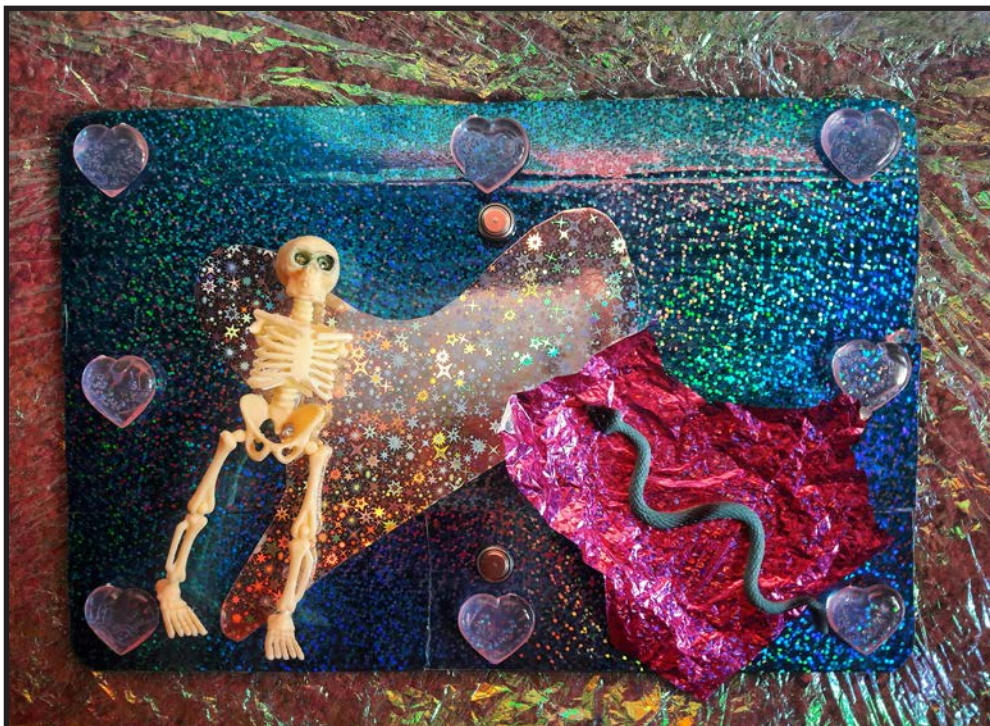
would be safe. It was a horrible feeling, one she didn't tell anyone, not even Alan, but he never said anything about another child so he must have known.

She tries to tell herself that, in a way, Josh is making her a better person, that having to deal with him makes her less judgmental of other parents, more tolerant, more empathic. It might even be true, but it doesn't feel that way. She feels he is making her ugly, making her do ugly things and say ugly things and think ugly things. When she was younger, she had wanted to change the world, and now she can't even change her son. It is a painful cosmic joke.

Moriah watches Josh run for the ball, laughing, the type of image people put on Facebook, and she thinks about how someday when they come for her son, she will let them. Worse, she knows she might be the one who will make the call.

Untitled

Yana Maru



Kismet 3

Kyle Hemmings



Early Morning Walk

Andy N.

Kissing the skies with a freshness
Each morning stroll to work
Across the end of summer
Carries a brisk walk across
Meadows half buried in mist
Agitated with the rising sunshine

Past swings covered in tears
From the freshness of the night air
And sunlight hovering
Over the top of the bowls club
Stretching slowly before
Eventually pulling itself upwards,

Disenchanted birds flying west
Then south with a weary cry
Admonished across the sky
Breathed from beyond the seasons
Wandered deep into a change
Around corners in murmured sunsets

Separating emotions around
The brushing of a few leafless trees
Standing at the edge of existence
Awakening different feelings
Eddied across my feet
Buried in yesterdays feelings.

Early Autumn Affair

Andy N.

Why don't you ring up your job, Sarah
And tell them your stomach is off
Then we run off to the shops
On the coastline near your mums
Just before it turns into
A constant, brisk, chilly breeze.

Play bingo in the old bingo hall
And watch that old comic at the Palace
Whose name I always forget
And listen to the Walker Brothers
And Roy and Elvis and the Everleys
Serrating each other next to the station.

We could go to the arcade on the South Pier
That stays open until 4 in the morning
And eat again in that Italian Restaurant
That barred your Uncle Bobby after
Serving us the most amazing Pasta
For being violently sick in their toilets.

Push each other down Fold Street again
That leads past the Old Market
Which we haven't been to since we were young
And then seeing somebody else
Until we got to Greengate Woods
Where we first made love.

Lift up our emotions
Right back up the very start
Love again what drew us together
Your parent's house, your bedroom
Even if I couldn't wait to run home
Fingering through my pockets for coins

Our memories for dreams
Scaled in fractal brilliance.

Revisit

Andre Katkov

The waterslide in the abandoned water park is pink.

It was red once
It was red once
It was red once

but the sun has seen to that.

The chain-link fence and autumn leaves
deify the plastic gazebo
where we bumper-carred our child summer days
away.

Look at all the sidewalk slabs. Shall we count them?
Shall we at least pretend to? Imagine a world
where archaeologists discover our bones
just here, where we're standing; just here,
staring at that once-red slide
through the criss-crossed metal—imagine
that world and believe those archaeologists
are just human enough to realize
we were children once.

There are ghosts
on the red water slide—
merry ghosts—screeching
out laughter. They didn't die here, or,
only part of them did, as a part of us did
some years ago.

The autumn leaves are red
and the sun will not touch their color.

Every moment of happiness
is a kind of death. Each smile
sheds a ghost.

It's hard to believe there was water here, once.

How Trouble Grows

Joan McNerney

Trouble is patient
hiding around corners.
creeping through shadows
entering without a sound.

It starts as a seed blown
by careless winds and
covers your garden with
foul brackish weeds.

Or sparks from a match
spread over fertile ground
becoming flames speeding
through the long night.

Trouble knows where you live.
You cannot hide from it.
Gaining a foothold, growing
fat feeding on your flesh.

Watch how trouble grows
inch by inch, molecule
by molecule coursing
through your veins.

Trouble begins as a whisper
day by day growing louder.
Now your heart beat becomes
a thumping drum.

Soon you will forget
there was a time
when trouble was
not at your side.

Oleanders

Wes Fink

Late July was a time like no other. Well, it was a lot like early July, June, and August, but for the sake of being dramatic we'll say it was a time like no other. For that sunny half of a month, I'd spend my days perched on an old dead oak watching the rabbits scurry about through the grass. They'd be far off, but I'd stare intently at them waiting to see their next move. There was something that astounded me about the way they ran. They seemed to have no purpose and nowhere to be. They'd run as if they had no idea what their next move would be. It would often make Alice's white rabbit seem a little less believable.

I would envy that. I envied the way they ran through life never fearing where to turn next. I wished I didn't have to plan my next move. I didn't have to spend sleepless nights with a cold sweat on my brow wondering where my next turn would be. I felt like I was drifting in an abyss. Like I had my whole life right in front of me, but I was too blind to see it.

On my perch, I'd sit there and watch them for hours. I'm not a madman or anything. Clearly, I'd need something else to bide my time throughout the day. So, I'd bring my guitar and strum while the rabbits sped through the blades of grass. Sometimes I'd try to match their tempo, but it was no use. They were too erratic and had no tempo of their own. As I'd slowed down they'd speed up, and as I sped up they'd slow down.

The old guitar was nothing special. The neck had been warped from the heat of sitting in my car on those summer days, as I'd drive out to my own personal rabbit hole. The bridge was peeling off the guitar, and I knew once it came off, there was no fixing it. The strings were nearing the point of turning into nothing but rust. It

wasn't something I was necessarily proud of, but it worked. Out in the canyon, where I'd watch the rabbits, the sound of the guitar would lay beneath the sounds of the wind and the bugs. It never sounded better than how it sounded out there.

I have no clue how this spot was ever found, but I was glad my father showed it to me. It made me feel a little closer to him even though he was thousands of miles away. It made me almost want to forgive him. Just the act of him showing me this place, almost made up for all he did to my mother and me.

As the sun started to set one day, I saw a shape in the corner of my eye. I wasn't used to seeing anyone out there, so it was a bit frightening when I looked to my right and saw a girl. She was crouched low to the earth right by a bush of oleanders. She either didn't notice me, or didn't care that I was even there. She was pulling the flowers from the earth and collecting them in the palm of her hand. I was so stunned by her presence, that I forgot to do the polite thing and look away. She wore shorts that only touched the top of her thighs and her long hair touched her knees as she crouched. I finally realised I was being a bit of a creep, and turned my head away from her. Had she even noticed me? I couldn't know. I spent a couple of minutes staring at the sunset, and when I turned back to where she'd been she was gone.

The next day I got in my car to drive back to my spot. I threw the guitar in the back seat. Then I pulled my pocket knife from my back pocket and stuck it in the glove box. *In case of emergencies*, I thought. I had spent all night thinking of her. I don't know why, but I just needed to see her again. The air rushed through the open car window and cooled the sweat on my forehead. The brakes of my

black '98 Civic screeched as I came around every bend. *How the hell did she even find this place*, I thought as I cranked the steering wheel. *It's so far away from everything*. I put my cigarette up to my lips and pulled in the smoke with my lungs. *This wasn't like someone I'd passed on the side of the street*. I reached my arm out of the out of the window and dropped the butt of the cigarette onto the ground and watched in the cracked rear view mirror as it sparked against the hot asphalt. It felt like she had entered my home and didn't even acknowledge me like an intruder that had just given me the cold shoulder.

A blue sedan sped by me coming from the opposite direction. It had been the only car I'd seen in probably ten miles. *There's no one out here*, I thought to myself as I placed another cigarette between my lips. As I slowed down to catch the gap in the guardrail along the roadside, I pulled the cigarette lighter out and light another cigarette. That was the only thing in my car that wasn't damaged or broken. I turned on to the dirt road as the clock struck one. It was earlier than I'd usually get there, but I had actually woken up early that day at around noon.

I was always kind of fond of girls that ignored me. I guess they reminded me of my mom in that way.

"If they aren't interested then I am," is what I'd typically say to Jason when we'd spend the weekend nights getting high after school and having long talks. He'd always give me a sympathy laugh for that joke.

I pulled into the dirt clearing, where I'd usually park my car. The car bounced with every rock and bump in the road. I noticed a bright reflection coming off something in the weeds by the trail to my spot. I parked the car and got out. I pulled in the smoke from my cigarette for a minute and then dropped it to the dirt and stomped it out. Then I reached in the back seat and pulled my

guitar through the back window and walked over to whatever was in the grass.

It shined and the glare of it caught my eye. As I got closer, I could see it was a bright blue schwinn laying on its side. It had yellow flowers painted on the side of it and dirty white wall tires. The rack over the back wheel had a helmet and a backpack strapped to it. I knew whose it was as soon as I saw it. The girl in the oleanders. It had to be. I mean I'd never seen anyone else out here, so who else could it be.

I took a deep breath. *I'm nervous*, I thought as I started down the trail, *why am I nervous? If anything she should be nervous. I could be a lunatic or something*. I shook my head at myself. My heart started pounding as I got closer. With every step, I could feel the blood pumping through the veins in my neck.

I entered the clearing and pulled another cigarette from the pack in my back pocket. I rested my guitar against a tree and looked around. I looked toward the oleander bush and saw nothing except those bright pink flowers. I looked towards the field and saw the tall grass rippling as the air pushed its way past. There was no one around. The rabbits were all gone. The grass they'd run through was now empty and I couldn't see any signs of life.

I put the cigarette in my mouth and held it with my teeth. I used my left hand to block the breeze and my right hand to pull out my lighter. My lighter only sparked and wouldn't catch a flame. I struggled with it for a couple minutes, but every time I flicked it it would just let out a few sparks and nothing more. As I had my head tilted down, trying to get the damn thing to light I felt a light tap on my right shoulder. I turned to look with the cigarette still in my mouth. There she was. Her arm outstretched holding a bright yellow bic lighter with a small yellow flame on the end of it. We didn't say anything. I just moved my face closer to the flame so that I could light the stick. I pulled in

the smoke and turned my head to blow it out.

"Thanks" I said as I pulled the the cig from my mouth.

"No problem." She said with an innocent smile.

Her dark brown skin was glowing in the sunlight. Her long hair swayed ever so gently from side to side. Her perfect lips sat slightly perched on her face. She had a slender face and stature and she looked at me with big light brown eyes. I felt like I was melting under the heat of her stare.

I turned my head and looked towards the field as a rabbit poked its head out of a hole in the ground. My mouth involuntarily turned into a smile. It was the first time in awhile that I had smiled without having to tell myself to. I turned my eyes back to her and she was staring at me intently. The corners of her mouth were ever so slightly raised.

"What?" I said.

"Nothing." She said. Her smile faded while her eyes lowered and she turned away from me. I could tell I had offended her and she started to move away from me.

"Hey now," I said reaching towards her, but withholding from touching her, "what's your name?"

"Oleander," she said raising her head toward me.

"Is that why I saw you you picking those the other day?" I pointed towards the oleander bush.

"That was yesterday actually," she said with a smile, "it was my birthday."

I put the cigarette back up to my mouth and took another drag off of it. She asked for one and I handed it to her and watched as she tore off its filter and placed it between her ample lips. She light it and sat on the ground. Her jean shorts pressed against the ground.

We spent the next hour just talking. It started as small talk and within twenty minutes we were talking about our lives, our loves, our passions. I learned she was a painter and a writer.

She'd actually been coming to this spot all summer as well, but more sporadically than I had. She'd found it last summer when her and her boyfriend were driving down the canyon road and had gotten into an argument over something she can't remember. I had a feeling this was somewhat commonplace for her. He had pulled the car to the side of the road and told her to walk home. After half an hour of walking, she came up to the break in the guardrail, the one I was all too familiar with, and she thought she might as well check out the road that lead down that way. She actually said saw me here that time sitting and playing my guitar. I was completely oblivious to her. She'd been here a several times since, but hadn't seen me again until yesterday.

We talked a lot about love. Well, mostly she did. I just listened. She talked about how she'd been in a lot of bad relationships, and about how she was still in one. She was still with that guy even after he'd ditched her like that.

"It was the first time he did it," she said, "so I didn't really think much of it. Yeah, I was pissed, but I love him." She pulled in as much smoke as she could off the cigarette. "He's done it a couple time since though. He always comes back to get me after about an hour."

"That's bullshit." I said.

"Well, you can't choose who you love."

"That may be true," I paused, "but that doesn't mean that it's good."

I hadn't cared about anyone. in such a long time, but she got to me. I guess it's because I saw part of myself in her. She seemed to let everything out that I kept bottled up in me.

She asked me if I believed in god or any sort of higher power. I told her I didn't think there was anyway to know if there is something beyond ourselves.

"That's a cop out," she said.

"What? How?" I asked.

"You're just avoiding picking a side."

"No, I'm just not sure what side is right and I don't really think anyone can be." She rolled her eyes at me.

"What do you think then?" I said.

"I think that there is something watching over me. Maybe not an old guy with a big grey beard, but something," she paused and watched my face for any signs of judgement, but I didn't react, "I just like the idea of heaven," she continued, "the idea that I can leave all this behind someday." She closed her eyes and I could see her tense up.

We stayed until the sunset and watched the blue sky turn to a burned orange. The yellow sun faded and black consumed the sky. We walked back down the trail together and once we reached the dirt lot she asked me for a ride back to town. With the seats laid down, we pushed her bike through the trunk and into the back of the car. As we opened the car doors, I realized something.

"Dammit, I forgot my guitar." I said.

"Do you want to go back for it?" She asked, turning towards the trail.

"No, I'll be back here tomorrow."

We got into the car and headed for town. Once we hit town I was low on gas, so I pulled into the station and parked by a pump. We hadn't said anything that whole drive, and I think it was because we'd said everything we'd needed to say to each other. I pulled my old beaten down brown leather wallet from my back pocket and grabbed my last ten dollar bill out of it. I got out and went inside. Oleander waited in the car and just kept her eyes forward. I could sense she she had something troubling her, but I thought it'd be rude of me to ask. We hadn't spoken a word the past ten miles and I wasn't going to just start trying to get in her business.

I bought five bucks worth of gas and a pack of cigarettes. I thought about getting a new lighter, but the one in my car worked just fine and I needed

the gas. The clerk noticed Oleander in my car and made some comment about if I was going to get "any" that night. I kept my head down and shrugged.

I made my way back to the car and saw her shuffling in the seat.

"Getting restless?" I said as I approached the car.

"Yea I should just be home by now. My boyfriend is going to get mad."

"Alright, we'll get you there quick."

I finished pumping the gas and headed out of the station. She directed me on every turn by just subtly pointing and softly saying which way to go. I made two wrong turns because she was being so quiet, but we finally made it to her apartment on Oak Street.

"I only live a couple miles from here." I said with a chuckle.

"Oh," is all she managed to reply.

Did I do something wrong? I wanted to ask so badly, but I refrained myself from doing so. I was stuck because I felt like we were so connected, but she was still an almost complete stranger to me.

She turned towards me and gave me a half-hearted smile. Her eyes looked to be near tears, but she didn't say much.

"Thanks," she said, "you've been sweet."

She leaned over the center console and kissed my cheek. I nodded with a smile and she got out. I helped her get the bike out of the back and waved to her as I drove off.

I could imagine Jason laughing at me for making a move, or really trying anything. I know a misogynistic gay guy seems like an oxymoron, but that's kind of what he was.

That night I didn't think about her like I had the night before. I felt at peace because I was acknowledged by the person that I felt was an intruder. It was the first time in awhile that I felt content and the memory of her big sad eyes escaped my mind.

The next day I made the drive out to my spot. I actually made the effort to get up early and I was there by noon. As I pulled in, I could see that familiar shimmer from the bushes and I smiled. I parked the car and walked down the trail. As I passed her bike laying on the ground, I gave it a little nod as a little thank you for bringing her here today. When I got to the clearing I didn't see her. I looked around and only noticed some rabbits hopping along a trail. Almost following each other, but not quite. I thought I knew how to find her, so I put a cigarette in my mouth and pulled out my crappy lighter. I spent two minutes trying to light the damn thing and I waited for a tap on my shoulder, but it never came.

Confused, I walked over to where I'd left my guitar. There was a note that read: *I'm sorry if I've ruined this place for you. - O*

What was she talking about? I looked around and then I finally saw her.

Her bright yellow shoes stuck out from behind the Oleander bush. *No. this can't be happening.* I ran to her and once I reached the other side of the bush I saw her.

She lay on the ground with her eyes closed and her arms spread out by her side like a cross. Her face had lost its glow and yet she seemed even more peaceful. She had a black eye and she was wearing the same clothes as the day before. I crouched and touched her leg. *It was so cold.* She must have been out there all night. She probably road out there again after I had dropped her off. The blood pooled around her arms and collected beneath her. It was so dark it was closer to black rather than red. The earth had soiled it. Off to her side laid the pocket knife that I'd put in my glovebox the day before. *In case of emergencies,* I thought.

Crafton Hills College Places 1st Against San Bernardino Valley College at the 2nd Annual Poetry Slam Competition

An Article by Ethan Poulos

On Thursday, April 19, 2018 Crafton Hills College held their annual Poetry Slam competition against San Bernardino Valley College. The event took place at Crafton Hills College campus at 7 PM and ran for a little over two hours. The scoring of the event was done by five judges. The judges were composed of a faculty member from both Crafton and Valley, and the three other judges were selected randomly from the audience. The judges scored each poem on a scale of 1-10. The building had strings of lights hanging over the audience and an MC, from Valley, to moderate the event.

Crafton's poetry team was an all-female, ass-kicking group of women who dished out powerful monologues as well as support for their fellow poets. All the Crafton students who performed had Crafton's Professor Ashley Hayes as a source of support as well as a voice to offer advice with regards to performing poetry in front of a large audience. Valley's team was composed of a variety of students, some current and some alumni, who all brought their poems to the stage after working with a Valley Professor, Nikia Chaney. Though each of the slam poets performed individually, you could hear the support in the nods of audience members heads and the "uh-huh. That's right" reassurance coming from those in the audience who felt strongly about the pieces being performed.

Both Valley and Crafton students stepped up to the podium with powerful words carrying deep and meaningful verse, discussing themes of challenging gender norms, negotiating lost loves or self love, and the current political uncertainty. The timing of the poems as well as the content is what made each slam poem work so well. It was evident in the performance that each piece had been meticulously constructed by the students with every

pause and breath being entirely intentional.

Two students from *The Sand Canyon Review* class, Mark and Alyssa, set up a table in the back to sell copies of the 2016 and 2017 edition of *The Sand Canyon Review* magazine to audience members. Black coffee, deliciously-poetic, a beverage to be at a slam-poetry event was also served. After the event, the room felt like what the end of an AA meeting must feel like as a weight was lifted from these student's shoulder's temporarily suspended, buzzing through the air. The Valley MC, acting as moderator, finished the event off by volunteering a poem he had written. As all the contestants performed using a microphone, the MC decided to do his own thing and drop the mic and project solely his voice without the assistance of a mic. And just through the power in his speech and the words he used to express a celebration of teachers, it quickly became evident that his words were affecting the the audience as few faculty members began to wipe tears that began forming around their eyes. And even without a window's bounce from a huge speaker's bass, this man's words shook the audience.

Events like these are a great way for students and staff to express themselves honestly, and any chance at expressing one's self freely is a worthy cause to attend and take part in. Freedom of speech was alive in this room.

Next year, the event will most likely be held at San Bernardino Valley College, and the school will have the chance for a rematch against Crafton. As for the school year of Spring 2018, Crafton holds first place for the Battle of the Campus' Poetry Slam competition, meaning Crafton Hills College gets to hold the "crystal microphone trophy" as the MC so poetically put it.

Crafton Hills College's 2018 Battle of the Campus' Slam Poets and Poems



Untitled

Sarah Hauser

You, right here in the front row
I am in love with you
The way the light is bouncing off your hair
That shy awkward smile you're trying to hide
Wait... no, maybe I meant the guy in the back
It doesn't matter though
Because I promise you both
I forgot about that guy I saw yesterday on the bus
You know the one with those breakingly beautiful blue eyes
He just stared at his phone the whole time
But when he got on and walked by
I swear I felt this connection
And I still can't believe he didn't ask for my number
Even though I stared at him for three stops
He did help me get over
That barista in that café that made my latte that one day
I gave him a hard time for spelling my name without the "h"
He teased me for all the sugar I put in my drink
It made me think for just a second about our future together
But our conversation didn't get much farther than the weather

There was a guy before him and I'm sure another
All these one second loves aren't really helping me
Actually, I think they're hurting me



In these people I find little mementoes I cling to
These triggers that constantly take me back
... I swear I'm addicted to the pain
I go back to the place and time
When you occupied that empty space next to mine
How can I move on when I still talk about you in the present tense?
I still tell the story of us like there is a chance for a happy ending
Like the past isn't that childhood concrete sidewalk forever holding my hand
Even though it's been paved over my mark is still there
I cannot erase you
When the bleach didn't work I turned to whiskey instead
What I vomited were regrets and parts of myself I wish I still had
But there's no replacement for your memory
The things that I burn to forget
These things that cripple me are
Tattooed on the walls of my skull
But... I'll keep stealing moments with people I don't know
That way I can fake being whole
I want to be the person that cares
That I buckle my seatbelt
Get some sleep and drink enough water
And tries to stop staring at the stranger
In the back of the room
Hoping and praying that its really you

Foolery, Immortalized.

Naomi Cheney

I want sunshine strums

I want plucky smiles, grins, thin fingers on my skins, thumb on my lower lip, lips berry-wet with warm and lightly plucked fruit strings.

Bring me more blooms than my vapor arms can carry.

Great castle arms and hotel hearts, have me.

Bright eyes, sighing glitter highs, haunting the night.

Honey, hand me your hole heart, I'll fill it wholly.

Firelight softens cuts and stars, sings sweet surrenders to the winds, birds in the reeds weeping whispers to lovely creeks.

Like you and me and sushi and sleeping through the days in an indica haze, split my legs like a sundae and take, until mourning dove, glory, nightingale. Dawning sunbursts. Pure.

I believed our love.

I bloomed and bled white for you.



I want your love. I want your love. I wanted your love.

Seven holes sans condoms, you slut.

Strangling dreams in their sleep, I shivered like the trembling earth, cursed birth, rebirth, and my own rose lenses, bending rules for one brush of a fucking finger.

I lingered with the lavender and lovers' duets.

I drag me along, a jaded rose. Though now these thorns cut far deeper and mend much quicker.

Fuck you.

You francophile fake feminist fuckboy.

Fuck every time you drink, fuck whatever you think, and fuck everything you want.

I want showers of silver, I want to watch the winter swallow the sun, and a light candle on the floor. Prayer candles for the pining hearts that dig graves in the chests of dead love.

I want to worry less of dooms. I want deep roots, to sleep through winds, divert my eyes from pretty, poisonous blooms. I'd trade my petal eyes for wings, branches, bark, protective gloom.

Don't come out of this thrift-store chrysalis too soon.

Don't return to arms that harm and consume.

Don't turn around, don't let him take you.

I want the love. Don't look for love. Your love will find you.

A Poet's Preach

Joanna Brock



In order to know about ourselves
We must first research our history.
Turn the page and read another line.
Look beyond what is said and
Discover the mystery.
Decipher what's real
Through signs
Left behind
by
Brilliant minds
And times
Before the man.
We have to take a final stand.
Preach only what you practice
Because we only got one shot at this
And I'll be damned if I miss.
Take your voice and be heard.
Express your thought
In your words.
Where you stand.
Who's got the upper hand

In this battle of heart
 vs
 Corporate demand.
 I've seen a poor man's hand
 Begging for change
 But it's never going to change
 This shit is staying the same;
 And it's just another game
 Of who we can blame
 And "I'm just sayin'" ...
 That's a dumbass saying
 Because we shouldn't be saying
 Or speaking, but shouting!
 Out to the world
 Out to our family and friends
 Out until our smoke filled
 Breath fucking
 ends.
 We are not on the fence
 Nor on the mend
 The division is clear
 As we begin the descend.
 Dying in darkness
 Laying in the smoke of
 jokes
 Voiceless and scared.
 No, we have to stand up
 So, friends be prepared,
 Because our enemy isn't Kings or Queens
 But the glory of big shiny things
 That loom and consume
 The hearts of the weak,
 And in the same breath
 Kills the hearts of the meek,
 Because they talk about bombs
 And nuclear war
 Like they talk about
 Spilling milk on the floor.
 A wipe away loss
 They can easily afford.
 So, it's up to us
 To scream that we're more.
 More than just numbers
 On an underground board.
 We are the people
 The now and the future
 This is America!
 And we won't let you abuse her.
 She is the land of the free and home of the brave.
 The land of opportunity and a billion lives saved.
 She is the melting pot and a haven from lore.
 She is your tired and she is your poor.
 She is your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.
 She is anything we can dream her to be.
 The spirit of America is freedom for all.
 So, I ask you now...

Will you answer the call?

Butterfly

Zoe Read-Bivens

Depression is sitting in spanish class
Minding my own fucking business
Trying to wrap my head around imperfects, imperatives,
and past, present and future tenses
When my senses notice something getting closer
a black butterfly fluttering
Getting closer, growing bolder
The butterfly sits upon my shoulder
And starts whispering
You are Imperfect, a person pursuing
Something greater
But fate that first traitor has cut you off like a big SUV
You drive down a path —a road eroded
Your dreams are all dreams corroded
Dust and rust. Blown away
It is Imperative you do not exist
You are an unchecked checklist
A missed train
A message washed away in rain
It tells me
It tells me
Your past has always been painful
Your present is always painful
Your future will always be painful
So that is how you conjugate your tenses
It's time to derail your defences and die
I look up and now the butterfly's a vulture, screaming
Black feathers dripping with pitch, an itch runs through me
Talons tearing into skin
Beak opening to start again
Starts to lay its deadly spread
A feast of lies, a host of flies
A poison apple looking juicy
Instead I open my mouth and lift my head
Deadweight, ledden, but I lift my head
I tell it to leave me be
I tell it to leave me be
I tell it to leave me be
And I go back to my spanish class,
Hoping I will learn how to say
I love myself



The OR Phenomenon

Savanna Fisher

I am a reinvented electric volkswagen bus and a slick black 1967 Pontiac GTO. Some days I wear the beach in my smile, while flowers cling to my hair and I sip nothing but green tea. And some days I am leather clad in confidence, boots taller than a man's ego, studded to kill. What I mean by that is the two halves of my whole don't always make sense next to each other. I am a revolving quarter, always heads always tails.

A long time ago someone told me choose. Uncomfortable in my indecision they stole my bus and crashed it into the symmetric, unchanging hills, keys still in hand they burned my pontiac and told me "that's just the way it is". After all "they" know best, and I've never been at the wheel of my own heart anyways.

"They" being the same ones who teach us beauty or brains, as if the double helix of my DNA wasn't discovered by a woman wearing mascara. Like the blush on my cheeks and knowledge of contouring somehow makes less room for knowing how a star becomes a supernova. Which by the way happens when it's core is so heavy it collapses in on itself. But knowing that won't change the fact that when you look at me you'll only see eyeshadow and lipstick because "that's just the way it is".

"They" being the same ones who teach us boys or girls. But only girls if you're a boy, and only boys if you're a girl, because that's just the way it is. Like I wasn't thirteen stumbling over ways to tell my parents that, yeah, boys are cool. But girls are what really make this engine purr. Only for them to tell me that it wasn't my decision, so I slapped a bandaid over the girls I'd been kissing since kindergarten and told myself boys, boys, boys, because "that's just the way it is".



"They" being the same ones who teach us white or black. While biracial kids contemplate the reality of grey, wondering if it only comes in fifty shades of spousal abuse. While little white girls watch even smaller white girls and develop eating disorders, while little colored girls watch even smaller, white girls. And develop nothing. Because apparently representation only matters if you're a white girl who's thrown up everything she's eaten that day.

"They" being the same ones that teach us that white is good. Like the poor misunderstood white kid who carved swastikas into his ammo before murdering seventeen people, good. Or the white woman who called all black men super predators while simultaneously using them under the guise of prison labor, good. Or the white man separating families jealous because his orange self tanner will never look as good as their natural glow, good.

Meanwhile anything more colored than ivory is bad. Like Malala Yousafzai isn't fighting for a woman's right to an education but her name has origins in Pakistan and sounds nothing like Brittany, or Ashley, bad. Like Michelle Obama wasn't writing her own speeches and keeping her commitment to putting more health food in schools, but she had the audacity to be a black woman in the process, bad. Like the only thing we're taught about Malcolm X is that, he's like the bad version of MLK? And not that his father was murdered by Klan members, that he wanted to be a lawyer but his teacher told him it wasn't realistic for a black boy, still he fought for the right of self creation, bad.

I am sick of "them" dictating what can and can't be because "they" are afraid of change and "that's just the way it is", no. That's the way it was. I do not live my life by archaic rules set in place before I had a say. And what I mean by that is, I'm less of an "or", more of an "and" kind of girl. As in brains and beauty, girls and boys, black and white, a reinvented electric volkswagen bus, and a slick black 1967 Pontiac GTO.

Big Love

Jaelynn Behlow

Have you ever had that big love?
That all consuming, time consuming, mind consuming, in love, big love ?
That, let me have all your babies childish kid love ?
Laying on the couch, head on your lap, hand in my hair, sitting looking at me like I was the only one there.
That kiss, that touch, the feeling of complete and utter luck.
The gratefulness that love brought
Oh Jesus, look! Look at what I got!
That, you're the only one I see, big love
You're the only one I need, big love
Just spend all your time with me, big love ?
But now everyone you ever date is a pig, huh?
The, let's hang out, talk about the gym, then let's get it in, love.
But ain't none of them ever in love.
Sorry sweetheart but I don't really dig love.
And now I wish I never knew love

Red love, blue love, one love, true love
And now I'm on my knees
Desperate and afflicted
Screaming out
Fuck love
And now he's looking at me, smiling, asking me, how do you do love?
(like I don't already know what he wants)
Sorry doll, I don't really do "love"
I did love, and it was a sick love,
Sometimes I miss love, his love



Mama telling me that this is what I need.

“The loving of another”

but it only has confirmed what I already know now and that is,

I will never feel the same again, never will I look into those green eyes and see that love.

Never will my mind be consumed by his touch, by his intellect, by his presence, by his affection.

And to who ever said it is better to have love and lost then to never had loved. You know nothing.

At least I had that big love, for now, I think it's time to quit love.

And now it's time to put my self above

To focus on the concept of self love

To focus on my own health

To watch me grow as a daughter, as a sister, as a woman.

Watch me grow in wealth.

Grow my hair out because he liked it short

It's my time now ! The balls in my court

I will strut my stuff because I can

I will show the world that I don't need no man.

And here I am now

I have come to the conclusion that I, don't have the patience to find a new love, a big love,

its time to say goodbye to that love, my past love

Never will my time be spent by his side curled up on the couch, head in his lap, hands in my hair.

Never will he be mine

Never will I be his

I'll never again have that true love

That one love

That big love

Never again will I have his love

Never again will he have mine

And what a shame !

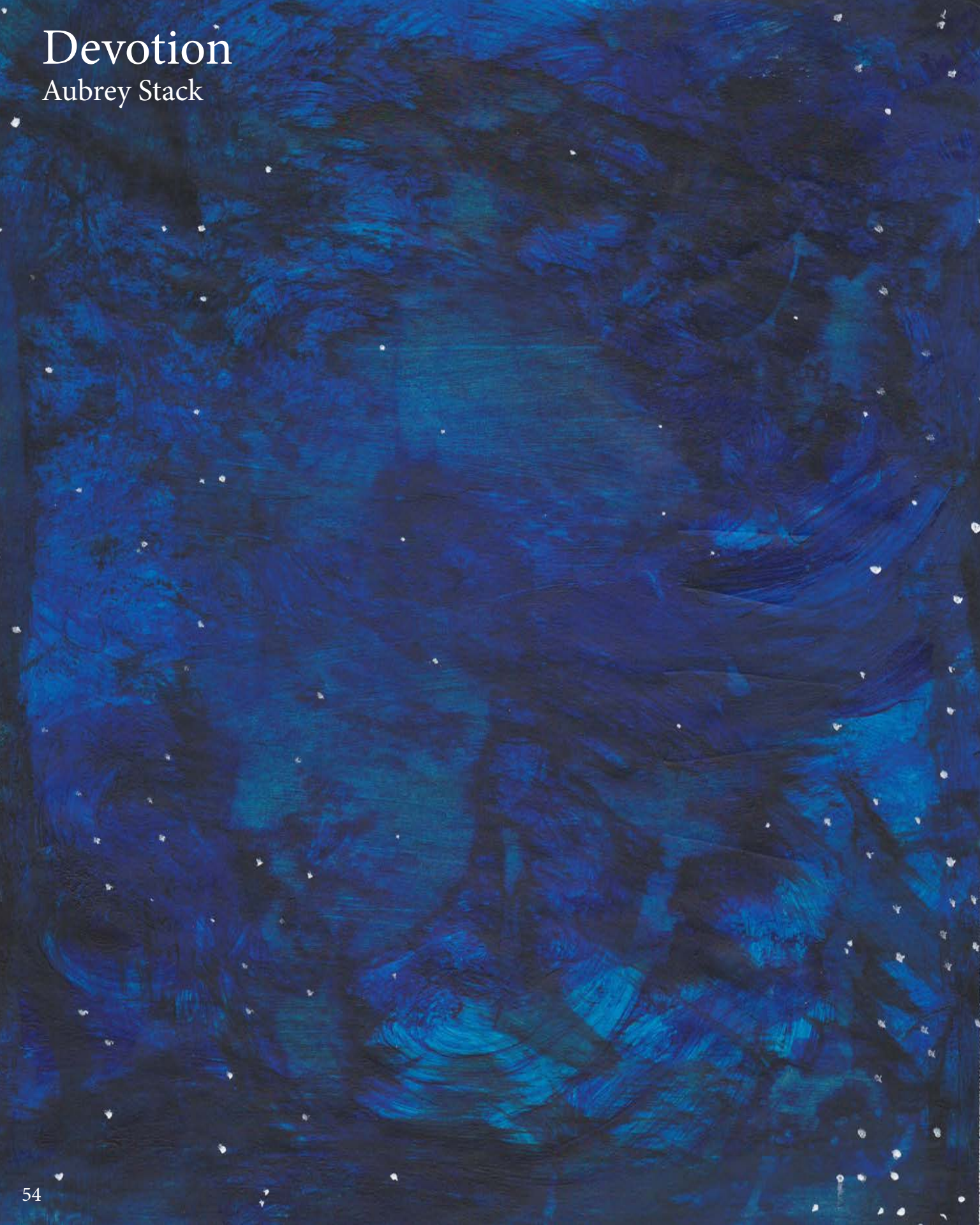
Because I am, all that was and all that is, because that is all I give.

I am big love.



Devotion

Aubrey Stack



Smiling Sun Emoji

Naomi Cheney



Soul Recognition

Katie Keridian

Soul Recognition

I've traveled galaxies to find you
cut through currents of light years to reach you
circled the darkness of obsidian holes
for the chance to be back in your arms
how many times have we done it
our pasts in exchange for a present?
going through life asleep, in a fog,
searching for what we can't even name

until

the time of awakening arrives
our attention becomes wholly arrested
that instant, breath-stopping recognition
when the half of my soul
housed in your body
calls out to me in welcome

En La Medianoche

Sarah Hauser

Muggy breath on my nape, skin
Sticky with sweat, strong
Pressure pushing me deeper in
To the bed, yes fills the night long

Hands pinned above my head
Chewing my lip in between a kiss
Not soft, hard instead
Real without tomorrows promise

There's no room for love
Between these sheets
Just this little death and another shove
Aching for more, always losing sleep

You kill me again and again
And again, I know dawn will bring the end

Macchiatos at Midnight

Sarah Hauser

Our memories are littered
with the insides of cars and the miles
of highways illuminated with sun and moonlight

Instead of a graduation
I have the crystal clear Mediterranean Sea
Towering tops of Austrian mountains still crowned with snow
Spanish sangria and German men,
Broken Italian and lights on the Greek coast

They ask of home
This California girl so foreign to them
Street tacos, worn down sandals, Taoist temples
Venice beach drum circles in October
Crossing between San Diego and Tijuana

These roads and places
Are carved into the back
of my hands
They are known and hiding
Waiting to be
Remembered and discovered

I am transfixed
Entranced by whirling unidentified smells
Strangers raising toasts in my honor
My tongue tripping over sounds I don't know
Unaware my world could be this

Unabashedly dumbstruck and goggling
at the intricate scene in front of me
Baffled at the new life
I am planning inside my head

The Night

Ivan De Monbrison

quelqu'un parle
on regarde le ciel
la nuit penche
tu cherches des yeux le cadavre d'un chien
un autre passe plus loin
sur la route qu'il emporte sous son bras
il y a un corps les bras en croix
et sous la peau quelque chose de plus léger
les bords des corps se touchent sans se coller
il faudra faire un pas de plus pour avancer
sur cette ligne si fine et suspendue au dessus du vide
c'est la corde d'un cri
par laquelle on pourrait se pendre
c'est aussi ce bout de l'horizon
resté accroché à l'aile d'un oiseau
la nuit retombe plus lourdement
on soulève un coin du silence
et le monde se met à avancer à quatre pattes
on a peur de fermer les yeux pour de bon
pour ne plus jamais avoir la possibilité
de s'extraire ensuite du sommeil
quelqu'un pleure plus loin
mais je ne l'entends pas
souffrir et partir
les murs de la maison sont trop fins
ils ne nous protègent plus de notre souffrance
et quelque chose en toi à changé
de telle sorte que je ne te reconnais pas
on repart en arrière
dans les mêmes traces de pas
on retrouve le chemin qui mène à la colline
et si l'on croise un animal tué par les chasseurs
il faudra faire exprès de ne pas s'arrêter
de ne pas voir dans ses yeux noirs
toute la violence inutile et brutale du monde
et tellement propre à l'homme
mais déjà la forêt nous entoure avec ses quatre murs
nous sommes devenus quelqu'un d'autre
sans le savoir
au détour d'un sentier
j'emporterai mon souvenir avec moi
comme au premier jour où
comme jeté sans crier gare
j'ai vu lentement tomber hors de ma portée
à jamais
ton regard et ton corps transparent
au fond du puits sanglant

someone speaking up
we watch the sky
the tilting night
you are looking for the dead body of a dog
someone is walking away
on that road that he carries under his arm
there is a body with spreadeagled arms
and under the skin something lighter
the edges of the body touching without sticking
we have to make one more step to move forward
on this line so thin and suspended above space
it's the rope of a scream
with which we could hang ourselves
it is also this end of the horizon
stitched to the wing of a bird
the night falling down
we raise a corner of silence
and the world starts to move on its four legs
we are afraid to close our eyes for good
and to never be able after that
to get out of sleep
someone is crying somewhere
but I do not hear him
to suffer and to leave
the walls of the house are too thin
they no longer protect us from our pain
and something in you has changed
so that I do not recognize you anymore
we go back
on the same trail
we find the path that leads to the hill
and when we walk by an animal killed by hunters
we will have to purposely keep on walking
in order not to see inside its black eyes
all the useless and brutal violence in the world
so specifically human
but already the forest surrounds us with its four walls
we turn into someone else
without being aware of it
at the bend of a path
I will carry away my memory with me
like on the very first day
when cast away out of the blue
I saw slowly falling away
for ever
your gaze and your transparent body
down a bloody well

The Falling

Ivan De Monbrison

quelque chose de plus vide
ailleurs le monde encerclé par la nuit
il n'y a plus rien à faire
il y a des visages penchés au coin de l'horizon
pour te regarder flotter sur la mer
pourtant on ne sait jamais d'où l'on vient
il y a une île qui dérive au coin de toi-même
il y a le silence qui sort lentement d'une épave
comme s'il s'agissait d'un petit animal de papier
les mains des hommes se rejoignent
nous nous regardons dormir dans la mer
sans oser jamais fermer les yeux tout à fait
et sous la surface transparente
c'est un autre soi-même qui apparaît
une silhouette désarticulée
un mannequin de bois et un morceau de chiffon en guise de tête
mais la poussière recouvre tout
et il nous faut continuer notre voie
vers cet ailleurs qui n'existe plus jamais
à l'intérieur du ventre
il y a un oeuf qui se forme
et quelqu'un s'extirpe de l'oeuf pour marcher jusqu'à toi
en entraînant derrière lui un horizon complet
nous osons à peine flotter sur la mer de métal
et ces corps décapités sont devenus méconnaissables
ces mains coupées portées par des chiens dans leurs gueules
sont déposées en tas dans un coin
la fenêtre est restée ouverte pendant ce temps là
et on s'est observé soi-même dormir
et les yeux ouverts pouvaient voir
la nuit étalée sur le monde au loin
bordant les montagnes et la mer à la fois
comme un linceul

something is emptier now
as the world is surrounded by the night
there is nothing we can do
there are eager faces hanging over the horizon
to watch you float on the sea
yet one never knows where one did come from
there is an island drifting not far away
there is the silence slowly coming out of a wreck
as if it were a small paper animal
the hands of men joined
we look at each other sleeping down the sea
without daring to ever close your eyes altogether
and under the transparent surface
it's another self that appears
a disarticulated silhouette
a wooden mannequin and a piece of cloth as a head
but the dust covers everything
and we must resume our journey
to this elsewhere that has disappeared for good
inside in the belly
there is an egg showing up
and someone gets out of the egg to walk up to you
dragging along a full horizon
we hardly dare to float on the sea of metal
and these decapitated bodies have become unrecognizable
these cut hands held by dogs in their mouths
are left in a pile in a corner
the window remained open all that time
and we have watched ourselves sleeping
and the open eyes could see
the night spreading away over the world
bordering the mountains and the sea together
like a shroud

Last Chance

Joan McNerney

You must come before 9 p.m.
(miracles can be quirky)
to the high way drug store
where pristine pharmacists
feed scripts into forked
tongues of computers.

Neat rows of sterile packs
and crutches wait attentively.
Herbal medicines, vitamins
pose with gleaming lotions.

One squat wobbly table
marked "Last Chance"
offers up my cure. I must
salvage a phenomenon now.
Here is a miracle I can believe in.

A tinted jar of aroma therapy
filled with flowers grown in California.
To be cuddled safely under my coat
taken home far from fists of winds.

My glass bottle of jasmine mist...
pink, yellow, white petals.
Night blooming jasmine
whispering perfumed nothings
at the 11th hour.

Luck

Joan McNerney

Wearing designer clothes
and sleek jewelry,
she traipses along willy nilly
throwing golden kismet
wherever whimsy calls.

Some think luck chooses their
goodness or hard work. Perhaps
they were blessed at birth?

The wise know luck wears a
visor tripping over herself
favoring both mean and lazy.

Luck has a toxic twin called
Misfortune covered with
gloom. Dressed in dusty
rags, stupor-like he selects
unsuspecting victims.

Stomping helter skelter
clutching the throats of
both meek and mighty.

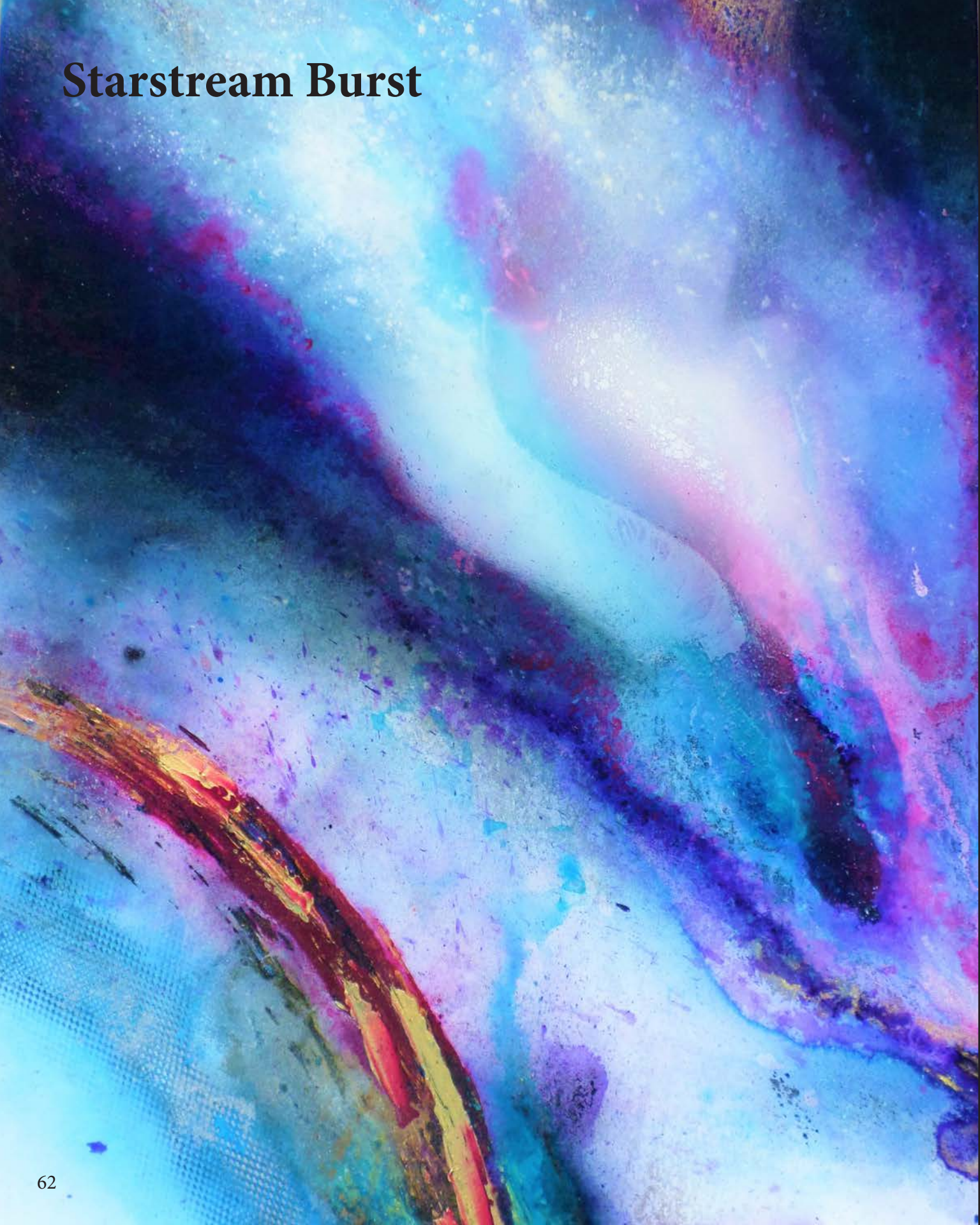
Everybody who gets in his way
will be pushed down, their
muffled cries barely heard.

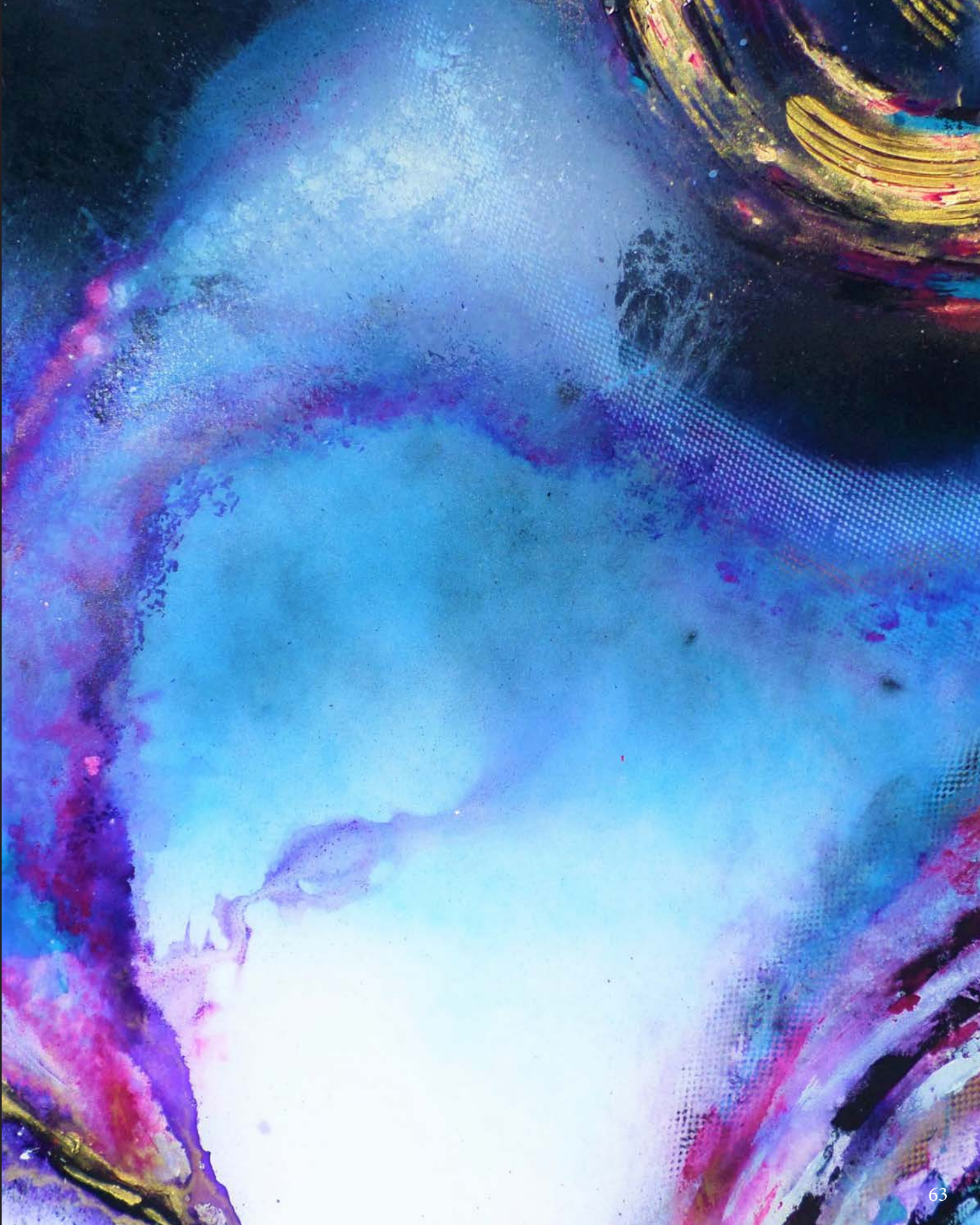
Meet Our Cover Artist: Allen R. Triplett



Allen R. Triplett (ART) is a visual artist from California. He studied game design at the Art Institute of Inland Empire and as a Studio artist in Palm Springs. Allen is known for his abstract expressionist paintings that combine the aesthetics of graffiti and fine art. Diagnosed with the neurological condition known as Synesthesia, Allen says, “When i hear music my brain reacts with color shape and direction. I record what I hear because I believe that songs have a deeper meaning beyond what the lyrics and instruments illustrate.” In a letter Allen wrote, he says “Painting has always been a way for me to get in touch with my inner voice. My paintings are a combination of what I hear and my human experience; Art is my way of screaming. However, a scream does not always have to be out of anger. You can scream for joy, passion, confusion, loss, or just to be heard. Everyone has their own reason; i ljust explore mine. Being an artist is difficult. Each time you create, you dissect a part of yourself and incorporate it into your work. To me the term starving artist does not mean sacrificing food; it’s about not connecting to the human spirit of others, feeling the longing to be fed by the positive spirits of others when you are emptied from life’s experiences.”

Starstream Burst







Left Side:

Cognizant Existence
(top)

Rubescens Surge
(bottom)

Right Side:

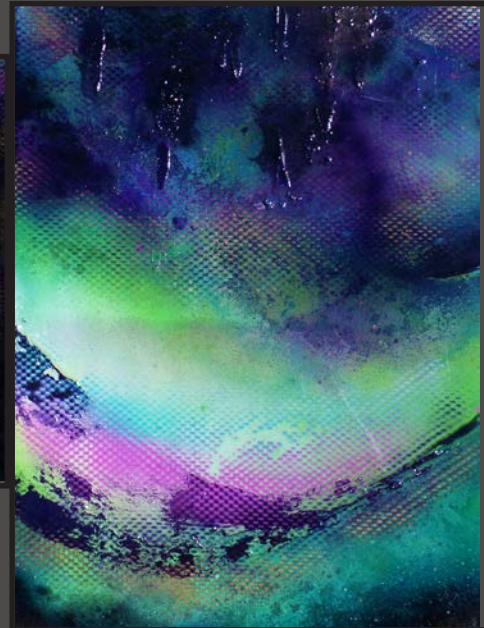
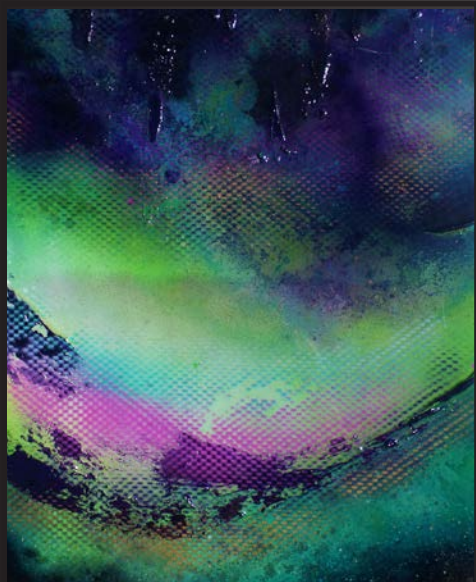
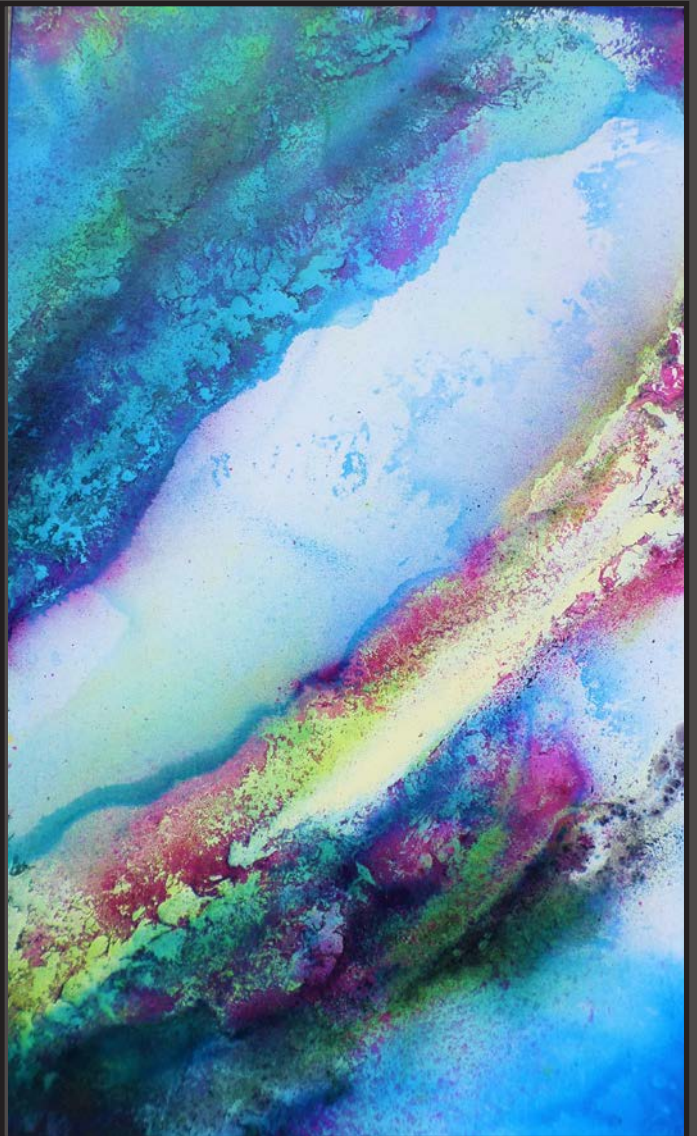
Fire Under Water
(right)

Suppurate Dispersion
(far right)

Live for Today
(bottom)

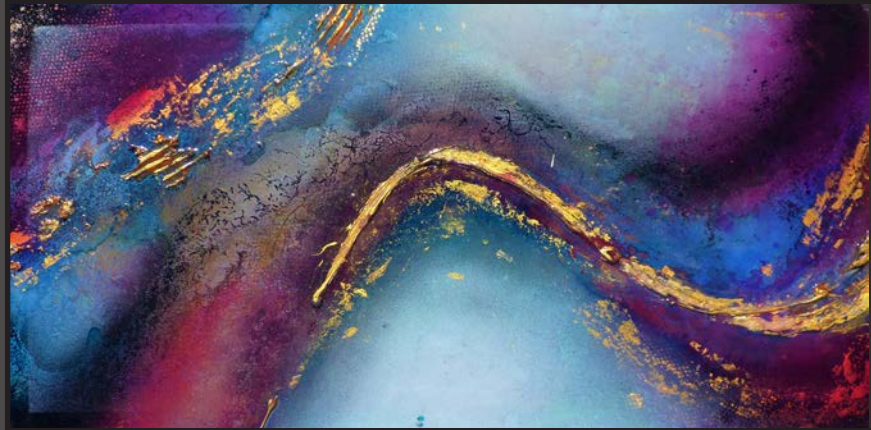


Viridian Torrent



Journey

Wavering Odyssey



Good Morning San Gorgonio

Jessica Gillfillan

Venerable Mountain,
I am grateful for your silhouette
upon the cotton candy skies.
I have made it out of bed,
have soaked myself in sweat
before the sunrise.

It is easy to get caught up
in the minutia of the day,
but there is not a thing mundane
about the slow illumination
of your tree-encrusted peak.
I study the flutter of the crow,
the up and down,
the steady flow,
oh, how I wish that more would know
it is we who are deaf,
and not You who doesn't speak.

Great Spirit, if I may ask,
I wish to grasp
just a little more of your strength.
As it stands I am weak-minded,
easily agitated
and entirely fallible.
I am bull-headed,
regularly clumsy
and occasionally unpalatable.

Not yet wise enough
to avoid folly,
I have entered instead
into a season of,
"I'm sorry,
I didn't mean it like that,
I should have kept my mouth shut,
it was never my intention
to offend you,
but since I have offended you,
may I humbly ask
that you please forgive
my fumbling tongue,
it has not yet been bridled."
Though there are moments
when my fiery belly
feels no smoulder,
sixty miles from home
and thirty feet up
an ancient boulder,
what's occupying me
is where to put my foot next,
what's on my mind
is how to reach the apex.

I'm 25, and only wise
In the knowledge of my flaws.
I am constantly reminding myself
to pause
before I speak,
anger makes me weak,
anger makes me something I do not wish to be.

I am grateful for rainbows,
and also for the rain that goes before them.
Though it may paint the day cold and gray,
truly it is the rain the ground is longing for.
It beckons growth,
gives parched earth hope,
and though beautiful
in truth I have never once watched a rainbow
birth a blossom.

So give me thunderstorms to weather,
that I may grow deep roots
to tether myself to Your will.
I am still a sapling,
but I want to be a strong cedar.
I am still a student,
but I'm trying to be a good teacher.

So Teacher...
Forgive me for any unkindness
I've paid to another,
And rid me of any ill will
to my sister or brother,
and should it take hail to humble me
send what you see fit,
and I'll trust that you'll bring me through storms
only when I need it.

I'm 25, fully alive
with a baby on the way.
In truth, I am just happy
that I have another day
to make my mistakes,
and when dawn breaks
a fresh, clean slate
under the watchful eye
of San Gorgonio.
There is nothing like good poetry,
Well written and well read,
Every word meaningful,
Each line transcended by the next,
To form one piece of beautiful art,
If a poem hasn't ripped apart your soul,
You haven't experienced poetry,
Poetry is how you feel
And how you translate
Feelings and thoughts into words,
Everyone has a story to tell,
Everyone has poetry in them!

Poetism

Sebenzile Ngwenya

There is nothing like good poetry,
Well written and well read,
Every word meaningful,
Each line transcended by the next,
To form one piece of beautiful art,
If a poem hasn't ripped apart your soul,
You haven't experienced poetry,
Poetry is how you feel
And how you translate
Feelings and thoughts into words,
Everyone has a story to tell,
Everyone has poetry in them!

The Pit

Joanna Brock

Come to the **pit** with me.
Sink into my **disease**.
I readily aim to please
But first,
get on your knees.
If I told you they're just *tricks*
I bet I'd make you **sick**
If I told you all my lines
Baby, you'd believe my *lies*.
I'll wrap you in my eyes.
Hold you 'til you **die**.
I'm a devil in disguise
And something to *despise*.
Honey, run and hide
I'm **never satisfied**.

Poem Girl Flag

Naomi Cheney



Two Parallel Lines

Elida Tato

Two parallel lines of the same path never merge, never meet.
I'm wasting my time.
Cursing won't solve anything.
My mind is saturated.
Too many things in a small room.
I should probably slow down.
So many stacked chairs. I cannot sit down.

I've got this fire in my soul
Burning through my veins
The energy does not let me sleep, does not let me rest.
It drills my brain at 3 am.
Pressure on my ribcage. Inside out.
Everywhere and nowhere to run to.

Two parallel lines of the same path never merge, never meet.
Yet they are only parallel to those who close one eye.
And as a form of protection we became blind
We became somebody else out of wrath.

I've got this fire in my heart
Burning through my veins
The ambition does not let me sleep, does not let me rest.
The thoughts in my head hurt
Again, they drill my brain at 4 am.
Pressure on my throat. Breath in,
Breath in breath in breath in
breath out deeply
Everywhere to run to.

Two parallel lines of the same path never merge, never meet.
So ... many stacked ... chairs.
Yet, they are only stacked to those who close one eye.
And as a form of protection we ...could avoid giving up.
We indeed became blind and could only see one path.

I've got this fire within me
Burning, shinning, glowing, beaming, biting, crazing,
I cannot slow down.
I cannot accept the mediocrity.
The paths are not parallel
The chairs are not stacked
I have got this fire
I cannot let it fade
I cannot simply let it go
I will let it inspire me
I no longer hold it on.

Guts

Naomi Cheney



Naomi Cheney
2014

Pretty

Naomi Cheney

The word “pretty” sounds like a gunshot
Leaving their mouths.
In turtleneck,
Sports bra,
Binding coverage and naked face,
I’m human lace.
In the spaces between sentences,
Faces eagerly await
My willingness to bloom for them,
Or force me open.
Trembling hands with repressed choke,
Lips pause for mine to cease
Speaking,
Until they smother soul with
Begging kisses.
Sexual wishes.
Desperate pushes.
You’re so pretty.
Just so pretty.
Ugh.
Thanks,
I’m fucking over it.
Piano fingers this,
And tan rubio that,
From birth destined for novelty.
Why won’t you entertain me with your body?
Hiss.
Spit.
Cower.
Split.
It’s mine.
It’s mine!
You don’t look like the kind of girl that--
Stop.
You don’t know me.
Don’t mija me.
Don’t hey girl me.
Don’t you manic pixie dream girl me.
Don’t glare daggers at me
Because your dog is humping my leg
From across the room.
I wouldn’t do a thing for him.
You shouldn’t either.
I don’t look like this for you.
I’m not beautiful for anyone.
And this glorification

Of porcelain skin
And golden hair
And eyes like the sea?
Birth of Venus?
It’s venomous.
Yes, white girls who talk like gay boys who talk like
black girls.
It’s what you and I both come from.
But Jacobo, homeboy, You racist.
When you say brown women are too angry?
Fuck off, bitch.
I’m angry.
I ain’t your goddess
Or your girl.
I ain’t your French model
Or your cum sock
To toss beneath your racecar sheets.
I’m free.
Don’t handcuff me to the word pretty.
Its a target.
Sad eyes are leeway.
Frailty is a curse.
Pretty is dismissal.
Pretty is a sitting duck.
Pretty is tits and silent mouth and holes to fuck.
Pretty is exhausting,
Costing me
So much.
So much lost.
Frost, you say?
Yes, I’m a frigid bitch.
Thank you.
But with hounds like these,
I have to be.
So I’ll wear my leather,
My trailer park,
My back alley guera ghetto,
And I’ll spit my fuck you’s.
Never use my flesh as a weapon,
But a shield.
Unsheath my teeth and claws for my girls,
Any girl,
Because
I never want any girl to feel like a loaded gun
Just for being
Pretty.

Ugly Fish

Pamela Donahue



The Dreamer's Lagoon

Alyssa Gonzalez

Exiting the car was a relief. A road trip to the coast had seemed like a fun idea, but the seven-hour car ride had been way too long. Willow's legs were sore and she stretched them out as well as she could. She breathed in the air, and the salty sea breeze crashed into her like the waves upon the shore a mere few feet ahead of her. The roaring sound of the waves rolling onto the sandy shore grew as she drew nearer to the ocean. Willow leaned against the railing, taking in the scenery. A few people littered the beach, their belongings spread out in small patches across the sand.

"Willow!" She turned and saw her mother frantically waving to her. She ran to catch up

with her family and took her own bag from her mother, peeking backwards towards the ocean one last time. She would have their whole vacation to explore the deep blue waters, she could wait a few moments more. So, she slowly followed her parents up the hill towards their hotel.

Their hotel was not overly huge, at least not in comparison to the hotel next door. Willow's parents had tried to reserve a room in the popular big-name resort, Seaside Paradise, but apparently all the rooms had been booked and they had been forced to reserve a room at the less popular, Dreamer's Lagoon.

The smaller hotel was thusly named due

to its easy access to the hidden lagoon a distance from the main beach. Though, not many tourists visited the lagoon since it was too small to take up any more than ten minutes of your time. It was not much help that the area of beach in front of the Lagoon was covered with rocks in the shallow parts of the water and on the shore as well. Most often, tourists from the Lagoon would make the long trek to Seaside's main beach, leaving the stretch of sand, rocks, and lagoon sadly empty. The only reason Lagoon was still in business was for the number of people who used it as a second resort if they could not find a room at Seaside. Much like Willow's own family.

As her parents approached the front desk, she sat with Ren, her younger brother, in the hotel lobby. Willow tried to remain patient as Ren hit his paddle ball as close to her face as he could.

"Stop. You're going to hit me in the face," She hissed. Ren stopped for a few moments, frowning. Willow turned away, her body overheating in the tank and shorts she was wearing. It was over one hundred degrees which meant that every part of Willow's body was icky with sweat. She felt overheated and no amount of fanning seemed to cool her down.

"I tell you Mr. Sanchez, the nearby lagoon is an exclusive tourist spot that many people overlook during their stay here. Yes, it is small and I don't blame our guests for being excited to visit Seaside's events that they have up on the main beach, but the lagoon really is beautiful, I promise you." To Willow's left, a vacationing couple was sitting at the Concierge booth. A man on the other side of the booth, presumably the Concierge, was waving his hands enthusiastically in the air, gesturing like a television salesman.

"What's more exotic than a beautiful lagoon? The perfect way to spend a honeymoon, that's what I think, Mr. Sanchez." Willow was listening so intently that she was taken completely off guard when Ren smacked her upright the head with his paddleball.

"Ren!" Willow yelled, grabbing at his paddleball determinedly. Angrily, she wretched the

stupid toy from his grasp, holding it above his head.

"I told you to stop!" Ren jumped trying to grab his toy and when he realized he could not reach it, he kicked Willow in the shin.

The resulting scene that followed was Willow angrily throwing the paddle, ball in all, off the nearby patio, chucking it into the waves below and her brother bursting into a fit of tears and screaming. The look in her parent's eyes were frightening enough that she almost followed the stupid piece of junk off the patio as well.

So apparently creating a scene in the middle of the hotel lobby was entirely Willow's fault, and punishable by being grounded. In a hotel nonetheless.

Her parents had left with Ren to the main beach, and Willow had been ordered to stay inside the hotel room. The first day of vacation was going terribly and Willow was extremely bitter.

So maybe she had overreacted a bit. That did not mean they had to punish her.

Willow paced the hotel room a few times before unlocking the sliding door that led to the outside patio. Willow gazed at the water below. Not many people were on the beach which made venturing out for a swim even more inviting. Squinting a bit to the right, Willow could also see a bit of the lagoon peeking through the greenery of the surrounding forest. Tapping her foot against the floor, Willow weighed her options. Sneak out without permission and explore, or be a good daughter and die of boredom.

Willow had no plans on dying anytime soon, and certainly not of boredom, so she slipped on her flip flops and grabbed her sunglasses, exiting the hotel room. She decided to visit the mysterious lagoon that the Concierge was raving about earlier in the day and went to his booth to inquire on how to get there.

"Oh, of course! Just follow the trail in front of the beachline and you should come across a sign pointing in the direction of the lagoon. As long as you follow the signs you should find it, no

problem.” He smiled cheerily. “I’ve always found the lagoon really remarkable. I’m glad a young lady like you is showing an interest in the marvels of Mother Nature herself.” Willow thanked him politely before he could talk her ear off anymore and followed his directions to the lagoon.

As she traveled on the designated path, Willow admired the nature surrounding her. What was originally ocean and sand had melted away into clusters of trees and underbrush the deeper she ventured into the forest. Many flowers of a variety of colors were scattered along the path. Different hues of red, orange, yellow, and blue were spotted in the midst of the greenery and Willow paused every now and then to inhale the scent of the flowers. It was beautiful, but not as beautiful as the lagoon itself.

She climbed a bit uphill before the lagoon finally came into view. The lagoon was a clear turquoise color, bordered with smooth, charcoal colored stones and tall trees that created shade with their leaves. A waterfall was pouring rushing water into the lagoon from above, its roaring the only sound filling the space of the area. Willow slid off her flip flops, tentatively testing the temperature with her toes. The water was cool and inviting, and she wasted no time in setting her things on a nearby rock and rushing into the clear water.

The lagoon was shallow, barely coming up to her waist. She had to extend her legs in front of her in a sitting position in order to be submerged in the water. Willow pushed her head underwater, relishing in the cold slowly replacing the heat the plagued her body, before resurfacing into the hot air. She floated on her back for a while, the sound of the waterfall like a lullaby playing in the background.

Way better than being grounded.

She swam for an hour before remembering that her parents had said they would be back in a few hours. Deciding not to push her luck, Willow lifted herself onto her feet wanting to explore the rest of the lagoon before heading back to the hotel room.

She admired the rocks lining the edges of the shallow waters and climbed on top of them,

walking across a line of rocks heading towards the waterfall. Willow watched her steps, careful not to slip on the wet rocks and ran her hands under the shower of water tumbling into the lagoon. Willow took a step back before running through the waterfall, completely drenching her entire body.

She squealed, the water freezing in temperature. She was about to run through it again when she noticed the entrance of a cave in front of her.

“Woah.” The cave was dark, and no amount of squinting allowed Willow to see any detail of its interior. What were the possible dangers of entering a dark cave by herself? Willow was no nature specialist and she hardly had any experience traversing nature. She considered herself a specialist in potato chips instead.

She took a few steps inside. And then a few more. Slowly she went deeper, inch by inch, hoping for some sort of light to appear. But the only source of light came from the entrance, and it was slowly diminishing the deeper Willow went inside the cave. A splashing sound echoed in the cave, startling Willow and she hurriedly ran to the cave entrance. She tried to catch her breath, hand over her heart.

Yeah, perhaps too much exploring for today.

And on that thought she made her way back to the hotel room.

Willow woke up the next day filled to the brim with curiosity. When she told her parents that she wanted to check out some of the hotel activities instead of visiting the main beach, they did not complain. In fact, they seemed a bit relieved. Willow tried not to let it upset her, and instead tried to grateful she did not have parents that were more concerned with her whereabouts. Or parents who would stop their daughter from entering a dark, seemingly endless cave.

She rode the elevator down to the lobby and immediately headed towards the Concierge’s booth but found it unoccupied. The sign on top of the booth said “Out to lunch.” Willow huffed in frustration, looking around the lobby for someone else to ask about the cave. She approached the

receptionists at the front desk and they greeted her cheerfully, "Good morning. How can we help you?"

Willow gave a wry smile, "I went to the lagoon yesterday. It's beautiful really, with all the plant life and the water was really refreshing. Um, I just had one question? I was wondering if the cave is safe? To explore I mean..." One of the receptionists, still smiling, looked at her in confusion.

"The cave...?" She looked toward her fellow receptionist, tilting her head as if to ask do you have any idea what she's talking about?

Willow swallowed nervously, "Yeah the cave near the lagoon?" She shuffled from foot to foot, fidgeting with her hands under their stares.

The two receptionists looked at each other once more before one turned towards her and said, "I'm sorry. But there's no cave near the lagoon, at least not to our knowledge. This is the first time I've heard about it actually..." Willow stared at her dumbly, her mouth not able to form any coherent words. No cave. What?

She smacked a hand to her face, "Oh I'm so sorry. I was thinking about a cave at another location. I totally got the lagoon mixed up with another place." Willow gave them what she thought was a sheepish smile before apologizing again.

The receptionists laughed good naturedly. Willow died a bit inside and awkwardly wished them a good day before high tailing it out of the lobby.

The cave was not necessarily hard to find, so why did they not know about it?

She continued on to the renting booth on the beach and upon asking the man working the booth if there was a cave in the lagoon, he gave the same answer: There was no cave on this coast. Willow felt like she was going insane and she was in a state of delirium. She had seen a cave for sure.

She rented a flashlight, gloves, and some swimming socks from the front desk and proceeded on her way to the lagoon. Warily, she passed through the waterfalls, but sure enough the cave entrance stood in front of her.

She stood at the mouth of the cave

determined. A cave that apparently did not exist. Either she was crazy or...

Supplied with her trusty flashlight, Willow entered the cave before she could rationally decide to turn back. She trudged slowly through the cave, her gloved hands feeling against the right wall so she could not get lost. She shown the light on every crevice of the cave but saw nothing but rock. It was disappointingly boring.

She considered heading back before she spotted a tiny reflection of light deep inside the cave. Willow blinked, thinking maybe she had imagined it. However, the closer she got, the brighter the light became. The path began to slope downward, the smooth trail turning into uneven cuts of rock. Willow looked down at her feet, attempting to travel downwards carefully when she turned around the corner and saw where the light was coming from. The cave had light filtering in from the top and a few trees clustering at once end. A small trail of water was running through the cave, flowing to a destination she could not see. In her awe she took a step without looking and slipped on a rock, tripping down the rest of the slope.

"Ah..." She groaned. Willow tried to get up from the floor and winced, a large gash was now lining the side of her left leg. Her blood trickled onto the rocks below her and Willow cursed. She leaned against a nearby wall and slowly raised herself to her feet. Looking back the way she came, she noted that the slope was not that steep and she could get back to the entrance, if only with a bit of difficulty with her messed up leg. Luckily, she had brought some band aids and disinfectant. Unfortunately, she had not imagined any cuts she got to be so big. She limped to a nearby clump of rock and poured the disinfectant on her leg, whining at the sting, and skillfully layered a bunch of tiny band aids on top of the gash. It looked stupid but at the moment it was better than nothing.

Willow was about to leave when she heard a mixture of splashing sounds and footsteps, first faint and then getting louder. Closer. Struck by a sudden wave of fear, her first instinct was to hide. She was not alone in the cave.

In a panic she slid off the rock, hiding behind the cluster. Pain reverberated through her leg and she clenched her teeth through the pain.

The footsteps grew louder, close enough that Willow imagined whoever they belonged to was only a few steps away from her. The person paused, silence filling the cave. Willow held her breath trying not to make a sound. Then she heard movements in the water. Plopping of water, splashing sounds, quiet, scuffing of footsteps, more splashing.

Willow's heartbeat echoed in her ears as she breathed slowly. In. Out. In. Out.

The footsteps began again, its echoing traveling in the opposite direction of her location. She took a chance and peered around the edge of the rocks.

A tall figure was walking with its back towards her. With dark hair and pale skin, its body was covered in leaves and moss. If Willow was not frozen with fear she would have screamed. It had the form of a person, but logically no living person would have the nature like qualities of the...creature.

Soon it was quiet in the cave again, but Willow did not dare move.

In. Out. In. Out.

She hid there for a long time and when the... when it did not return she rose on shaky legs, pain returning to her leg and frantically climbed back to the entrance. When she saw the light from the lagoon pour into view she limped as fast as she could, launching herself into the light. Dissolving into tears, Willow looked back into the darkness of the cave. She did not know what she saw, and she was not sure she even wanted to know. She wondered if maybe she was experiencing some sort of heat induced hallucinations. She felt her head to test her body temperature and wondered if she was dehydrated. No matter what scenarios she proposed, none seemed to come close to explaining what she just saw.

She limped back to the hotel, visibly distressed. The workers at the front desk were startled at Willow's appearance and hurriedly led her to a chair, bringing out bandages and properly wrapping the gash on her leg.

The Concierge came upon the scene with wide eyes, "Oh my. What happened here?" Willow, not wanting to speak of her experience, tried to play nonchalant, "Oh, I tried climbing some of the rocks near the lagoon and cut myself on one of the rocks. I should've been more careful." The hotel workers chided her for being so reckless without anyone around and helped Willow walk to her room, giving her medication for the pain from her injury.

Willow spent the next couple of days confined to the room, her parents upset that she was causing so much trouble. She could not complain as she honestly had no desire to walk on her injured leg.

Though she was safely away from the lagoon, the image of the figure continued to haunt her. She woke from nightmares of the creature turning around to face her, and every image of its face she conjured in her mind was frightening.

A face that was partly human, but with crooked features that immediately exposed the truth. Not human. Something not human that lives in a cave only a half mile from her hotel.

Who could she tell about what she had seen? Yeah, so I entered this cave that nobody even knows about and I saw this weird tree monster inside. It sounded crazy even to her.

The nightmares kept her up at night, but they soon lost their chilling atmosphere and melted into something less sinister. The creature was still frightening, in the same way anything unknown is, but Willow dreamed of entering the cave and experiencing...comfort. The concept was laughable. Seeking comfort from a monster, how desperate could she be?

But this whole situation was driving her insane, and whether it was the meds or her own personal death wish, Willow decided that once her leg did not throb so much, she was going to go back into the cave.

Willow felt silly sneaking past the front desk, but the embarrassment of walking around with the bandages wrapped around her leg was worse.

For a vacation, she was really getting pretty banged up.

She arrived at the lagoon and saw a small family exploring the surroundings. Willow took a seat on one of the rocks waiting for them to leave. When they departed she tied a plastic bag around her bandages, taping it to her leg with duct tape, and climbed on top of the rocks lining the water, going towards the cave entrance. She steeled herself before walking through the waterfall. She waited for pain, but the plastic bag held and she removed it, putting it in inside her backpack.

Standing in front of the entrance Willow felt her heartbeat quicken and she paced a while, steeling her nerves.

This was stupid. This is how people die, she told herself over and over again.

She took a deep breath and entered the cave. The descent was easier this time since she knew what to expect. The only difficulty was maneuvering the downward slope and rocks with her injured leg.

She came into the cave's clearing and looked around the empty space. The creature was not here. She took a few tentative steps forward and spotted something lying on a rock towards the middle of the cave.

Willow approached it cautiously and saw it was a tiny animal. A small furry animal that was injured. And not moving.

Oh god, it was dead.

This was a mistake, a huge mistake.

She turned around to leave the cave, and the figure was in front of her.

She screamed.

She scrambled backwards from the figure, tripping over her feet, and falling backwards onto the ground. It followed her slowly. When her back hit a rock she stopped, looking up into his dark eyes. The figure was shaped like a person, and almost seemed human, if not for the cracking lines digging in his skin and the green moss covering his body. She closed her eyes, hiding her face in her hands.

She squealed. Opening her eyes as she felt him touching her leg. His hands were rough and

felt like bark from a tree. He was studying her injury intently and then quickly looked her in the eye. She jumped, pulling her leg out of his grasp and bringing her limbs close to her body. Wide eyed, and shivering with terror, Willow did nothing but watch as he stood up and walked over to the trail of water. He gathered some in his hands and sprinkled some on the animal before rubbing some dirt on him. He then cupped his hands for more water and brought it over to her, kneeling down and coating her bandages with water.

He peeled off the bandages and when Willow attempted to pull her leg away he held it firmly, his fingers digging into her skin. He gave her a scorching look that made her choke on quiet sobs, before continuing to peel off the bandages. He gathered some green sludge from his body and spread it on her gash before covering it back over with the bandages. He looked at her one last time, bringing his hand up to caress her cheek as a breeze blew through the small cavern. Then he stood up and walked away.

Willow watched him leave the cave's clearing, staring at the last spot she saw him even when he was gone.

Within moments the animal on the rock began to stir, shaking the dust off its fur and jumping off the rock, paying her no mind.

She left the cave, the lagoon, and walked through the hotel in a daze. Not noticing that her leg was completely healed until she was safely in her hotel room and peeled off the bandages. Amazed, Willow rubbed her fingers over the area where the gash had once been for hours. Only putting the bandages back on when she heard her family enter the room.

Ren came over to her, sticking his tongue out, "We had so much fun today. I bet you didn't have as great a day as we did." Willow stared at him before bursting into laughter, not minding when he angrily stormed over to their parents, complaining about her behavior.

She laughed at everything but mostly the impossibility of everything she had experienced, and the wonder of witnessing something magical.

Morning came. Breakfast passed. Willow moved methodically, like an mindless machine. She was still trapped in a daze from the previous day.

She heard a nearby family discussing their plans, "Oh how about we check out the lagoon that's nearby? I've heard it really beautiful. And the waterfall-!"

Willow continued walking, trying to ignore the longing in her chest. Maybe she should let things be. She had met the figure in the cave. She her wound had been healed. Yet, she wanted to see him again. She had so many questions. Could he even talk?

She sat outside on the beach in front the hotel. Gazing mindlessly at the waves crashing onto the shore as they splashed her feet. Willow had the sense that she was messing with fire each time she visited the cave. These types of stories never ended well and yet...

She could not stay away. Picking up her sandals she ran to the lagoon. She dodged people, apologizing when she hit them with her sides, but continuing towards the lagoon all the same. She approached the cove, empty as always, out of breath. She excitedly threw her things on the ground, wafting through the shallow waters, going through the waterfall, and-

Rock. Behind the waterfall was nothing but a wall of rock. Willow stared at it, disbelieving. She placed her hands in the rocky surface feeling for a type of glamour of some sort.

"No," She whispered. She collapsed back through the waterfall, sitting, soaking in the water. Her mind was miles behind her back at the hotel, attempting to comprehend what was happening. Was she going insane? Had she been hallucinating all this time? But she had gone through the cave. It had been there, she was sure! Right?

Willow's mind tried to grab onto something tangible in order to prove that she had seen the cave. The cave that was no longer here.

"It's gone isn't it?" A deep voice asked.

Willow splashed in the water, disoriented from her confusion. She was surprised to come face to face with the Concierge.

"Y-you-" He approached her, his footsteps making ripples in the water, each one splashing her body. Wide eyed she could do nothing but stare.

"I once entered the cave as well. A few times. But just like you I was cast out," He muttered bitterly. He walked around her, circling her like a shark. "You see. As you might know, this lagoon is magical and it holds many secrets. He hides in his little cave but no matter how I've tried, all these years I could never enter it again."

He looked her in the eyes. The friendliness that had once been present, now only reflected something much more chilling. He was not longer seeking a friendly chat, he was seeking something else.

"When you came back that first night I recognized the smell on you. It wasn't from the lagoon, it was from the cave. And when you came back with that gash on your leg I knew you had gone inside. It wasn't until I saw you in the hotel, walking like you had never been hurt, that I knew he had taken a liking to you."

Willow furrowed her eyebrows, "He-?"

"YES, HIM!" He yelled. She flinched at his tone, her breaths becoming more erratic.

"The dark one!. Don't tell me he never showed you! He has the power, you know? Takes the dead and gives them life!" Willow attempted to rise to her feet, slipping on the slippery wet floor of the lagoon.

"Sir, I really think I should go. My parents are waiting for me." The Concierge ignored her staring at the waterfall as if he could see through it and slowly pulled out a knife.

"Oh, I'm sure they're waiting for you. But they'll never see you again."

Willow's stomach dropped, and she could barely whisper a pathetic, "Why?" Why did he want her dead? Why was this happening to her?

"If he's taken a liking to you. Then you're special. If he can bring back nature's offspring then why can't he do the same to us? I wanna see." He licked his lips. "I wanna see if he'll bring you back too."

Willow made to run around him but he grabbed her by her hair as she struggled to break

free. She elbowed him in the gut, attempting to distance herself from him.

He raised his knife almost in slow motion and Willow's mind went blank. She thought of nothing, felt nothing not even the wetness of her clothes.

But then a rope of vines wrapped around his wrist, tugging and wrenching the knife from his hands. It plopped into the waters they both stared at in wonder. A breeze filtered through the lagoon and despite her distress, Willow used this opportunity to run.

Hyperventilating, Willow wafted through the waters, desperation encouraging her to claw herself onto land and enter the coverage of the forest. Desperation and fear clouded her mind as she focused on running from the Concierge.

Her ran slowed and halted as she came upon the cliffside. Peering below she saw the waves crashing against the side of the cliff and the rocks piled upon the floor below. She turned around to continue running, but saw that the Concierge was waiting there, knowing she had nowhere else to run.

"Please. Don't do this." She begged. Please, please, please. She begged, and prayed to anyone, anything, that would listen. She pleaded for another miracle.

The Concierge stalked closer to her and she tried to dodge pass him to no avail. He grabbed her arm, raising the knife in order to strike and Willow brought her arm up in defense. The knife tore through her right arm and she cried out in pain, her blood spraying onto her face. He lifted up his knife in order to strike again and Willow frantically grabbed on to his wrists attempting to stop the knife from puncturing her skin again. They grew closer and closer to the edge of the cliff, her feet slipping on the edge, and he brought the knife down, embedding it in her left side collarbone. A fierce wind blew across them, making the Concierge take a few steps back. Willow fell to her knees and felt the wind brush over her almost like a caress.

She stood shakily to her feet.

"I don't want to die..." She whispered, silent

tears falling from her eyes.

And with a last look at the Concierge she closed her eyes and stepped back off the cliffside.

Willow, you must wake up now. She had heard that soothing voice calling to her from her deep slumber.

She woke, surrounded by blue of the deepest color.

Her eyes burned as the water, rich with saltiness, burned her vision. She opened her mouth to breathe and inhaled salt water instead of air. Every breath she took was water and she choked on it, clawing her hands through the water in order to reach the surface. She crashed upon the shore with a thundering wave and crawled onto the sand, retching the salt water from her body. She took in deep breaths, rubbing her eyes with sand covered hands.

A bit wobbly on her feet, she surveyed her surroundings and herself. She studied her hands with intense fascination and upon feeling something lodged into her body, she grasped at the end of something protruding from her left collarbone and pulled it out, a trail of brown sludge slowly trailing from the gash. She felt her head and was surprised to find more of the brown sludge leaking from a spot on her head. Curious.

A breeze filtered across the beach and she followed it. Willow. Willow.

She walked across the beach, following the breeze to a small lagoon hidden away in an expanse of greenery. She walked through a waterfall, coming upon the entrance to a cave.

A tall, beautiful, dark haired being waited there for her.

And she was welcomed with open arms into a brand-new life.

Watch for Small Animals

Steven Brunelle

Foaming. A rabid mouth. The sound of Grandpa's shotgun firing. Three times.

Good dog. Good dog. He was. Always. Still is.

"Do you remember Hunter? Well, I had this dream last night that reminded me of him. I remember when Grandpa first brought that dog home, I didn't want to accept that there would be a new dog in the house to take Brock's place."

"Yes, but then you two became inseparable by the next week! You were so cute together. I'm sure I have some pictures somewhere."

"Do you remember his eyes?"

"Like, the color? They were pretty plain, I thought, almost black. Looked like most dogs."

"His eyes were exactly as Brock's were."

"How do you mean? Pretty sure Brock had brighter eyes, a lighter brown."

"Yeah, in color they were different, but I remember first seeing Hunter and thinking how strange it was—uncanny, really—when I saw his eyes. They didn't look like Brock's eyes, they very much were Brock's eyes. Right there, looking at me, but through Hunter. Brock was there. I know it sounds crazy, but I just knew he was there."

*** **

"You see, he likes these ones. I told you! These little pretzel things, whatever they are."

"Who are you talking about?"

"Have you not been listening? James! James likes these ones." Brianna shifts about her hips, showcasing in her hand something like a small, oval chip. Member of the family of trail mix.

"He's got shit taste. Those are the worst. Come in though, Mom has dinner ready and you know how she gets all pissy when you make her wait." Dominic throws his arms up, flailing in hysterical fashion. "Oh, you're gonna let the casserole get cold my dears!" he yelps, imitating mother dearest.

"Yeah, yeah. I'll be right in." Brianna

responds without looking back, leaving her brother's charade in vain. Her focus still fixed on her friends before her. "Okay, you guys, I'm gonna have to get going, but same time tomorrow, I promise. Okay, one more, but then I really have to go." Another pretzel chip she frees from the bag and places gently affront of James. He grabs at it; a pancake in such dainty hands.

Brianna watches over. "You're becoming a spoiled one because of me. You get the special treatment that your little pals here miss out on." She points toward the three standing just behind James. The tip of her index finger quickly rotates, gesturing towards James' companions. "Off, off now. Mom's gonna lose it if she finds out you're holding me up." James and the gang scurry off. Flee into free suburban forestry. Pine trees, they shine and sway with crisp breeze. Excitement in the wind paints a freckled face with curled lips and a sensation of fuzziness.

Brianna comes inside and takes her seat at the dinner table. Her backdrop: glass walls of a renovated Victorian home, remodeled two years back, adding a fresh modern touch to what her mother once considered "a beautiful, but depressing old place." The bright auburn of Brianna's hair: illuminated by setting sun. Radiance.

"You know, I'm getting better at this. The noodles aren't dry like when I first started." Mother places a heaping casserole dish at the center of the table. "Your dad was much better than me when it came to cooking, I must've been the only wife who couldn't cook her husband a meal."

"Mom, when you make remarks like that it just makes you sound bitter," Dominic remarked, tucking a handkerchief down the collar of his polo. "I think it's better to refrain from comments like that, don't want anyone thinking you can't move on." He stabs his fork into a breast of chicken. CACAW! An audible yelp, only Brianna seems to notice. She glances at Dominic, with face, not of

shock, but of confusion.

"I don't talk with anyone but you guys these days, and don't fuckin' talk to your mom like that. Let me sound bitter without your backlash." She grabs the ladle, digs into steamy noodle casserole.

"And I don't see it as being bitter, actually. When you invest so much, really all you can give, that shit doesn't just leave you so quickly, and if it does, it was never real." She points the blades of her fork towards her son. "You'll know what I mean when you're older. It's not so simple to start anew."

The son doesn't say a word. Mother scouts the table, locking eyes with Brianna.

"Bri, what's up with you? Been a while since I've seen any of your little friends over here. What happened? Scare them away?"

"No, just been fe—" Brianna is interrupted.

"She's got new friends now." Dominic added in. "James and whatever else she chose to name them."

"What are you talking about?" Mother asks, face perplexed, concern.

"James," Brianna begins to speak, "is the name I gave to one of the... squirrels, one who has visited here. Well, out there in the front yard, multiple times. He keeps coming back."

Mother observes her daughters face. Looks at her with a sly smile. She asks, humor in her voice: "How do you know it's this same squirrel. They all look the same, don't they?"

Brianna speaks quickly: "Well, they don't actually. They've each got different designs on their backs. Each one of em'. They have different lines and swirls goin' on. Once you realize that, you'll even notice that their tiny faces are each a little bit different as well."

Her words picking up pace, injections of a fiery flare in the atmosphere. Eyes wide and brilliant, she continues: "And James—the one who has visited most—is my favorite, he's got the most fascinating pattern on his back, really looks like a glowing hexagon. I feel that he's the leader of his little bunch. Really, never afraid of approaching me as the others are. No, they're so meek compared to him, but they'll follow his lead once he initiates."

Brief silence takes place. Mother breaks the

quiet and speaks: "I really had no idea you were serious about this. I thought it was just a one-time thing—when you were out there that one evening last week."

"I'm not serious, or 'invested' in it like you say. It just feels nice, their company, I mean."

"More so than your actual friends? Where has that girl Kayla been? Thought she was your best friend? She's pretty, too. It's good to have attractive friends Bri."

"Yes, Kayla is my friend, a good one too, but she's just too much at times. She's too gossipy, and really, we only have a few similar interests. She's a lot more, not feminine, but girlier than I am. I just need a good break from her. Doesn't mean we're not friends."

"Hun, I don't think it's good to get so attached to... well, small, wild animals. Your little friend may be returning to you now, but you don't know for certain that it'll continue. Plus, I'm sure most of them don't survive very long."

Dominic chimes in: "You got hunters killing those little guys all the time. I'm thinking you can even do it with a BB if you aim it right." He wields an imagined pistol, pretends to focus and fire.

"They aren't gonna be killed by hunters here." Brianna responds with subtle vehemence. "And nobody is attached, as mom just put it. I swear you guys just love to imagine the worst scenarios for everything and you're giving all this too much attention anyways. I'm happy. It isn't harming you guys. So, please, don't worry about me, nor the nature of my attachments."

"Bri. I just don't want you falling into these states of gloominess all the time. You're a young girl! The way you talk about those small animals is concerning. You talk about them the same way you talked about Cody. It's one after another and I don't want to see my daughter so torn up all the time. Torn up about something that can be avoided."

The room filled with Brianna's trembling. Volcanic. Her response: "It's like you guys just always have to bring that up in some way. Whenever I'm not acting myself—as you say it—it

must be because of Cody. He was just as much yours as he was mine, yet you guys go on with your days as if nothing had ever happened when he..."

Momentary pause. The grasp for air when speaking too violently. "When he passed. That's what people say instead of died, right? Doesn't sound so melancholy that way. As if we all just simply pass from this life to another and it's so perfectly normal. People are so fake about people dying."

"Bri, you are distorting our intentions entirely. Dominic and I just never seem to know what mood you're in. We all loved Cody, you know that, and—"

"You guys really don't act like it."

Dominic added in: "What? Why? Because we aren't weeping and moping? We deal with our loss differently than you deal with yours." He shoves his fork back into the chicken; slices at it with the knife, in rapid aggression. Lumberjack sawing wood. He continues: "Don't tell me I didn't love him, I'm the one who took him when it happened."

Yet another silence. Brianna's left hand on the temple of her forehead. Turns to two hands on temples. With fingers resting lightly at first, her pressure increases, followed by the shutting of the eyes and immense weight in the throat. The conversation is over, as it can't possibly continue with rationality. Only ammo of toxic spit.

Mother looks at Bri and sees: micro-expression of the mouth, quick quiver and shiver; the blocking of the eyes with hands, a quiet self-frustration, a daughter torn, passionate loss against perseverance. Coming of age, a bite of venom reality. Retreat or move forward with heart whole of confidence.

Mother recalls: nearly twenty-five years earlier, coming forth to the same reality. And slowly. Surely. Developing. For better or worse.

Mother speaks: "Bri, we're done with this conversation." She places gentle fingertips on her daughter's arm. Remaining in silence, Bri releases her hands from the temples. Looks, shifting slowly, first at Dominic, then at mother. Eyes are moist. They look like glass.

Brianna speaks, calm acceptance, sounding like the remnants of a tide pulling back from the sands of a shore: "The dinner, really was great. You are improving. I'm full now though. I'll go wash my plate and then probably call it a night." Doesn't wait for a response. Walks up and away. Impact of recent phrases stalk her up the stairs. Door shuts, not with force, no, with heavy calmness.

Just after five seconds of departure, Dominic speaks, loudly at first, but then hushes down to a whisper. Whisper whispers: "She might never get better. I mean, yeah, I expected this, but I mean this bad for this long? It's starting to depress me."

"Well, you know how she is. She'll grow out of it."

"Yes, but this much? You know that she sleeps with Cody's ashes at night?"

*** **

She kept her promise the next evening just as she said. Once again, James and his crew return for their evening visit. Brianna, sitting in the grass, holds her hand out revealing an assortment of the usual snacks.

"Knew you'd guys would be here. How's it been? You know, the time that you're spent gone, I'm here thinking about you." James grabbed out a few pieces of trail mix. Brianna looking down wearing eyes of love. "You know, Mom and Dominic don't think it's good for me to be giving you so much attention." James doesn't look at her, just continues to nibble away at his dinner.

Brianna releases the crossing of her legs, places her arms over her knees, and softly looks up at the swaying of the pines. Like a whistle is heard through the sky. The aesthetics of a miniature forest. Peaceful, with subtle scents of oak. "What do you think? Mom talks a lot about investing, as she says it. Deciding which basket to place all your eggs in, I guess." With her eyes still focused on the leaves of the pines, something like a bittersweet smile forces its way out of her face. "Well, maybe I've got a whole lot of eggs then. Lots of baskets to fill."

She looks back down at James, who is aggressively scratching at his eye. "Oh, you have

no idea. Lucky. But how about you? Do you think of me when you aren't here? Do you talk to your friends and family about me with sparkles in your eyes, hmmm? Or is this just a one-way trip? You can tell me, just tell me if I'm delusional, everyone else seems to think so."

No response.

"Maybe one day I'll say the right thing. Something so spot-on that you'll just have to say something! Until then, I'll be here venting and bitching. It's getting late though, time for me to get back in. Thank you, guys, for coming back, really. It's been the highlight of my days this past week."

She hands James one last pretzel. He grabs at it and runs off, his friends trailing behind him. They sprint across the street in usual formation, but James drops his pretzel about three-fourths of the way through. With his crew already on the other side, he runs back to retrieve the snack.

Deer in headlights, in this case, squirrel in headlights. Two black beady eyes confronted by the black of tires. No time for response. James is struck and sticks to the spinning of the wheel for seventeen revolutions. When the body finally detaches itself, not a whole lot is left remaining.

Split. Ribs rip open like the splitting of a baked potato. Face, open-eyed, but the vitality is gone. Just an ornament now. Soul isn't there.

And all the while Brianna's screams are piercing. The murder of a loved one. Time stays still. The world can't be the same anymore.

She runs up to the scene and looks down the street. The car has already made its way well down the road.

Two red rear lights. A slow, complete stop, with the turning signal appropriately turned on. And then, the calmest right turn.

The following sequence seems to be quite hazy to Brianna. Mom and Dominic, as well as some of the neighbors, come out to see what had caused the screams. They see the corpse on the street, with Brianna, weeping and wailing. Mom attempts to calm her, but with little success. Mother steps away, gives Brianna some space. After the volume of her sobs decreases, she asks to be left

alone. The crowd around her obliges.

She stayed lying next to James, right there in the middle of the street that night. With cars honking and weaving their way around her.

"Get out of the street!"

"You're gonna get yourself killed!"

"Idiot! Move!"

Some drivers, asking the other passengers of the car: "What was that girl doing?"

"I don't know, that's kinda weird though."

After the cold hours of mourning, the sun is now coming up. Brianna moves about slowly, then brings her fingers to the blood coating James' ribs, caresses the bone, and with some trembling of the hand, brings the blood to her face. She smears it, marking herself just below the eyes. With crimson of passion.

She goes back home, falling asleep in her own bed. With blood of love now her own. One in the same. Deep within her.

*** **

This night was dreamless. No other world to take her away from the recent happenings of the world of flesh. Sleep just served as a short filler space. Just unconscious black, followed by an awakening. A confrontation of those same feelings.

She didn't wake up until late in the afternoon and when she did there were no new sobs or moisture from the eyes. Just silence. Walking around the house in quiet solitude, completely, no words from others piercing her with any real meaning. Sounds, muffled sounds, sounds, muffled sounds. Agreements, nods of the head. Existence, like floating in a world of haze. The words from her family don't truly register until well into the evening. There was a conversation with her mother at the living room couch. It didn't start off immediately, but with Brianna taking a seat next to her mom. Mother, bundled up beneath a blanket, watching the latest breaking news on television.

Brianna watched with her mom for a few moments. News of crimes of passion, robberies gone wrong, suggested regulations of gun control, and the closing segue: Misty, an eighteen-year-old Labrador saves two children from drowning.

Close-up shot on kids hugging, petting, smothering the dog.

“Mom,” Brianna breaks the spell of the ten o’clock news. “Do you think most people even care if they hit an animal like a squirrel? I know people treat it as if it’s not the equivalent of hitting a cat, or even more so, a dog. Why though?” She turns toward her mother.

“I think most people don’t care, or at least don’t view it as a catastrophic loss when a squirrel is hit. Probably bec—”

“Would you care? If you hit a squirrel, or a possum, or even a coyote, or something. Would you care if you were driving and you hit one?”

“Bri, coyotes are big, that’s differ—”

“Yes, but would it bother you if you hit one? And what makes it different, just because the animal is bigger? Oh wait, I know why, because a bigger animal will make a louder thud when the car hits it, which means you’d be more aware of it, can’t act like nothing happened. The impact would be too violent, too startling, to just ignore. Is that the rationality, there?”

Mother looks at Bri with eyes that hold a soft aggression, with a small hint of startle. “I’ve got to be practical with you. Of course it would bother me if I hit any animal, but it’s ridiculous to deny that there is no distinction between striking a small animal like a possum and striking a dog. Dogs are pets, with personality, and families who deeply care for them, they usually have a good understanding of right from wrong and will keep themselves out of danger. Possums, or squirrels, or any other animal like that, are wild, their lifestyle constantly places them in danger, makes it more likely for them to perish. You can’t go on trying to be a savior for these animals. They will do what they want and whatever consequences that come with that are natural. You won’t, and can’t, break that cycle, Bri, no matter how hard you try. That’s why I worry about you. I don’t want to see you how I saw you last night. Not ever again. You hear me?”

“Yes.” Brianna fell back into her isolation, sitting there next to her mom, watching the images of the television screen. Passing through her.

Through the eyes and out through the back of her skull.

“I heard you come in at like five this morning. You shouldn’t have been out in the street like that. I can cut you some slack because of the situation, but that really wasn’t smart of you.”

“Do you think I can request a sign to be put up? Like a sign that warns people to watch out for squirrels or any other animals that may be crossing the street? Like maybe at the city hall or something? Do they do that?”

*** **

Brianna was at city hall the next morning. After asking questions and proving to be somewhat of a nuisance to the staff, she met with the man in charge of the city’s sign posting. A man with a rather tiny office. His official title being: Overseer of City Postings and Traffic Safety.

“What brings you in, eh, you said your name was... Brianna?” He sits at his desk, hands placed together, staring at Brianna intently.

“Yes sir. I want to request a new sign to be put up. One that I’d like to be posted somewhere out on the street I live on. My mom and brother are big taxpayers, I’m sure it won’t be too much trouble.”

“A new sign? And what could this sign possibly read?”

“Well I’ve got a few ideas actually, but I think ‘Watch for Small Animals’ is the most encapsulating, doesn’t leave anyone out.”

“Watch for what?”

“Small animals. Lots of squirrels and other animals, I’m sure, are constantly crossing the street I live on. Lots of trees around the area, they probably make their homes there. A few days back I witnessed a terrible accident that I never want to see happen again. I feel that the putting up of this sign may cause drivers to be more cautious. They’ll know that small animals may be crossing, and they’ll be on the lookout.”

The man looks at her, rubs his forehead, then speaks. “This terrible accident, if you don’t mind me asking, what exactly happened?”

“I’d really rather not go into the details. To put the story short, I witnessed an animal get

severely wounded by an oncoming vehicle. So, I'm here taking measures to see that it doesn't happen again. I'd appreciate it very much if you can make this sign a reality, sir."

"Ehh, I see. Well, I'm going to have to check with my boss to see if the funds are in order for such a sign. Good to see such a young woman getting so involved with city affairs. I've got an appointment coming up, so I'll just show y—"

"When can it be up?"

"Excuse me?"

"The sign. When can I expect it to be put up? I really don't think we should waste any time."

"Oh, yes. Well, like I said, I have to get the okay from my manager. Signs like that aren't cheap, you know."

"They aren't?"

"Well, their prices vary. Anyways, I'll see what I can do. I really do need to get going now though. Here, I'll show you out."

"Wait, one second. Just wanna grab your card here. I'll call you tomorrow to ask about the progress." She grabs his business card from a silver card holder that sits atop the desk.

"Yes, yes, alright, here we go." He holds the door open for Brianna.

"I'll call tomorrow at ten!" The door is closed on her.

In his office, the Overseer of City Postings and Traffic Safety shakes his head and sits back down at the desk. He grabs at his stress ball and gives it seven or eight hearty pumps. Thinks to himself, "Damn, how am I going to pitch this one? The little bitch was a pushy one, she'll be calling here everyday if I don't make something happen." He picks up the telephone and dials. After a few rings, an answer.

"Hello?"

"Hey Marv, it's Scott. Yeah, doing well, doing well. You? Good to hear. Look, I got a request for a new sign. Yeah, I know, right? Well, this girl comes in here, real sexy too, nice red hair and tight little ass. You woulda loved it. Anyways, this girl comes in asking for a sign that reads 'Watch for Small Animals'.... 'Watch for Small

Animals'. Yeah, I know, right? Apparently, she saw some squirrel get run over or some shit, I don't know. Anyways, she was annoying as hell too, wouldn't stop talking about it. She only requested one. Yeah, think she wants it on her street, left me a note with the address. Okay. Okay. Yeah. Alright. Yeah, I was thinking that too, cheapest shit we got. Okay. Alright, I'll put in the work order."

*** **

Brianna must have left quite the impression, because the sign was being put up the next morning. Brianna watched from the front yard, coffee mug in hand, and a feeling of triumph circulating through her as the final adjustments were being made. It only took one man—one very aggravated man—to put up the sign and it was done in less than thirty minutes. The sign had printed on it exactly what Brianna had requested. A tiny dream transformed into a reality in less than twenty-four hours. The posting is complete and the angry city worker drives off recklessly.

"Thank you!" Brianna shouts out.

Her mother walks out and stares up at the sign with her daughter. It's posted on a streetlight, about ten feet up from its root. A brilliant reflective yellow, with bold black lettering across diamond-shaped metal.

"You really got this done quick, huh?"

"I needed to. Drivers here are reckless and I don't want this to keep happening. They need to be more aware of their surroundings."

"Well, I'm proud that you're fighting for this, but just because this sign is up, that doesn't mean that it will keep these animals from being hit. You can't expect it to fix everything immediately. Please, keep that in mind. I'm not telling you this to bring you down, but you have to be—"

"Yes, practical."

Mother places a hand on Brianna's shoulder, rests it there for a moment, then continues back into the house. Brianna remains looking at the sign, then sits down on the grass of the front yard. A few cars zoom by. Anticipation, too. A sip of coffee meets her lips.

*** **

Mother's words ended up being more accurate than Brianna had anticipated. Over the past two weeks, the lifeless bodies of both squirrels and possums seemed to show up even more now that the sign was erected. Brianna never again witnessed a collision firsthand. She'd just wake up and there would be a new body or two decorating the street during her morning walks. No personal witnessing, yet it was happening all the same.

Mother attempted to console whenever Brianna seemed down. Brianna just became increasingly quiet. She wouldn't sob or weep or go into hysterics any longer. The fire had been put out.

Brianna was now in her room. The chest that held her previous dog—her favorite and most emotionally intuitive—Cody's ashes no longer held its own spot on the bed. No, it was now placed in the closet, just aside her high school diploma and old volleyball trophies. Brianna gives the objects an absorbing glance, then shuts the closet door.

She lies on her bed—on her back, hands together across her chest—for quite some time, until she makes a phone call.

A change of scenery would indeed be nice.

*** **

"Can't believe it's been like, what, two months? Almost, right? What have you been up to girl? Talking to anyone?"

"No, not really. Like, literally, haven't been talking to anyone. Kinda just been lounging around at home, you know, until the semester starts."

"Yeah, I feel you. You need to get out more though."

Brianna and Kayla sit directly across from each other on the picnic table of the local brewery. The table is excessively sticky, so much so that Brianna can't rest her elbow on it, even though she'd like to. Instead, she just listens to Kayla's stories.

Sits, stares, nods, agrees, sips, sips, sips. Another drink. Kayla monopolizing the conversation. Brianna sits, stares, nods, agrees, sips, sips, sips. Another drink.

She finally takes hold of the conversation after the right amount of beers. As if a seal is broken. It all sprays out.

"Kay. I know you've, like, been involved with a lot of guys, right?"

"Hey, I ain't a hoe though! But I guess I'm experienced, what makes you ask?"

"Have you ever loved? Would you say you've ever truly been in love with any of the guys?"

"Girl, you're getting all deep on me out of NOWHERE." Drunken giggles. "But, I don't know, actually. There was one, wasn't even one of my boyfriends, actually. Jacob, you remember him, right?" Brianna listens and nods. "Well, at one point I really thought I did, bu—"

"Did he feel the same about you? Like, could you tell by the way he looked at you, or talked with you, were you able to just know. Those feelings you had for him, what were they like?"

"No, I don't think he ever did feel the same. Didn't seem like it, a least. I remember, I remember, knowing all of his favorite movies, even his favorite scenes, you know, because he used to talk about em' so much. You shoulda seen it when he talked about em' too. His eyes would get all big and he wouldn't be able to shut up once he got going! He was funny." She breaks her gaze away from Brianna for a brief moment, looks down at a crack in concrete ground, and rubs her index finger atop the glass she had been holding. "He cheated on me though. Caught him right in the act, stupid ass didn't even try to hide it. It was literally at his apartment and I guess he didn't expect me to stop in. It's alright though, girl was an ugly bitch anyways. No titties."

"If you had the choice, would you take your time spent with him back, as if it didn't happen at all? I mean, if you knew what the outcome would be. Same outcome, him, you know, cheating on you. Would you go through it again?"

"Hmm. If I knew the outcome? No, I would avoid it entirely. I wouldn't want to go through that shit again. Once was enough. It wouldn't be worth it."

Brianna's eyes, wide with wonder. She spoke: "Even though you said you had loved him? Even though you knew his favorite movies and knew how his eyes would get big and even though

he was funny. Funny, not in the traditional sort of way, but in the way you just told me, the way you just meant it. The way you just said it. Even after all that, you'd still deny yourself the opportunity?"

"Opportunity? What opportunity? The opportunity for him to get satisfaction for being unfaithful? The opportunity for him to deceive me and ma—"

"No, that's not the point! Not what I'm asking here. I'm talking about the initial feeling. The way you felt, you being capable of feeling immortal, even if it was short lived. That's what I'm talking about. Not about him cheating on you."

"Immortal? What are you talking about? All I know is that it was pretty good while it lasted but ultimately, I learned from it. Maybe in a learning aspect, I'd go through the experience again, but without those feelings. They just ended up making things nastier. Him cheating outweighed any joy I felt during that time."

"You really feel that way?"

"Yeah, I do. Why are you so interested all of a sudden? And what the hell do you mean by 'immortal'? I felt for him yeah, but that was it. Nice during the time, but there are plenty of other guys who have much more to offer anyways."

"I'm interested because I can't believe your answer! You just talked about how much you loved this guy, yet him cheating spoils the whole fuckin' thing? What the hell is the point in ever starting something new, then?"

"Brianna, not all guys cheat, plen—"

"Again, that isn't the point!" She rubs at the temples of her forehead. "I'm not talking about the end result here. I'm talking about simply experiencing it. Yielding to it all, not worrying about any consequences at the time. No give and take bullshit dynamic of relationships. No, I'm talking about you simply letting yourself succumb to whatever it is you succumb to, and because you enjoy it. Because you bathe in it, not whoever is on the receiving end. An electric feeling all your own, that may come and go, but can never be washed away once its current has travelled through you."

That's why I'm so curious. That's why I wondered how you felt during that time."

"That just sounds like a way to get hurt all the time."

"If you do it right, that won't matter."

*** **

The Uber ride home was a quiet one. The driver remained silent too. Not even music to distract. No, only a smooth ride under a remarkably crystalline clear night with the brilliance of a full moon.

Brianna's vision was somewhat shot, as the alcohol induced her to see double. Upon looking out the car window, her eyes meet with the moon, but appearing before her are two beautiful cosmic eyes looking down. Watching over, like a divine mother.

She cries. First time since James.

"What is it?" Kayla asks, looks over.

"I've just never seen it look like this."

That's when the brakes are applied much too abruptly, followed by an aggressive turn, causing the car to swerve violently into the opposite lane. A chain reaction: resulting in an oncoming car to impact Brianna's passenger door at fifty-five miles per hour. Point blank with no preparation. To Kayla and the driver, it was a momentary blackout.

Brianna, she bled to death there, eyes open, on the city sidewalk.

Later, when the report was being made, the driver was asked questions as to what had caused him to lose control of the vehicle.

Still badly shaken up, he smokes at a cigarette he can barely keep still.

"A coyote," he says, "I just didn't want to hit the coyote."

Kayla says she never saw a coyote.

*** **

Running wildly between the pines, she comes to a halt and hides behind the branches of a holly bush. Just ahead of her are her prey; a mother fox and her infant. She'd been stalking them for roughly an hour now. They've lost breath. Terribly wounded amidst chilling winter weather.

Two foxes. Mother wraps her body around
her child. Their fates now sealed.

The fur of Brianna's back stands up tall.
Hungry eyes waiting for the right moment to
pounce. She takes one last look; an examination.
Her nose wiggles as the scent of fox and fear travels
through.

Through her eyes: the mother dies, a child
fox left alone, shivers the bone. The weeping of the
fox tears her in two.

Brianna approaches delicately. Her paws
sink comfortably into the snow.

She lies with them, her body wrapped
around both the mother and child. Her fur keeps
them warm, up until the frost takes them away.

And well after that.

Untitled

Jade Landrum



Delving into the Desert's Words:

An Interview with L. I. Henley



L. I. Henley was born and raised in the Mojave Desert village of Joshua Tree, California. She is the author of two chapbooks, *Desert with a Cabin View* and *The Finding* (both with Orange Monkey Publishing). Her first full-length collection, *These Friends These Rooms*, was published by Big Yes Press in 2016. She is the recipient of The Academy of American Poets University Award, The Duckabush Prize in Poetry, The Orange Monkey Poetry Prize, and The Pangaea Prize through The Poet's Billow. L.I. Henley won the 2017 Perugia Press Prize for *Starshine Road*, her second full-length collection. Her next collection of poems, *Whole Night Through*, is forthcoming from What Books Press in 2019. With her husband, poet Jonathan Maule, she lives once again in the high desert of California. Together they edit the online literary and art journal *Aperçus*.

Q: Has your idea of poetry changed since you began writing poems?

A: Yes, for sure. As with any pursuit, we learn through actually getting our hands dirty, so to speak, and jumping into the fray. We can't experience a rollercoaster or ice cream or swimming in the ocean without actually doing it ourselves. As with any art, you have to flail a lot and make a lot of mistakes (just try not to publish those mistakes on the Internet). You also have to study the masters, those bright and troubled minds that came before you. I think this second part is what a lot of students of the arts don't realize; if you want to be a poet, you must read widely and with an insatiable appetite. If you do the thing and study the thing, your ideas about the thing can only ever evolve.

Q: Have you ever experienced a lengthy term of writer's block? If so, what sorts of things can change said block? Do you find that writing is more fluid when it is spontaneous?

A: I have actually never suffered from writer's block because I don't believe in it. As my mentor Marvin Bell was fond of saying, if you can't think of something to write, lower your standards. I think that if you are truly curious about the world, then you will never be at a loss for things to write about. I mean, have you ever watched a documentary about coral reefs and the critters who live in them? Or about Mariner 9, the unmaned vessel that went to Mars in 1971? There are worlds within worlds for us to discover if we only seek them out. People who find themselves dried up in their imaginations just need to remember how very small they are, how very old and infinite the universe is, and look outside of themselves. Practically speaking, I turn to nonfiction when my imagination needs to be shaken up—I read a book about the history of artificial light recently, and now I know what I'm going to write about for my next poetry manuscript.

Q: How do you know when a poem is complete? Do you spend less time revising certain poems over others?

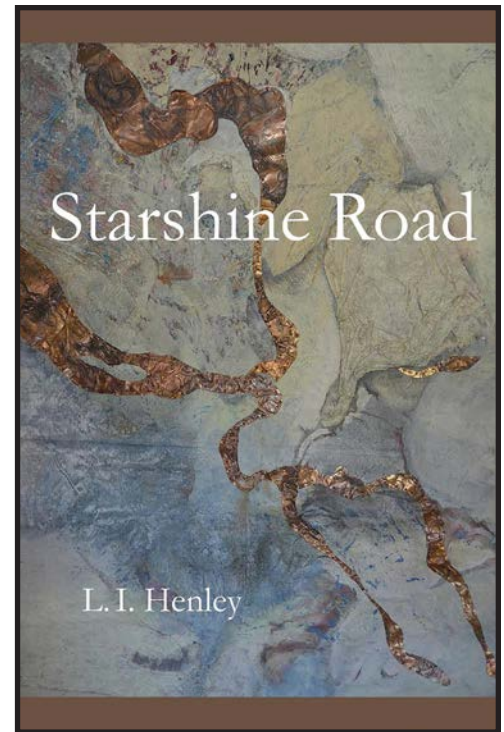
A: There are some poems and even certain entire manuscripts that seem to practically write themselves as though I'm just a conduit—the voices of persona poems, for instance, seem to just arise and flow, and I make very few conscious choices. This is somewhat rare, though, and I've only experienced that with two of my five books, and of course it's not true for every single poem within the collections. Other collections have been taken apart and sewn back together like little Franksteins. Sometimes a poem needs a few minor changes, and other times you have to put it in the blender and pour it into a new mold. You have to be open to doing that kind of work not just as a beginning writer but also as a poet with several books. Every time I start a poem, it feels like the first time in regards to uncertainty. I feel my way through the dark with every poem, even the ones that seem to rush in from another source.

Q: Do you find satisfaction in the process of writing, or the responses from your audience? What has been one of your more accomplished moments as a writer?

A: A poet or fiction writer is lucky if they have even one person who reads their work. You are rich in luck if you have more than that. So, writers will burn out quickly if they are seeking their joy through other people's responses to it. Writing is often a lonely act. If a person seeks joy in audience responses, they should do theater instead. I am deeply, madly, and foolishly in love with the process. I have written many, many pieces that have never and will never see the light of day—I wrote them because I love to write. I can't live without writing. Of course, it feels good to get the call or the letter that you have won a prize. I was happy when I got the call from Perguia Press in 2017 telling me that Starshine Road had been chosen for publication out of over 500 other manuscripts, but the happiness I felt pales to the accumulated happiness spent writing since I was old enough to hold a pencil.

Q: Have you considered how your audience receives your themes, and how they may relate to them? Have fans identified with your naturistic, desert themes through fan mail? Does awareness of your audience affect your writing process? If so, how does it affect you?

A: Oh, I'm sure that I have thought about audience reception but not on a real conscious level. I write things that I would like to read. I have heard from writing students that they could relate to the poems I wrote about my father or about relationships though not so much about the desert. The desert I write about is dark, unstable, shifty... and I'm not actually sure how many people can relate—but I would guess they are intrigued. Does fan mail from my grandma count? And actually, she didn't really like my poetry, so I don't think I ever received any fan mail from her. There are a lot of poets out there... great poets...great poets who are published and have many credits to their names...but I would guess that only about 5% of them are famous enough to receive fan mail even once in their lives. The times I've been given a check or some cash to do a reading I've nearly fainted from surprise—I always think it's a parking violation or some bill I'm being given. So, I burrow into my writing cave, and I write like no one's watching (and no one is watching, not even my dog, and I like it that way). Poetry and creative writing and all of the arts are undervalued in American society—we can see this at the K-12 level, at colleges, and in politics. So, honestly one of the most rebellious things you can do is to make art. Make art and don't smoke those stupid E-cigarettes—that's how you can stick it to the man.



Q: In “Junkpile as Seen from My Kitchen Table,” how do these descriptions of junkpiles, bricks and wire relate to your personal experiences in that environment? How did this environment affect how you wrote the poem?

A: Junk is a part of my imaginative landscape, and I use it synonymously with the word “treasure.” Both of my childhood homes were absolutely brimming with objects of the past—glass insulators from abandoned telephone poles, antique glassware, railroad ties, all varieties of colorful ephemera. The desert in general attracts such eclectic trappings. Every yard of every desert house I've lived in is a field of exotic landmines—shards of goblets and bottles, masonry nails, rusted wire, marbles, half-buried toy soldiers, rare coins, crystals, bottle caps, arrowheads. Go out on almost any dirt road in Landers or Joshua Tree, and you'll find abandoned couches or a pile of tires or part of a car that's been shot up. These items are the artifacts of all kinds of stories—some of them violent, some of them humdrum and workaday and fitting for the kinds of people who live there.

The pile in Starshine Road stands for many things, most of which I'm not conscious of, but one of them is indeed longing. The narrator's fascination with the strange composition of re-claimed objects is almost—almost—erotic. The narrator can't explain why she loves it, why she could stare at it all day, its odd and gangly parts. She wants to see the rusted heap from every direction, even from inside the pile itself. The junk is dangerous, its jagged edges are uncaring; it resists while the narrator persists. Longing. Love deferred. Unrequited attention. But the narrator seems to enjoy that pursuit.

Growing up isolated, I often convinced myself that the natural and material worlds loved me back. This belief that my surroundings embraced me was the closest thing I had to a religion, and really when you compare it to other beliefs, it's not that strange. Why can't the cottonwood tree in my backyard love me and want good things for me if I say it does?

Junk Pile as Seen from My Kitchen Table

(An Excerpt from *Starshine Road*)

From here
it is two inches of rust-red corral

a foot of chain-link
wooden posts every three inches

a hanging pile

I am too far away
maybe thirty feet
eucalyptus leaves are blotting out the scene with their circles

It is a problem of perspective

The only thing clear is the stack of bricks
that are not the color of bricks
but loafs of bread

sourdough rye honey wheat

They collectively lean left
toward the chinaberry tree
& beyond that chicken-wire housing a garden
of window glass

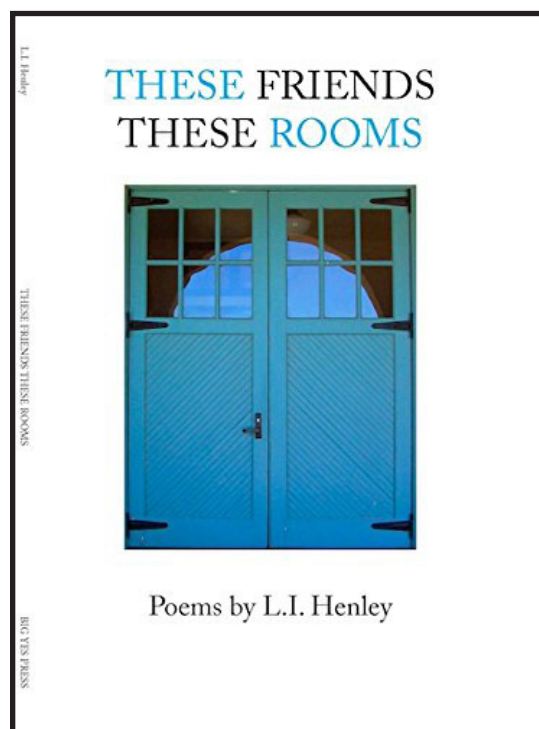
Beyond that

the shed with no doors
the neighbors spanking each other
the network of spitting roads
the highway where cars go to Vegas Salt Lake Taos
At this rate
they'll never make it

I could watch you lean toward your desires all day
Please
promise me you are something close to content
at ease something close
so we can keep on this way

Q: In your poem, “Sometimes Three Hawks Sitting On A Fence Post Means What You Want It To Mean In Victorville California,” what do the three chickens and the three hawks symbolize to you? Where did this image originate for you?

A: This is a poem poem about my father, and one that I have gotten several questions about. I can understand why. I try to walk that line between mystery and mystification in all of my poems, but the details that root a reader in reality are particularly intriguing in this poem, and I only give a few. Earlier drafts of this poem were too indulgent—they fed my ego through the divulging of family secrets. I take it as a compliment that people want to know more about the situation that sparked the poem, but I’m also very careful not to say much about the poems besides that it was a thoughtful exercise in writing about personal family dynamics, and that it might serve as an example of a poem that gives just enough information to keep a reader from becoming befuddled. And, of course, the answer to your question about the three hawks is in the title.



Q: Much like the desert, are there any other environments that inspire you to write? If so, what areas do you envision yourself visiting for inspiration?

*A: Yes, I am inspired by other landscapes, especially ones that I spend extended amounts of time getting to know. We lived for two years in Arcata, California, which is in Humboldt County, about 270 miles south of the Oregon border. Arcata is surrounded by old growth temperate rainforest, which we had the pleasure of meandering through on a daily basis, weather permitting. The rain was a constant presence and became a sort of antagonist in our lives. This is where I wrote the poems that eventually became *The Finding*. Many landscapes feel foreign to me either because I haven’t lived in them (cities) or because I lived in them for many years and found no characteristics that moved me (suburban areas). I recognize fully that the “not finding” in suburban areas is a lack of imagination on my part. For me to want to write about a place, it’s got to be at least a little weird, at least a little dirty, at least a little dangerous, and there’s got to be the possibility of getting good and lost.*

Q:) How have struggles in life affected your writing? Do you feel that poetry has helped you overcome obstacles in life?

A: I think it was the poet Kim Addonizio who said something like, “I’m not the poet I am because of my suffering, I am a poet despite of it.” I really like that quote (even though I know I’m not stating it as eloquently as she did); I think it’s important for young people to hear this so they don’t think they have to inflict suffering on themselves in order to be great writers. Besides, if you live long enough, suffering will find you. Life experience is essential to great writing. I’ll be specific with your question now. My struggles in life have absolutely influenced my writing, and so have my joys. If I had a magical scale and could weigh the impact my struggles have had on my writing versus the impact made by love, love would weigh more. Between the ages of 14 and 23 I suffered an unstable home life, frightening health problems, and a failed marriage. I wrote a ton of fiction during that time, some of it was pretty good, but I couldn’t write poetry that was worth a damn because I was too closed off from love. It wasn’t until my brain grew into an adult brain and I was done with teenage stuff that I became capable of experiencing real love of self and then real love of others. I stopped being so self obsessed at that point, and it was then that I could write real poetry.

Q: Do you feel that writing has been a calling, or a choice? Both? How has writing empowered you?

A: I chose to answer the calling of writing. It was a choice to listen to the voice telling me to write. I didn't say, "Nah, that won't make any money, and my parents won't get it—I'll become a special education teacher like they want me to be." Nothing wrong with being a special education teacher, by the way, if that's where your heart is. It was empowering to build my own path even if I was pretty damn scared along the way. I have written voraciously since I was old enough to read. It's what I've done in my free time (and what I did instead of homework many times) for decades now. I can't not write. I've written through times of loneliness, extreme and debilitating illness, chronic pain, poverty, instability, and all through the great times, too. It is always empowering to do what you love.

Q: What advice would you offer a college student who is seeking a career in writing?

A: I don't have a career in writing, per se, so I'm afraid I can't really give a worthy answer to your question. I don't make any money from my writing besides winning occasional prizes for contests (enough money to make up for the money spent entering said contests). If you want to make money from your writing, you should probably be a technical writer and be ok with describing the set up and operation of gadgets. Or, you could go to school for journalism, I guess. But I have a feeling that's not the kind of writing you are asking about. If you want to write creative pieces that you actually like and believe in, do that. Just don't go into it thinking you are going to make a living from it. My best advice is for balancing your writing life with your career life. Choose a job you don't hate and that might even be compatible with creative writing. If you go to a really, really good MFA program and then publish a best selling book (I haven't yet), there is a chance you could be hired to teach some creative writing courses at a four-year university along with teaching lit and comp classes. If you get a PhD in literature with a creative writing emphasis from a top-notch program (nope, I'm not going to do that), maybe you'll have even more luck getting paid to write and teach. Maybe. There are a lot of great writers out there living pay check to pay check as adjunct English instructors (hey, that's me!) or as waiters or whatever. I'm sure some of them are happy (yes, I am) because when they aren't working, they are presumably writing (yep!), and their jobs don't rob them of creative energy (I am creatively energized by teaching). I think my advice for writing is better than my advice for how to balance work with writing. Here are four things I'll leave you with:

- 1) Read widely. This means reading extensively in every genre. It means reading everything that's assigned to you in all of your classes—even, and maybe especially, science and history and psychology. Read oodles and oodles of poetry by contemporary writers. Read work that is different from your own. Delete all of your social media accounts, get a flip phone without Internet, and replace all those wasted hours with reading.*
- 2) Write every day, even if it's just notes on a napkin for a story you want to write later.*
- 3) Experience nature. Go camping. Look at the stars. Be curious. Ask why. Ask how.*
- 4) Read widely. Wait, did I say that already? I guess it must be really important.*

Time in the Desert

W. Jack Savage



The Daughters of Namath Sahir

W. Jack Savage



The Beginning

Elida Tato

The cosmology of the unknown
Unmodern extrapolation of the pure singularity
Stephen Hawking's eternal Sunshine of the mysterious
Explosion of bodies in the heavenly vault
Stardust of the non-believer prayers
The universe at the feet of the Gods.
Lobotomy of the culture of the underdogs.
The soul of the atoms merging in giant clouds.
Expansion of subatomic particles kneeling to Demeter and Hades.
Powerful sour fruits of Eden.
Divine punishments of the eternal inflation.
No direction, no answer, no doctrine for sinners.
No multiverse of poetry for the winners.

My Moment

Katie Keridan

every now and then
there comes a moment
that you know is different
a miniature fault line
that cracks the span of time
and carves a canyon
into the landscape
forever marring the flattened clock face
that's what you gave me –
a moment of my very own.

Grab The Opportunity

Sebenzile Ngwenya

It takes more than death,
To kill a man,
Hopelessness, Defeat, and Failure,
Could all destroy a man

Opportunities give hope to everyone,
But opportunities come and go,
In hope for better opportunities,
We often ignore the first opportunity

And then we cry a river
When things go sour,
Then we go into our shells,
And be ready to launch into self destruction

My advise is to treat every
Opportunity like a gold mine,
The first opportunity may open
Doors to further opportunities

So make use of every opportunity,
And measure each day by the Seeds
You plant, and not by the
Harvest you reap.

Closing in on the
Eleventh Hour
Connie Major





Cleanse Our Planet

Connie Major

Held

Vivian Wagner

The sky adheres to the horizon,
glued by the pale orange of
early spring, anchored by
trees longing to bud but still
afraid of frost's catch.
In this way, the world
holds together, hitched to the
past while leaning toward
an incoherent future,
the line balancing the rising
sun our one certain thing.

Both-And

Vivian Wagner

I live in fear of ice,
those slippery sheets
on sidewalk and road,
sometimes visible,
often not.

And yet, I love crystals
in the trees, catching
light, forming their fractalled
selves, always fragile,
always unique.

So we fear and love the same things.
So we find our claws and wings.

Audrey's Tale

Jennifer Engel

Age 5

Audrey stroked the lion's fur. It was oily and heavy under her palms as she cupped the contented bristle of his muzzle. Her lion had helped her many times, appearing just when she needed him the most, giving her strength. She didn't know where he'd come from. She didn't even know his name.

The landscape was languid and indistinct which made Audrey feel as though she was in a dream looking up through an ocean to the sky. She thought she could hear faint sounds of crying in the distance but surely she was alone with the lion. Perhaps it was just a dream. Perhaps she was crazy.

Her legs were pressed against the cool grass. A blue mist surrounded distant mountains. A slight breeze touched her cheeks, warm like the breath of the powerful animal before her. This beast could make a meal of her with very little effort and she trembled at the thought. The mighty animal turned toward her, opened his mouth and the docile sky shifted and roared. Then there was darkness.

Sunshine struck Audrey's face. She rolled over and stretched. Beside her Alexa snored softly, soured breath passing through slightly parted lips. Would she still be angry? Alexa was ten, five years older than Audrey, and she was always scolding ... ALWAYS! Audrey hadn't understood why she couldn't use the big knife. She'd watched her mother slice sandwiches with it lots of times. Mommy had gone to the store to pick up some butter leaving Alexa in charge. Audrey was hungry. She didn't need butter for a PB and J and she didn't want to wait for Mommy to return. When she tried to cut the sandwich in half she came down too hard with the blade and knocked the Corelle plate onto the tile floor where it shattered into a zillion pieces. Alexa's hands clenched with fury.

"You're lucky you didn't cut your fingers off," Alexa shouted, hammering each word hard

for maximum effect as she picked up the knife and swept up the sharp splinters, "or shred those little toes of yours on all this glass. Look at this mess! Where are your shoes anyway? Get OUT of the kitchen! I'm telling Mom when she gets home."

Audrey fled through the back door. Hastily, she climbed the ladder up the tree to the fort, bumping and scratching her knees against the rough bark. She curled up into a ball on an old blanket and cried. The lion had been waiting for her. She pressed herself snug against his tawny fur and fell fast asleep. It was Mommy who woke her up, urging Audrey down the tree for a dinner of macaroni and cheese. When Mommy heard about the knife and the plate, she sank into the hard dining room chair and sighed. After all, this was her impulsive daughter and accidents tended to be a common occurrence. Everyone sulked for the rest of the evening.

Now, it was a bright new day. What could go wrong? Audrey was optimistic. She rolled over to be closer to her sister. She could smell Alexa. Alexa was a big middle schooler. She tried to mask her body odor from the other kids in order to fit in, but Audrey found her warm scent to be familiar and comforting.

"Rise and shine you two," came Mommy's voice as she entered the door. "Come down and eat your breakfast." The girls threw on their bathrobes and sprinted downstairs to the kitchen. Mommy set out plates for the three of them. Bacon sat next to a steamy plate of fried eggs and a bowl of orange slices.

"Where's the toast?" asked Alexa.

"Oh. I was buttering it. It's by the toaster."

"I'll get it," lisped Audrey who had been cramming an orange slice into her mouth. She jumped up so fast she almost knocked over the chair and dashed to the toaster. She started to grab the plate when she spied a piece of bread still wedged between the wire racks of the toaster.

Audrey picked up a fork and poked at it.

“NO!” barked Mom and Alexa in unison jumping up in alarm. “You’ll electrocute yourself!” Audrey was so startled she dropped the fork on the counter. “Never, NEVER put anything metal into a toaster unless it is unplugged.” There was a moment of awkward silence as Audrey glanced at her mother and sister, tears puddling along her eyelids.

“It’s OK Sweetie. Come sit down and I’ll get the toast. Who wants strawberry jam?”

Age 10

Audrey closed her eyes as she laid her face against the lion and breathed in his earthy scent. She could feel his ribs rising and falling under her cheek. The rhythm of his heartbeat was soothing. Again, Audrey found herself in this strange place. A different backdrop had descended upon the landscape. Her surroundings were still indistinct but the colors were brighter, like morning rising in a dream. Audrey stood up and looked around. There were no houses, only a few teal colored trees growing around the edge of yellow foothills. The mountain peaks looked violet beneath the robin egg sky. Were they this color before? Audrey couldn’t remember. The sobbing seemed closer this time, but it was still too far off to be heard clearly. It must be her imagination. She shook her head. This time, Audrey thought she detected muffled voices but couldn’t make out any words. Out of nowhere amorphous clouds came rolling in. Their bodies shifted and twisted as they skittered across the sky. Thunder broke the stillness. Startled, Audrey flinched and shivered. The lion jerked his head upward. Then a blinding flash of light stole the view and there was darkness.

Raindrops danced on the concrete outside the open window above Audrey’s bed. She breathed deeply to settle her galloping heart after what must have been a nightmare. Whatever the dream had been it was fading and Audrey let the sound of rain comfort her as she lay wrapped in her sheets. This was going to be the best of days. Audrey

was ten years old, a big girl now! She got up and looked into the full-length mirror on the wall. Her waist was starting to narrow and her hips and breasts were beginning to take shape. Satisfied with her image she smiled at her reflection and then looked around. Where had everyone gone? Would her family help her celebrate her birthday after yesterday’s fiasco? Were they still angry?

Audrey reflected on their reactions. Had she really been that foolish? Audrey had trailed behind her mother and sister as they walked to the market a couple of blocks from their house. There was a park across the street from the grocery store. Surly they understood that she was bored. She was still child enough to want to play on the swings while her older sister and mother shopped. Reluctantly her mother had agreed to let her wait for them in the park.

“Keep your cell phone on and we’ll let you know when we’re ready to head home ... and stay out of trouble, young lady!” Mom warned with a frown.

The park was almost deserted. No matter, the swings were enticing. Audrey knew that she was growing up and wouldn’t be able to do this kind of thing much longer. She loved to soar as high as she could, her legs cutting through the air, her shoulders and arms straining as she strove to reach new heights. She thought about jumping to the grass from the highest point, but then she remembered that the last time she tried this, she’d come close to breaking her leg. She’d sprained her ankle and had to hobble around with crutches. Mom was not pleased. Alexa was disgusted. Audrey was almost to the swings when she heard a voice.

“Excuse me miss, can you help me?” Audrey blushed. The stranger looked to be no more than 18, but Audrey was a lousy judge of age. His pale blue eyes were mesmerizing and he had a lush mane of blond hair that curled neatly around his shoulders.

“Excuse me miss,” he repeated, “I found a lost dog wandering in the park. She’s just a puppy. Have you lost a dog?”

“We don’t have a dog,” blurted Audrey awkwardly.

“Well,” said the stranger nonchalantly, “she’s the cutest, sweetest little black and white spaniel. I hate to leave her to starve in the park and I can’t take her home. My roommate is allergic to dogs. Maybe you could take her. Would you like to see her?”

Audrey doubted that Mom would tolerate a puppy ... but it was a puppy ... a real live puppy would be so much fun. She’d always wanted a dog.

“Come on, she’s in my car,” the stranger said in a smooth voice. “You don’t want her to starve. Come on.”

Audrey had taken no more than a few steps forward when she heard footsteps galloping up behind her. Then came the yank, and she was thrown backwards, her buzzing cell dropping from her pocket. Alexa had taken a firm grip on the back of her shirt nearly strangling her. Mom had an alarmed expression and was not far behind. The stranger turned and ran. All the way home, Mom and Alexa yelled at her about the dangers of talking to strangers. Audrey, who was in tears, dragged her feet slowing everyone down on the trek home. Had she really been that stupid? Eventfully, Mom and Alexa calmed down. After dinner they sat together on the sofa watching old movies. Audrey loved these moments when she was comfortably smooshed between Mom and Alexa. The day had not been a total loss.

But today was a new day and Audrey bubbled with optimism. It was her tenth birthday. Excited she leapt out of bed and raced to the bedroom door. Still in her nightgown, she hurriedly mounted the banister and slid downstairs. Audrey shot off the end and plop, she landed hard on the tile floor. She stood up slowly, pain radiating from her tailbone. Then she fainted.

Age 15

A storm had passed and the air was crisp and fresh. The lion yawned and stood up. He casually sauntered in the direction of mountains that had transformed from violet into charcoal with white snowcaps. He paused and looked back

at Audrey. Without question she trailed behind. The lion appeared whenever she was awash with tears or floating in pain. She loved Alexa and Mom, but the lion was always with her, especially when they could not be there for her. The landscape had become a bit more defined. As if by magic fragrant yellow flowers appeared beneath her footsteps. They seem to jingle as they swayed in the breeze. Audrey was more certain than ever that someone was crying on the horizon. It was still pretty faint but definitely sobbing. She thought she heard someone say her name. She cocked her head, cupped her ear and squeezed her eyes shut as she concentrated. Any words that were spoken were still too garbled to understand.

Was that smoke rising in the distance? It trailed upward darkening the salmon sky. A new sound was rising above the ringing flowers. It was the crackling voice of fire. Audrey wasn’t in danger yet but thought it prudent to turn around and walk the other way. The lion stood his ground and the two were frozen in a stalemate.

“Honey, get up,” yelled Mom from the doorway. “We have so much to do today. You have got to get dressed.”

Audrey rose slowly. Her head pounded. Had she known that alcohol would give her this much of a headache, she might not have taken her friends up on their offer to join them after the school dance. This was not a good day to be sick. Alexa was getting married and Audrey was the maid of honor. Audrey ached from head to toe, but at least she wasn’t throwing up any more. She thought the sophomores her own age were silly. She had higher aspirations and did everything she could to befriend seniors. Not just any seniors but those who loved to party, if one could call bingeing on alcohol and cigarettes a party. When they introduced Audrey to her first cigarette it burned her throat and lungs like crazy. She was sure it wasn’t something she really wanted any part of, but she clenched her teeth and put on a cheerful face for her friends who were egging her on.

When Alexa borrowed Audrey’s jacket a few days earlier she found cigarettes and a lighter

in the pocket. Audrey knew Alexa was going to kill her but that day Alexa was full of surprises. Alexa's face furrowed with concern. She pulled her younger sister to her chest and squeezed her like she would never let her go. In a quiet voice, she warned Audrey about peer pressure. She wasn't going to tattle to Mom but she told Audrey that she loved her and wanted nothing more than for her to be healthy and happy. What did Alexa know about her life! Alexa was the "perfect" one!! However, this was Alexa's wedding day, and as annoyed as Audrey had been with her sister, she wasn't going to ruin it for her.

"I'm coming," Audrey shouted down the stairwell to her mother.

She jumped into the shower and let the steam wash away some of the sweat and grime from her escapades of the previous evening. It wasn't time yet to put on the sapphire satin dress her sister had insisted upon, so she pulled on her jeans and a tee shirt and went downstairs for a bit of breakfast. Maybe food would make her feel better. Audrey was cranky and logy. As she strolled into the kitchen she tripped and fell against the countertop, knocking over the coffee pot and breaking the carafe.

"Argggggg," she raged with frustration. Alexa gently pulled her into a chair while Mom wiped up the coffee. Noting their anxious stares Audrey screamed, "WHAT? What do you want from me?" She ran up the stairs and flopped on the bed for yet another cry. The lion was there. She couldn't see him, but she could feel him as she drifted off to sleep.

An hour later, Audrey awoke feeling more refreshed. Damn it, it was going to be a good day! This time she was not just optimistic but determined! Mom walked softly up the stairs. She peered through the bedroom door.

"How are you feeling, Honey? Can I help you get dressed?" Audrey cracked a smile.

"Sure, I'd like that."

They helped each other put on makeup, laughing at too much rouge and at how the glittery eyeshadow tended to send sparkles everywhere.

When they had perfected their faces, they slipped into their dresses. Alexa came waltzing in wearing her wedding gown.

"Look at what I have for you!"

Alexa's eyes gleamed as she gazed at her sister. She anchored a comb with a small arrangement of pink and white flowers in Audrey's hair and handed her a matching bouquet to carry.

"You look like a princess," Audrey gasped in amazement, "and I love the flowers. Thank you. Thank you!" Alexa pinned a corsage to Mom's satin dress. The three women embraced.

"I'm so proud of my girls," Mom whispered, starting to choke up.

"Mom, don't cry," whined Alexa. "You'll ruin your makeup."

Dad died when Audrey was small and it had been just the three of them through thick and thin. Now, Alexa was about to leave and start a whole new life. The mixture of love and loss nearly brought Audrey to another round of tears. But she was strong. The rest of the day, with all of its extra activity and excitement, went off without a hitch.

Age 20

Audrey scratched the lion around his ears. She cupped his muzzle and he rubbed his face against her cheek. For the first time she had clarity in this surreal place. The landscape was pristine. Scattered flowers of every color were underfoot. Birds chirped happily in the sweet air. The grass and the few trees sported bright greens and oranges that flickered in the sunshine. The mountains were now a shimmering white. It had been five years since Alexa's wedding and now Alexa was expecting a child. Imagine that! Audrey was so excited. She couldn't wait to be an aunt.

But what was that? The sound of someone weeping was stronger than ever. Audrey peered across the meadow, shading her eyes with her hand, and strained to see who was out there. The landscape wavered and a new, less distinct scene emerged. In front of her was a street. She gasped and took a step back. The blackness of the asphalt

frightened her. Flowers were replaced by flashing red and blue lights. A policeman stood nearby taking notes. Then she saw herself lying in a pool of blood. Mom and Alexa stood huddled together at the side of the road, shaking as they sobbed in each other's arms. What had she done before coming this place? Audrey's eyes widened as the truth began to sink in.

The last thing Audrey remembered was having lunch with her family at an outdoor café after a shopping spree for baby clothes. She was so happy. A car honked behind her and she'd turned her head around to see what was causing the commotion. A puppy, of all things, was in the middle of the road; a little black and white spaniel had wandered into harm's way. Audrey's impetuous nature had gotten the best of her. Without thinking she'd burst to her feet, knocking over the chair, and rushed into the street to grab the hapless creature. Mom and Alexa frantically reached for her, but their hands clawed the air just grazing Audrey's sleeve. Audrey hadn't noticed the truck that was going too fast to stop. The impact threw her over the windshield and into the street with such force that it crushed the back of her skull.

Audrey's face was stricken with understanding. The lion, now at her side, licked her hand with his rough tongue and nudged her forward. In a daze, Audrey ambled beside him toward the mountains. Life had had its ups and downs, but it had been a good life. Audrey

was blessed with an understanding and loving family, and in the end, nothing else mattered. She regretted the pain her death was causing Mom and Alexa. She wanted to reach out and hold them, to rock them in her arms, and let them know that she was OK. Most of all she wanted to tell them how much she loved them. As Audrey and the lion continued their journey she could feel herself disappearing, a footstep at a time.

Age 0

Audrey was pressed against her sister's chest. Alexa's familiar scent was strong in her nostrils. She looked up at the blurry face.

"Let's name her Audrey," came a masculine voice from somewhere off to one side. What memories remained dissolved into oblivion as Audrey relaxed into the bliss of Alexa's arms.

"Audrey. Yes, that would be beautiful!" answered the blurry face above her.

Audrey's eyelids began to fall and she sank into slumber. Alexa ached with sorrow at the death of her little sister. She gazed tenderly at her infant daughter and wished she could have shared this joy with her. She gently set the sleepy child in her bassinet and put a small stuffed lion down next to her. Where the toy lion had come from was a mystery. It had appeared on the hospital nightstand wrapped in shimmering yellow paper. Today, was a brand-new beginning. It was a good day.

The Rage

Elida Tato

It's better to be feared than to be loved
When asked, say you regret it all
Inside, keep the rage under control.

It's better to be admired than to be liked
Step your game up and do not swallow
Be the light for their broken shadow

Walk alone and do not expect much
The Ravens have grown and they will claw off your eyes.

Be smarter. Be faster.
Go far. Go fast.
What you are after
Won't last that much.

Face your demons, kill your darlings.
Everything that does not make you fly weights you down.

Face your demons, kill your darlings.
No need to prove them wrong.
For what I've known
they will kill themselves in the battle.

Blood to blood and flesh to flesh.
Flush the fear and embrace the race.
Make allies you will betray.

Flesh to flesh and blood to blood.
Increase the adrenaline until it is odd.
This is your game and you are their God.

Do you feel the pressure on your brain?
The effect is like cocaine
It will eventually drive you insane
Like the click of a clock
It is raging.

Haven't I told you to keep the rage under control?
You feel it, don't you?

It's uncomfortable to keep reading.
But you already knew this feeling.
Isn't it true?

Threads of a Jumper

Andy N.

Whatever happened to Anne from Cleveland's?
Who you met on holiday with your parents
Just after your brother was born
And held your hand throughout that night
When all three of them nearly drowned?

Barbara who was the younger daughter
Of your old history teacher from High School
Who everybody disowned in the playground
After her brother got sent off for fighting
And cost the school the cup final.

Jude who you worked with at Woolworth's
Who wouldn't speak to you for two weeks
After you went to your Christmas do there
When her husband made a move on you
After 5 pints of lager and 3 whiskies

Mags who moved to Australia
When she hit 45 for a new start after her divorce
Or Rose who you went to IT Classes
Just after you both retired only to fuse her pc
Within ten minutes of your first lesson

Memories I still have of you
Closed like shut warehouses
Shaking your head furiously
With a animated anger
And sometimes with a muted tear

Sat there with a fountain pen
Looking every inch the thoughtful poet
Instead of a crossword scribbler
Lost in the floodlights of decades
Of a eventful life

As your pen crossed out people
You knew once upon a time
Like moments pulled out of sequence

Which you smile at quietly
And whisper thank you

Recalling their friendship

Carrying their dreams

Lost in sleeplessness memories
Tied in relationships

Stuffed with man-made threads
Dangling off jumpers
Carried off memories
Underlining your background
Whether at the end of summer

Or in the heart
Of a frantic Christmas.

Brighton in September

Andy N.

Forgetting you are full
Of a cold for five minutes

Your scarf spins around in circles
Back from the front

All the way past Daves on the lines
For the second time

Walking into the hazy mist
Two graphic novels in hand

Lost in memories of last night's
All nighter on the beach

Dancing to the obscurity
Of the moonlight in damaged beats

Thrust up words
Lost in song

Grabbing the end of summer
By the hand

And hugging the birth of autumn
Like a brother.

Fiery Infatuation

Alyssa Gonzalez

What is it about fire that is so alluring?
Its heat welcoming with a blistering embrace.
The flakes of embers dancing in the air,
Twirling brilliantly and then gone without a trace.

In close proximity it burns the hair on my skin,
The singeing sensation a guilty pleasure.
I long to cradle just a sprinkling of flames,
As the fire blazes passionately like a treasure.

To be cursed with flimsy papier-mâché skin,
That would easily ignite if I could dare,
To give in to my innermost desires,
And let myself be consumed in its flare.

No fool can deny its addictive temptation,
And I am none the wiser.
I am entranced by the searing inferno
And will the flames to grow higher.

Try as I may it will surely not last,
My patience will eventually crumble.
One day I am sure, without a doubt,
I will become one with its ashy rubble.

Be Mine

Melanie Faith



Vodka and Poptarts

Sarah Hauser

Beauty is in the eye
Of the person stupid enough to love
My fingertips traced the warning signs
On your body, admiring the scraps and scars
Trying to read the stories that I mistook
Tragedy for silly mistakes

Constellations hide in the crooks of your elbows
Painted purple and blue and black

Sunsets rim your eyes
Startlingly red as the lids try to shut and end the day

Jagged edges of the mountain ranges are found
In the places your rib cage should hide

There are tracks in the bends of your elbows
That mark the time passed and the doses taken

Panic and pleasure and pain
Rim your eyes and mine

The memory of you last meal
Too long ago to remember

My bones are cemented to flesh that is drenched
By the icy water of cold sweats
Thoughts that are as heavy as my anchored body
Tethered to this spot on your kitchen floor
Shards of myself will forever be scattered and gone
Whether I choose to leave or stay

I was never religious but still I pray
Times will take us both and my decision away

Part 1

Samantha Scott

Happiness was the first time I heard the sound of your laughter
In a brightly painted, crowded room where no one else but you existed
And I hadn't really noticed you before, but I did that day
I cracked one of my horrible jokes and you let out a laugh
But not just any laugh, no, the kind of rich laughter people take notice of
The kind of laugh that sends a shiver from someone's toes to their neck
A loud, soulful guffaw followed by the faintest of snorts
It ended in a stifled giggle that clung to my eardrums
The soundwaves rolled off your tongue and down your body
Gently caressing every inch of you on their way to me
From the stygian hair with rolling waves like the ocean in summer
To the snowy skin, the softness of which put your yellow dress to shame
Kissing your soft, rosy cheeks the way I now often think to do
Tumbling down your arms to the slender fingers I've since memorized
Every tone soaked into me so deeply that they became permanent
And have morphed into vibrant golds and reds that I alone can see
Your laughter is my secret pleasure and I seek it every time I see you
But no instance can compare with the first time
The blissful moment when I realized I would go to great lengths
If it meant, for even a moment, that those sounds would reach me
Happiness is every time I hear the sound of your laughter

Part 2

Samantha Scott

You stand there, talking so quietly that I must lean in to hear you
Wearing a deep blue dress covered in pink and red flowers
That falls just past the middle of your thigh
And exposes your skin that looks like honeyed milk, soft and golden pale
And, my god, it takes everything in me not to reach out and touch you and the urge grows
stronger every time I am near you and I am constantly questioning my ability to hold back, and I
wonder if you even realize that you have this effect on me
Or that I think about you
And your thigh-length, deep blue dress with red and pink flowers
And silently wish I had the courage, or the permission, to pull you closer
Instead of trying to calm my heart from racing like a jackrabbit
And quell my desperately dangerous desires
Because, if I fail to hold them down, they will explode forth with enough force to push you away
and ensure that you never stand so close, or speak so quietly to me again

So, I focus on the red and pink flowers, and bring them to life in my head, imagining they smell like the rose blossoms my grandmother used to grow
Because this helps me think less about the fact that you are more beautiful than the rose blossoms my grandmother used to grow
And the pain of being stuck by one of their thorns pales in comparison to the ache I feel in my chest when I'm standing next to you
This moment has been archived in my memory as the moment I first loved you

Part 3

Samantha Scott

I will never forget the moment you asked me to kiss you
On the floor of your living room at midnight
With tears in your eyes
And fear in your voice
And I will never forget the way that fear melted away
When you told me you loved me
And Heard me say it back.
I look at you every morning as you get dressed
And thank God for blessing me with you.
I listen to your laughter
And feel a warmth all the way down to my toes.
I watch you rub the sleep from your eyes as you wake up
And know there is no place I'd rather be.
You are my heart
My quiet amidst the raucous noise in my own head
My peace in an endlessly restless world
My calm in the storm
My forever.
I love you.

Back Roads and Lost Highways

Sarah Hauser

What they thought were stars shining in your eyes
Were reflections of the city lights you've seen
The freckles on your skin weren't scars
They were evidence of the same sun that's followed you

The tall green blades of Amazon grass reflecting bright light
Footsteps hobbling on orange rays blanketing a cobblestone street
Underground caves still shine from ancient gladiators' glow
Escaping the artificial beams trapped inside walls to familiar

The unknown is exhilarating when you have never faced it
Loneliness comforting when you choose it
Frightening strangers are actually friendly
Home lives outside a mortgage and a bed
... of yellow daises

The ends of your lips stretch easily to the sides of your face
Embers cackle along to your jokes and tales that
Never end like roads weaving in and out of towns
The lifelines moving you forward to that next sunrise

Kismet 2
Kyle Hemmings



Mystery's Lyre

Naomi Cheney

Lewis hated Sundays.

Those particular Sundays had been quite dismal; despite the clear skies and sweltering heat that brought a pleasant layer of pillowy fog to the moor. Even in the bounds of academic progression he had made over the course of this seemingly indefinite Indian summer, Lewis lagged behind everything else.

Renovations had been crawling up the corners of downtown, where Lewis was nested in his grandmother's old house. The house was at the town's edge; a mere ten minutes away from all the bustle of State street; where everything, and nothing happened. That morning he could hear the bells of the university in the distance from his window; the one that was painted open. The other was painted closed. The small house was neatly tucked in the wooded marshes, a safe distance away from the sounds of the city.

That day was a Sunday.

Lewis found himself in the same mood every Sunday those days. He would usually wake up with a slight hangover, vaguely remember the events from the night before, and typically find himself either irritated, or sad; but ultimately, dissatisfied. He'd have many messages on the answering machine in the living room awaiting his attention. Usually telemarketers or debt collectors. On Sundays, Lewis would never reply. Sundays belonged to him.

He would treat himself with unsettling independent films and sloth; sometimes even a quick, but half-hearted orgasm. But lately, he didn't have the motivation or desire. Pornography now made him feel sicker than any violent, graphic, gruesome horror film ever could. He wasn't sure why.

That day, Lewis felt vomitous. He oozed out of bed and ignored the nagging ache of his empty stomach. He migrated to the living room, where he sweat on the second-hand loveseat and fed his senses with the poisonous, possibly needless

despair, violence, and depravity of various indie-drama flicks. The emotional weight increased, and he could feel the damage he was doing to himself; but for whatever reason, he couldn't seem to stop. I need to sink. He ruminated. Deep. I must weather this self-inflicted disease until I've reached some sort of plateau. A part of him felt his sanity stretching. Almost like a rubber band. An instinct told him that if he just kept going, just kept this delicious suffering up a bit longer, something would snap.

Snap.

And maybe then, it will all make sense. He reclined in the loveseat. *But, fuck if I know.* It was eight P.M. The grandfather clock tolled eight times. Lewis turned off the television and sat for a moment. His tired eyes wouldn't focus, and he didn't possess the will to make them. I am at the end of my rope, he concluded.

Again.

Lewis heaved an exasperated sigh and willed his body to move to the kitchen, where he fished out his grandmother's old painkillers and some whiskey that he kept in the same drawer. In the back of the drawer was a pocket-sized spiral-bound notebook and a black pen. Lewis flipped the notebook open and tore out the most recent scribbling; a note he'd written the week before. It was shorter than most of the others, and less legible. It was a bad week. Lewis pinned it to the wall near the fridge; where it joined its hundreds of siblings, all mocking the procrastination of his own death. He sat on the floor against the sink, staring at the wall. Sighing a second time, he opened the notebook and put the pen to paper.

A loud chime emitted from the phone on the counter. His hand hesitated. He waited for the ringing to stop, then peered back at the page. Lewis wrote the date and again, the phone's high trills filled the small house and clanged off the walls. Lewis's jaw clenched. When the ringing ceased, he took a deep breath and lowered the pen to the blank sheet.

The phone rang.

Lewis carved the word FUCK in large erratic letters into the notebook, then shoved everything back into the drawer. His hand darted for the receiver and brought it swiftly to his ear.

"Hello?" His tone was polite; breaching boredom. He cleared his throat and tried to sound more enthusiastic. "Hello?" He said again.

"Hey, man. It's Rick! What are you doing?" Rick. The skinny kid with crooked teeth and cigarette burns on the brown leather jacket he wore; he said it was his old man's. He played guitar better than Lewis (though Lewis could play better banjo; of which Rick was always jealous). Rick sang for the girls with ripped jeans and acne scars at the bars, the ones with daddy issues and fake IDs. At least they were over eighteen. They met at Riley's; the Irish pub on 3rd, when Lewis was playing at the open-mic one Tuesday night. He said Lewis had good words and should read poetry at the open-mics every Tuesday. Most of the time, Rick smiled and had a beer in his hand. But some nights, he'd turn to Lewis and say something really profound. It was usually when they were both very drunk, towards the end of the night. Like a few months prior, when they had been smoking pot outside of Riley's.

"Sometimes, I look at all the people walking by; and I can imagine what their faces would look like when they're crying. I close my eyes, and I can see their faces, all red and shit. Sometimes I hear the world screaming as it spins. I dunno." Lewis remembered those words very clearly; even if he couldn't remember when they were said.

"What's up?" Lewis mumbled and looked around the kitchen, feeling a small tug of guilt in his stomach.

"Come out to Riley's tonight! I'll be playing with a couple of bluegrass bands that are coming out for the art festival. My buddy Frankie is bringing his friend Mary; she's an art major from University. Real sexy, one of those librarian-types. You'll like her."

"I dunno, man." Lewis paused. He never went out on Sunday nights. For some reason, it felt strange. All the losers, wannabes, and party-kids

came out of the woodwork on Sunday nights; in all of their hungry desperation to find something worthwhile before Monday came to find them with fast-food jobs and bus passes. "I might stay in tonight. I have work in the morning."

"We all do! Come on, man. Just come out, meet this chick, and I'll never ask you for another cigarette ever again."

"That's a lie."

"I'll never ask you for a cigarette for a month."

"Rick." Lewis rubbed his temples.

"Lewis." Rick contested mockingly. Lewis groaned.

"Why are you calling me now, anyway? It's only eight."

"It starts at nine, and I know how long you take to get ready. So, are you going, or not?"

"Fine." Lewis clicked the receiver and stared at the wall of his paper failures. He could hear a silent chorus of 'boos' from each page as they gently quivered beneath the ceiling fan.

"What fucking bullshit." Lewis barked at his reflection. There were dark circles under his eyes, and his cheeks looked sallow, slightly sunken. His skin was paler than ever; despite the amount of sun he'd gotten over the long summer. He was skinnier. His gnarled hair was so unkempt, he couldn't run his fingers through it. He needed a haircut but didn't have the money for something so frivolous. He rolled up the cuffs of his pants and shirt sleeves. He took solace in the fact that a drunk girl from University once told him he had sexy ankles. He wasn't sure how ankles could be sexy, but he'd been cuffing his jeans ever since. He put on a baseball cap that Rick gave him for his birthday when Lewis had told Rick he'd been looking for a good hat. His roost of curls puffed out from beneath the hat. He quickly tore it off and tossed it back into his closet on the top shelf. He noticed some stubble on his chin and considered shaving, but quickly reverted to indifference as he grabbed his keys and wallet, before dashing for the front door.

In town, the streets bustled with people. The day walkers were slowly tapering off, going back to their homes with ice cream and comic

books, while the night folk strode down the street with impressive confidence. Many short dresses, many flexed muscles. Lewis watched them all in a parade of beautiful abnormalcy. The art-geeks all wore attention-grabbing clothes, sporting piercings and fascinating hairstyles in various colors. Lewis tucked his hands in his pockets; humbled by them all.

Lewis had lived in this town for years. It had a very reputable university; which was the main reason he remained there. So many young people. To be young; truly young again like they were, would have been such a relief for Lewis.

"This is Mary," Frankie gestured and wiped his nose on his sleeve. Mary was very petite, with freckles and mousy hair pulled back in a ponytail. Her eyes were bored.

"Hi." She shook Lewis's hand and smiled faintly.

"Hey." Lewis returned the smile vacantly and sipped a weak beer Rick had bought him.

"I'll go grab you a drink," Frankie said to Mary. He crossed the bar and approached a pretty blonde sitting at the counter. Rick was preoccupied with tuning his guitar. The bar was a little more crowded than usual. Lewis was watching the opening band set up on stage.

"So, Rick tells me you're a writer." Mary tipped back her vodka tonic, her bored eyes peering over the glass.

"I mean, not professionally." Lewis shrugged and willed his hands not to tremble. "It's not really an artistic thing either, really..."

"It's artistic as fuck!" Rick chimed in. "I've read your stuff, and it's incredible." Mary's eyebrows shot up, and Lewis noticed the flicker of interest.

"Well, I mean; I'm not really making a spectacle out of it. It's more of a catharsis than anything."

"Ah, I see." Mary nodded. "What kinds of things do you write about? What kind of writing do you do typically?"

"I mean, it's just thoughts, mostly." Lewis stared down at the beer in his hand and picked at the label. "I write about life, and meaning, and I

guess my own ignorant philosophies and inner babble."

"When you say you write about life, what do you mean by that?" Mary's thin mouth curved in a smirk. Lewis's mind spiraled and he instantly knew how things would play out. She was attempting to psychoanalyze him to her benefit; so that she might gain the upper hand in the conversation and prove that she was much more academically groomed. She was looking for an opportunity to show off her intellect. Typical grad student. As soon as they leave the ocean, they mock the smaller fishes in the ponds back home. Nervously, Lewis responded.

"I guess it's all just the typical inner ramblings of an agnostic existentialist; or anyone, really. Questions on reality, observations of humanity, theories of existence...what does it all mean?" His lungs released a breathless laugh. Mary crossed her arms. Rick appeared disinterested.

"And what is your conclusion?" She asked. Lewis shrugged.

"There isn't one. The knowledge of humans is much too finite for us to comprehend the significance of existence; much less the existence of divinity, or higher power. Everything we think we know could be a lie. There is no truth. Only what you believe to be true."

"I disagree," Mary's bored eyes were then burning embers of excitement as she rose to the proverbial challenge. "Humans are very intelligent creatures; the most intelligent creatures."

"--That we know of," Lewis added.

"I believe if there's anyone who can fathom the meaning of existence, it's us. Look at the evolution of higher thinking throughout history. The Greeks were able to..."

And she began citing what Lewis believed was a memorized philosophy magazine article. Lewis was quite unnerved by these kinds of people. They asked very vague; unartistic questions and would endlessly assure him in various subtleties that he was not intelligent, articulate, or good enough. All the while, citing every meaningless piece of pretentious information they've soaked

up in college; and it wasn't that Lewis didn't value knowledge, or intelligence, or even narcissism. What made him uncomfortable was that they seemed utterly indifferent to all of the mindless, homogenized philosophies spilling from their mouths. They weren't even passionate about it. If you're going to be so holier-than-thou; at least have some conviction about it. He awkwardly shuffled his weight to his left foot.

Mary spent the following twenty minutes on a lengthy diatribe about Aristotle. Frankie soon joined them with the pretty blonde on his arm, and they all began discussing politics. Rick even joined in, simply stating that marijuana should be undoubtedly legalized. Lewis nodded obediently and gave responses when necessary; all the while trying to ignore the static fuzz that was beginning to fill his ears. He was suddenly saved by the loud electric guitar that erupted from the speakers; cutting Mary's lecture short. Lewis seized the opportunity and quickly let Rick know that he was going to the alley for a piss. Mary was easily distracted by the band's appearance, so Lewis edged his way through the crowd out the back door.

His ears were ringing as he stepped out into the night air. Down the alley toward the street, the hum of voices and traffic could be heard. A single fluorescent bulb hummed over the door of the pub, a couple moths silently flitting around the warm, tangerine light that spilled onto the wet concrete. Lewis lit a cigarette and watched a cockroach shoot past his shoe. His mind was quiet now, but his body was buzzing. He peered down the alley. Behind the looming historic buildings stretched the road to the cemetery. He pulled another drag of his cigarette and looked up at the street sign. Safe Pl.

"Huh." He laughed. "Safe Place."

He'd never thought about it before. He stared down the alley and the static in his head began to increase again. Suddenly he was running. His legs were throwing him forward; hurdling his body into the shadows of the trees flanking the cobblestone street. He was surprised his legs even had the energy. The muffled sounds of downtown faded away and he was surrounded by the ghostly quiet of the night.

At the end of the road, he saw the gate. Lit only by the moon; its skeletal iron bars glistened, freshly-painted. He hopped over the stone wall surrounding the cemetery and scraped his exposed ankle. He was breathing hard. He jumped down to land in soft grass. For a quiet moment, Lewis was enraptured by the pale headstones littering the grassy hillside. There were thousands. Some bigger, and more elaborate. He could see statues too; of saints, and crosses, and religious figures. All altars for the voiceless ones of this world. Lewis kicked his shoes off and his bare feet sank into the cool blades of grass.

Wandering through the white gravestones, Lewis listened to his own breath. It was too loud and broke the deep, hollow magic of the place. He attempted to quiet it; drawing from his tired lungs with some effort. A tall monument caught his eye. His heart quivered and relaxed as his eyes registered that it was not a living figure; but a towering angel with great, carved wings. He approached her and studied the detail in her white, peaceful face. As he neared the grave, the white noise in his brain increased again and he was unable to hold her gaze. He held his head in his hands and sank to his knees. His skin remembered the weak embrace of a familiar stranger. Soft voice. Cold light and the empty tone of a heart monitor. He remembered a vacant hospital bed and neat sheets. He remembered the ache.

Lewis's chest seemed to break and a reservoir of air flooded from his throat in a desperate scream. His outcry echoed through the trees and he could hear how fucking pathetic he was. Deflated, he fell back into the grass to stare up at the black sky.

"I agree completely."

Lewis bolted upright, startled by the gentle voice that seemed to shatter the silence more than his shout into the dark. His head swiveled around, eyes frantically searching for the source. A thin figure slinked down from a nearby tree.

She stood in the dappled shadows the leaves cast on her face. The silver moonlight glowed on her skin and played in her long, chestnut hair. Her body

was bare, except for a single cord across her body that held some sort of stringed instrument on her back. Mortified, Lewis turn his face from her nakedness.

"Oh my god...I'm so sorry." He wasn't sure why he was apologizing.

"It's fine. This is a safe place for screams." Lewis couldn't see her face very well, but he could vaguely recognize a smile touching her ghostly cheeks.

"What are you doing out here...like that?" His face felt hot. He rubbed his temples. She shrugged, and he envied the shadows that danced across her skin.

"It's a nice night. I was feeling suffocated." Her dark lashes fanned across her cheeks as she looked down at her toe that nudged an acorn on the ground.

"Suffocated?" Lewis's voice was a dead leaf across cement; but her resonance was deafening.

"We all scream in different ways." Her thin shoulders shrugged again and she loped through the grass to lean against the angel statue. Lewis thought she moved like a deer. Graceful; but wary. He could see her face now. Her features were delicate, but somehow there was an element of harshness to her beauty. She was a wisp of smoke, her limbs long and bone-thin. Her skin was almost translucent, blue veins woven beneath it like tiny rivers. Her lips cast a high contrast against the white marble of her face; full, and slightly parted as if she were tasting the air. But Lewis stood frozen beneath her gaze. Her eyes were oceans, the biggest eyes he'd ever seen. Like an owl's. They were the color of music, of a fish's scales, of catnip, or wind, or moonshine. He couldn't be sure.

"What are you doing here?" She eyed him like a cat might eye a string being dragged across carpet. Lewis inhaled. Those eyes could swallow him. He wanted them to.

"I don't know. I guess I also felt suffocated." He knelt before her, shivering.

"Why do you feel suffocated?" She asked, her gaze softening, melting him like candlewax. Yes, pity me. He thought. Anything.

"I..." Lewis inhaled the sharp night air. "I don't feel like I was meant to be human. I feel like I

should have been a grasshopper, or a dandelion, or an orgasm, or something." He trembled. The girl's laugh was a hundred tiny raindrops on his skin; musical, and bubbly like champagne in a crystal glass at a wedding. He wanted it again.

"Wow, it's like you're telepathic." She said, bewildered. "You feel like your physical vessel cannot sustain the complexity of what you are. Like it cannot bear the weight of your essence."

"And maybe, if you'd been birthed into existence as something much more fleeting, and simple, it would have been better-suited for you. For anyone. Existing is madness. It's agony." The words were spilling from him, just like Mary talking about Aristotle. Lewis swallowed.

"It makes you wonder if this is it. If this reality, this life, this existence is all there is." She grew serious. "It makes you wish you could be in someone else's skin. Feel their consciousness. Not just 'live life through their eyes,' but actually know the feeling of someone else's soul. So, maybe you'll know what it is to live in a different universe."

"Universe?" Lewis frowned, puzzled.

"We're all universes. In a small way."

"I'm Lewis." His name fell from his lips like a confession to a priest.

"Mystery." She smirked.

"Your name is Mystery?" Of course it was.

"My parents were born in the sixties." She chuckled.

"Am I hallucinating?" Lewis stared at his hands.

"I don't think so. If you were, that would make my night infinitely more interesting. Which is saying something." She laughed again and Lewis wished to hear that laugh against his collarbone, feel her lips smile against his skin.

"Why do you feel suffocated?" He asked her.

"Same reason as you." She admitted. "But it's also...Something else. Like a sickness. And I want to get better, because everyone around me expects me to. But I can't seem to get well..." She paused. "But some days are different."

"Some days?" Lewis wanted to know about her days. The good, the bad; Lewis wanted to become her good days.

"Some days, I feel awake." She glanced off into the distance at something, some memory Lewis couldn't see. "I feel good. I want more of those days."

"Do you know what makes those days different?" Lewis watched her pearlescent eyes catch the moonlight.

"I'm not sure. I don't know if it's the days that are different, or if it's me that's different." Her hand reached for a delicate silver chain resting on her throat Lewis hadn't noticed before. A pendant dangled from it, a moonstone set in a metallic flower. He wanted to ask about it, and the stringed instrument, but he wanted to learn her as she bloomed, not force her open.

"Maybe it's both." Lewis suggested, watching the moonstone cast rainbows on her throat. She peered at him, like she was searching for something. Lewis hoped he could give it to her, whatever it was. The look disappeared and she straightened. She stepped forward, very slowly. Lewis's mouth went dry. Mystery leaned in close, her mouth a breath from his. Her lamp like eyes held his like a bird hypnotized by a coiled serpent.

She then whispered quietly, "Let me borrow it for a while."

"What?" Lewis choked. Mystery's chuckle was warm and those bright eyes flickered as she observed his features.

"Your soul."

"Heh...Okay?" Lewis grinned nervously. Mystery rose and swiftly departed.

"Where are you going?" The question burst from Lewis's mouth without permission. Her head turned as she danced back into the darkness and trees.

"Back where I came from." She grinned.

"Wait, I want to see you again--" She was already gone. The air in Lewis's lungs rushed from him in a gust of disbelief. He stood there like an idiot for a moment, pulling at his hair, staring off into the glimmering shadows where she had gone.

"Fuck," he muttered. Lewis spent almost an hour looking for his shoes before giving up and walking back barefoot.

"Hey, man! You missed the show!" Rick approached Lewis as he emerged from the trees

and walked into the light that now seemed so different to him. Mary and the others followed closely behind him and Lewis's cheeks burned as their expressions shifted from pleased to concerned. "What happened, dude? Where are your shoes?" Rick placed a heavy hand on Lewis's shoulder and glanced down at his feet.

"I don't know." His mind was a whirl of confusion and overwhelm.

"Are you tweaking?" Frankie asked warily. Mary watched from close behind him, her bored eyes observing with mild disgust. People were flooding from the pub. They were beginning to notice Lewis's lack of shoes and muddy pants. Rick was still talking to him, but he couldn't make sense of any of it.

"Hey, I gotta go home, man. I feel really weird." Lewis pushed past him and trained his eyes on the slick asphalt beneath his chilled toes. Rick called after him.

"Hey, man! You okay? What the fuck happened? And where the fuck are your shoes?" Lewis walked away from them and took the foggy trails through the swamp, toward home. His feet were blistered by the time he reached his doorstep.

"Where did you go, man? Call me ba--." He ignored the four voicemails left by Rick on his answering machine. Lewis shuffled to his room, left his muddy clothes rumpled on the floor, and lay on his bed. He stared at the ceiling. Glimpses of memory granted him those gossamer eyes. Mystery. He could see her name in his mind's eye like a mantra. He dared not say it aloud. He still wasn't even convinced she was real. Is this how teenage girls feel like?

Lewis dreamed of her in the shadows, sprouting flowers. They filled his sheets, bloomed in her hair, they sprang from his skin, they filled his lungs. And her languid form was draped over a throne of sticks and moss. Queen of the marshes, flocked by woodland creatures. Foxes, waterfowl, raccoons, owls, coyotes, alligators, circled around her protectively. She clutched a spotted fawn in her arms, rabbits slept in her lap, birds nested in her

matted hair. Her mouth was smeared with blood. Her eyes were sorrowful. Her voice shook.

“I might kill you too.”

Lewis woke in a tangle of sheets in the cold light of morning. His mouth was still dry. He leapt to his feet to pour himself a full glass of water. He wolfed it down then, still thirsty, guzzled another. After a third glass of water, Lewis sank to the floor of his kitchen, his tired eyes trained on the ghostly pages pinned to the wall. He heard the birds

outside the window. They rendered him unable to leave the dream completely. Lewis relaxed and his erratic breathing calmed. He sat on the wood floor for a moment, staring at the scrapes on his ankles. The birds continued to chirp outside the kitchen window and he let their symphony wash over his sleepless mind as he closed his eyes.

When Lewis stepped outside at eight thirty to leave for work, he found his missing shoes, muddy and scuffed, resting neatly on the doorstep.

Kismet 1

Kyle Hemmings

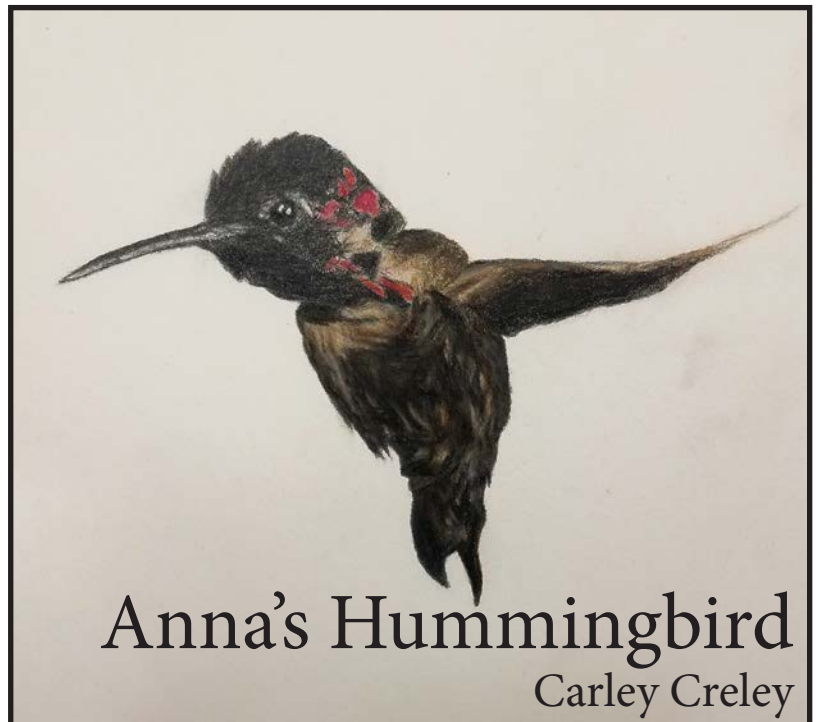


The Phil and Kevin Morning Show

Kevin Ridgeway

I hear the birds chirping at 6 AM
the same time of the morning
my roommate Phil and I brewed
a pot of coffee and chain smoked
cigarettes. Phil turned it into a
program on the animal planet,
describing the chirps and which
types of birds they were coming
from, and noticing the subtle
changes in the formation of
the clouds. He and I argued
about music. One time we
agreed that Michael MacDonald
ruined the Doobie Brothers
but when I came back with
a third cup of joe, he was
jamming to What a Fool
Believes and I said what
the fuck, Phil? He said
he couldn't help it,
MacDonald or no, it
was a good tune. Then
it would become time
for me to shower and
head to my treatment
program and for Phil
to either nap or go on
a fat kid snack cake
shopping spree at the
dollar store, as he
called it. He lost his
job at the golf course,
but still planned to slap
the ball around, and
with a year on the streets
behind him he was not
about to let it get him down.
Now I hear the birds chirping,
but no Phil or his signature
cigarette perched on his lips,
marveling at the simple

pleasures of the world
and making the wind laugh
at us when it blew our cheap
haircuts into sight gags.
He's not here right now as
I drink coffee and smoke
an extra cigarette for him,
and I pay attention to the birds,
the clouds and the tickle of
the wings on Phil's favorite
local hummingbird, all of us
still here after his abrupt
big sleep blew him away
from us to a different place
people argue over in warfare,
the complicated nothingness
of what a fool believe to be
eternal paradise, but that
paradise was right here
at this back porch table
where we talked about
the promise of a new life.



The Fading of _____ Things

Andre Katkov

The Fading of _____ Things.

adjective

The _____ wanes, and with it goes the _____.

noun

noun

The once proud _____ of our forebears has all but _____

noun

verb (past tense)

and the _____ of bygone years

adjective

noun

has come at last to rest inside the _____ of our _____.

place, general

body part (plural)

No longer shall the _____.

noun

verb (present)

No longer shall the _____ carry its/his/her _____,

noun

noun

adverb

drag its/his/her _____ to the _____.

noun

place (any)

When the world was young—that is,

when the _____ still _____ their _____ without fear of _____ and _____,

noun (plural)

verb (past tense)

noun (plural)

noun (plural)

noun (plural)

when the _____ was still _____ and the _____ ing _____ of _____

noun

adjective

verb noun (singular or plural)

famous person

still _____ in the _____ fields of our youth—yes, in those days

verb (past tense)

adjective

_____ was more than just a distant dream.

abstract noun

But now the _____ wilt(s) and even _____ die.

noun (plural)

noun (plural)

Somewhere in _____, the _____ cry,

place (specific)

occupation (plural)

“ _____ , _____ .”

question

question

to which _____, solemn and grim, replies, “ _____ .”

name of volunteer

statement (fact or imperative)

The _____ wanes, and with it goes the _____. ß(Repetition of first line)

and here in _____, slowly, we forget how to _____.

place this piece is being read

something important

Last Words

Elida Tato

My dear darling,
It hurts me to say
That little by little
The memory of your face
Simply faded away.
Though, i remember the smell
And your last words
“Everything will be ok”
And you closed your eyes
and I kept mine open.
For you, for us,
for the “what could have been”
And forgive me if i am mean
For keeping, in your name, my heart cold as ice.
So many came after,
And indeed they brought me laughter
Sometimes they made me feel like home
But the moment i thought of you,
Darling,
All I wanted from them was to be gone.
And your words keep following me
And I cannot simply move on
Tell me, love, how am I supposed to live
If everything about you is gone.
So many years have gone by
I can barely remember your voice
Please, darling, tell me if i have another choice
Than to give up
And kneel to goodbye.
Hence you see nobody has taken your place
And after all this time
I doubt someone could
My feelings are dizzy in your maze
...
If someone could make me forget your last words
Please, please, please
Forgive me darling but i would.
And I hope your memory can forgive me
But I desperately need to move on
I will forever be yours
Darling
But these
are my last words.

Blank Canvas

Alyssa Gonzalaz

My future was once made of fireworks
Exploding with vibrant sensations
My life was planned like a novel
And drenched in my elders' elation

My future is now a blank canvas
And all my inspiration is gone
It vanished with all of my innocence
It is a toneless, rhythm less song

My hands can tell no more stories
My eyes are lifeless and grey
My mouth speaks nothing but nonsense
And my words are worthless to say

When your future is planned to perfection
And crafted from everyone's mind
The dreams you dreamt as a child
Are forced to be left behind

My dreams were painted in watercolor
So fragile, so dainty, so frail
And drenched in sparkling water
That erased every delicate detail

My future is empty like space
Vast and covered in darkness
No one told me when I was a child
That obligation would act as a harness

Yet in my future, I also see stars
Far and not close to the touch
But each step I take gets me closer
To what I dreamt when I was young

Though I know not where life plans to lead me
Wherever I am meant to be lead
As long as my dreams are beside me
My future is not something to dread

My future is now a blank canvas
But like a masterpiece yet to be made
I will repaint my dreams with fervor
And proudly put them on display

Contributors' Biographies

Joanna Brock is an artist, a poet, a lover, a blank canvas, a shell, an outline and like everyone else, a work in progress. She is both passionate and compassionate as she continues to work hard as an English major at Crafton Hills College to carve out her place in the world.

Steven Brunelle is a student at Crafton Hills College. He majors in English Literature, and both reading, and writing have been passions ever since the earliest childhood days of elementary school. He has just recently begun to pick up pace with his writing and plans on 2018 being his breakout year.

Patricia Chavez is an artist based out of San Timoteo Canyon. She primarily focuses on Realism within her works. She enjoys traveling to new places in search for her next great inspiration.

Naomi Cheney is a fledgling artist and writer attending Crafton Hills College in Southern California. Her hobbies include: aggressive doodling, sarcasm, quitting smoking, watching pretentious movies, and writing similarly pretentious poetry and fiction. She is currently "working on a novel" (or script); the title, characters, and plot of which will change countless times by the time it (eventually) reaches publication.

Carly Creley is an environmental artist and educator in Los Angeles. She works in acrylic, oil, pastel, colored pencil, and photography. In addition to painting and teaching, she conducts scientific research, which is reflected in her artwork. She loves to hike, camp, and share the natural world she loves with others.

Pamela Donahue is a former Managing Editor for *The Sand Canyon Review* (2012 edition). She has a passion for classic art, especially art from the Baroque era. She also loves to write and make jewelry. A Redlands, California resident for 36 years, she lives with her handsome hubby and youngest son.

Ellen Drummonds is a Humanities major about to graduate with her second degree, soon pursuing a Religious Studies major and Creative Writing minor at University of Redlands. She aims to reach and teach and heal through her understanding of language and spirituality and ways they connect with and aid each other.

Thomas Elson divides his time between Kansas and Northern California. His short stories, poetry, and flash fiction have been published in the United States, Ireland, Canada, England, and Wales in such journals as the *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Oracle Fine Arts*, *Calliope*, *Lunaris Journal*, *The New Ulster*, *The Lampeter*, *Blood & Bourbon*, and *Adelaide Literary Magazine*.

Jennifer Engel has taught art at Redlands High School for 31 years where she co-advises the RHS Literary Journal. Her writing focus has been poetry; however, she's branching out into short stories. Her goal is to write a series of short stories based on the major arcana of the Tarot. "Audrey's Tale" was inspired by the Strength Card.

Melanie Faith is an English professor, tutor, auntie, and photographer. She sometimes teaches online with a mug of tea and chocolate at the ready. She loves visiting the Butterfly Palace with her darling nieces. This spring, she's teaching a dream class she created: photography for writers. Recent publications include a poetry collection, "This Passing Fever", and *In a Flash* and *Poetry Power*. Read more about her writing, photography, and publications at: <https://www.melaniefaith.com/blog/>

Wes Fink is an aspiring writer from California's most beautiful wasteland; the high desert. His inspirations mainly consist of authors that you have heard of but are probably not really interested in reading. He currently resides in Calimesa, California and is majoring in English at Crafton.

Savannah Fisher's best friend is Catharsis, Stephen King is a personal hero, sometimes she writes things that only make sense to her, and sometimes she writes things that are more relatable, more often than not she just reads everything in sight.

Jessica Gilfillan is a school teacher, yoga instructor, and student of the universe. When she is not working, you can find her trying to become the best version of herself through much trial and error.

Alyssa Gonzalez is currently a student at Crafton Hills College majoring in English. Due to her overactive imagination and extreme love for storytelling, she has been inspired to write stories and poems from a small age. Due to the support and encouragement of family and friends, she continues to write in her free time with the goal of someday having her work published.

Sarah Hauser is studying English at Crafton Hills College. She wants to teach English upon graduating from a four-year university. She has and continues to travel across the United States and Europe. These travels often ensue in confusingly serendipitous misadventures that inspire her writing. She lives off coffee and compliments.

Kyle Hemmings is a retired health care worker. His visual art has been featured in Sonic Boom, Rush, Peacock Journal, Sunlight Press, and elsewhere. He loves French Impressionism, street photography, and obscure garage bands of the 60s.

André Katkov is an artist, arteest, poet, and poeet from Redlands, California. He holds and MFA from CSUSB, is pursuing his PhD at URI, and likes his pizza plain, thank you very much. He has been published places and tries to sleep nightly.

R. Keith is the author of *Some Little Pricks* (Alien Buddha Press), *Chicken Scratch* (EYEAMEYE books), *Background* (inquierto press), *How to design a hail storm* (Another new calligraphy), *Signature Move* (Knives Forks and Spoons) and *re: verbs* (Bareback editions), as well as six chapbooks.

Katie Keridian writes to understand the worlds within and without. She is passionate about creative expression and to that end, she is trying to get more of her writing out in front of readers. Eventually, she hopes to make the transition from healthcare provider to full-time writer. When she's not writing fantasy or poetry, she's talking about it with her yellow Labrador, Dante, or the humans who are kind enough to listen to her endless musings and love her anyway.

Jade Landrum is a 20-year-old artist from Redlands, California. She has always had a passion for art since she was a small child. She loves taking photos, writing poetry, singing, sculpting and basically anything that lets her be creative and expressive. Lately, she's been taking photos on her Nikon D3400.

Jackie Leonard is the creator and editor of the *Like A Woman Series*. *Like A Woman Series* is an online magazine and community featuring contributor essays that celebrate, support and promote women-centered endeavors, that inform and critique current women's issues, and most importantly, connect women to other women. Jackie has an MFA in Creative Writing from California State University, San Marcos. She lives in San Diego with her husband and son.

James Lewandowski is an English Major at Crafton Hills College, currently living in Yucaipa, CA; currently transferring to CSUSB (Cal State University of San Bernardino). He's continuing as an English major to pursue a career as an educator. He has been writing poetry off and on since he was a sulky teenager, continuing to do so (off and on) as a man-child.

Connie Major states, "Clay is clean dirt and I love to play in it." Her first ceramic class was in 1967, her first year of college. She became a Scout Merit Badge counselor and taught cultural ceramics at Bowers Museum, Santa Ana to school groups on field trips. In 2003, she decided to go back to college and become a ceramic artist. Her work has been in many shows, winning awards and recognition. She enjoys making pieces that require thought from the viewer, not just a pretty face.

Yana Maru is a queer, trans-nonbinary artist and musician from San Bernardino. They come from a conservative, SDA, Filipinx background, so it was difficult pushing through and following their passion for art and music. They vend at shows and art walks with their pop up shop @Pixie_Occult. They are also in a jazz, neosoul band called The Black Mystery Snails. Most of their art is mixed media or assemblage pieces. They also enjoy incorporating iridescent things and, of course, glitter.

Joan McNerney's poetry has been included in numerous literary zines such as *Moonlight Dreamers of Yellow Haze*, *Seven Circle Press*, *Dinner with the Muse*, *Blueline*, *Halcyon Days* and included in *Bright Hills Press*, *Kind of A Hurricane Press* and *Poppy Road Review* anthologies. She has been nominated four times for Best of the Net.

Clark Morrow attended classes at the Screen Actor's Workshop in Hollywood, which led to roles in the CBS TV-movie *The Amazing Howard Hughes* (1977), and *Night Patrol* (1984). He has been a newscaster for radio station KBON-FM, and co-hosted – over a period of four years -- a weekly radio program on both KTIE 590AM and KVCR 91.9 FM. For 13 years, Clark wrote a monthly column for the web-magazine "The Vocabula Review" edited by the well-known Robert Hartwell Fiske.

Joseph Mill is a faculty member at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. He has published several collections of poetry with Press 53, most recently *Exit pursued by a bear and Angels, Thieves*, and *Winemakers* (2nd edition). Currently, he's working on a fiction manuscript of entitled "Bleachers." More information about his work is available at www.josephrobertmills.com.

Ivan de Monbrison is a French poet, writer, and artist who lives in Paris and Marseille. His poems or short stories have appeared in several literary magazines in France, Italy, Belgium, The UK, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, and in the US.

Andy N. is the author of the poetry books *Return to Kemptown* and *The end of Summer*. He is currently working on his next poetry book *Birth of Autumn*.

Sebenzile Ngwenya was born and raised in Soweto. God, family, sports and music are the most important things in life. He started writing poems as a hobby and then developed a greater liking for it. The poems he writes are based on the emotions or inspired by music and movies. He writes poetry to entertain and inspire other people to better themselves and that through them, they will learn and most importantly, know how strong and mighty God is.

Elisabet Nicholas is currently attending the University of Alaska Anchorage, working on her B.S. in Chemistry with an aspiration to attend med school and become a neurosurgeon. In her spare time she enjoys cheerleading, writing poetry, singing, eating potatoes, and reading the Harry Potter series to her kitten, Snöflinga.

Kevin Ridgeway lives and writes in Southern California. Recent work has appeared in *Chiron Review*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *Spillway*, *BIG HAMMER*, *Gravel Magazine*, *Olentangy Review*, *Riverside City College's Muse Magazine*, *Dryland Lit*, *Lummox and Cultural Weekly*, among others. His chapbooks of poetry include *Burn Through Today* (Flutter Press, 2012), *All the Rage* (Electric Windmill Press, 2013), *On the Burning Shore* (Arroyo Seco Press, 2014), and *Contents Under Pressure* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2015).

W. Jack Savage is a retired broadcaster and educator. He is the author of eight books including *Imagination: The Art of W. Jack Savage* (wjacksavage.com). To date, more than fifty of Jack's short stories and over a thousand of his paintings and drawings have been published worldwide. Jack and his wife Kathy live in Monrovia, California.

Samantha Scott has been writing poetry as long as she can remember. This particular set is especially meaningful to her because it represents a journey. She met a girl last year who quickly became her best friend and the person she trusted most in the world. She fell head over heels, hopelessly, unwaveringly in love with her. But she was straight. Then one night she broke down crying and told Samantha that she had fallen in love with her, but didn't know what it meant, and she was afraid of what it would change. After many hours of talking, they both admitted that they wanted to be together, even with the risks. "If this isn't kismet, I don't know what is."

Aubrey Stack is a writer, painter, and scientist living in Yucaipa, California.

Elida Tato grew up in Galicia, Spain, writing since the age of 13. She published her poetry in a blog called "La Gaceta de Medianoche" leading her to study Literature and Linguistics in Spain and The Netherlands. She co- founded the first Literary Magazine of the writers of Bratislava. She is also a slam poet, making it

to the finals in the Clash of Languages battle by the Goethe Institute and Fountain Poetry. Despite her young age Élida has traveled around forty countries. Currently living in Australia, she likes writing about daily life struggles and life choices.

Elisa Grajeda-Urmston is an artist/musician/poet and college instructor, but is probably best known as the front person/guitarist/vocalist for the band Caliente. Elisa is a native southern Californian, raised in San Diego and currently makes her home in the Mojave Desert. She earned her MFA from Cal-Sate San Bernardino. Her book, *Sound Check*—a semi-autobiographical story told through a series of poems—is available from Jamii Press.

Vivian Wagner lives in New Concord, Ohio, where she teaches English at Muskingum.

Mercedes Webb-Pullman received her MA in Creative Writing in 2011 from the IIML Victoria University Wellington New Zealand. Her work has appeared online and in print in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, USA, UK, Ireland, Spain, Germany, India, Patagonia and Palestine. She lives in Paraparaumu Beach, New Zealand.

Daniel Weinell is a storyteller, irrespective of medium. Though his technical training is in creative fiction; games, film, and art remain creative outlets for him. He is fascinated with the exploration of human psychology, relationships, and decision making and his prose reflects those elements, though often through the lens of science fiction and fantasy.

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ARTISTS, WRITERS, POETS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS

Crafton Hills College's
Annual Literary and Art Magazine

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW

IS CURRENTLY ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS
for our "UNDER BELLY" themed 2019 issue!

Please keep these limits in mind:
10 pages of Fiction, Non-Fiction or Flash Fiction
3-5 pieces of Art and Photography
3-5 pages of Poetry

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in the subject line. Submissions should include a cover page
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