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An Earthen Levee

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Author Bio

Brendan Raleigh is a senior English major. He is a tutor at the Writing Center and the editor of The Gettysburgian, Gettysburg College's student newspaper.

An Earthen Levee

Brendan Raleigh

Arrows glance
off a suit of plate.
It is unpierced,
but, beneath it,
small, steel barbs
scrape and tear through skin
with every motion.
The arrows and gashes
go unacknowledged
until death
manages to seep through.

A man stands at the base
of a skyscraper.
He pulls a cigarette from his lips,
taking in the poison and trading it
for a thin film
of composure.
He blows smoke out into the city air.

It is a cold day
and crowded.
A day ago,
all that would have left his mouth
was water vapor.

A day ago,
the wind would have blown
right through him.

Large brown eyes,

like a young girl's,
stare back at the leaves,
and perhaps through them.

Little hunks of cloven keratin
crush puddles of leaves.
Along with the eyes,
they are ignored, as they must be,
and a shot is fired.

A levee was constructed
along the river
from the dirt and sediment
that had washed over
for many years.

The residents nearby
cannot tell if,
with each wave,
the levee is reinforced
or eroded.

You said the white tree was a hand,
and hands were more mouth than mouths were,
your gesture cut short by a look
and a whisper at the dinner table.
I wish you had advice for me, Uncle of mine,
but prophecy swirls in your head, disordered.
Everything resonates in colors and voices unseen.
Instead, spin me a memoir of a life that didn't happen;
translate into words the things the moon showed to you.