



# THE MERCURY

THE STUDENT ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

---

Year 2019

Article 1

---

1-1-2019

## The Mercury 2019

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury>

 Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

**Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.**

---

(2019) "The Mercury 2019," *The Mercury*: Year 2019, Article 1.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2019/iss1/1>

This open access complete issue is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

# The Mercury 2019

## **Author Bio**

THE MERCURY  
The Art and Literary Magazine of  
Gettysburg College  
2019

## HISTORY & PROCESS

The Mercury is a student-run art and literary magazine released each April. It has been published annually since 1899 at Gettysburg College. All students of the college are invited to submit their work for possible publication. Editors are elected annually by the entire staff. Submissions are reviewed and selected anonymously by the staff each year during winter break.

## EVENTS

The Mercury holds a publication reception each year and participates in campus events such as the Activities Fair, Get Acquainted Day, and co-sponsored events with Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honor Society. In 2019, The Mercury hosted its eighth annual open mic night, an opportunity for students to read their work in a formal setting.

## THE MERCURY PRIZE

Each year, the staff awards a monetary prize to the best piece of work published in each genre. We would like to thank the judges for 2019: Grace Timko (Fiction), Nazli Inal (Nonfiction), Ela Thompson (Poetry), and Erica Schaumberg (Art). The Mercury Prize-winning titles are bolded in the Table of Contents. This year's winners are: **(Fiction)**, Dylan Prazak (Nonfiction), **(Poetry)**, May Lonergan (Art).

## PUBLISHING

The Mercury was printed this year by The Sheridan Press in Hanover, Pennsylvania. We would like to thank The Sheridan Press, especially Kathi Ortman, for their support this year. This is the eleventh environmentally-friendly edition of The Mercury, printed on paper from sustainable-harvest forests with soy-based inks. The Mercury is part of The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College, an online, open-access repository hosted by Musselman Library.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Mercury would like to thank the Provost's Office and the English Department for their contributions. Another note of gratitude goes to magazine advisor, Kathryn Rhett, and a special thanks to all students who contributed to The Mercury by sending in their work or serving as staff members. Staff readers invested a tremendous amount of time evaluating and selecting submissions, and we greatly appreciate their dedication. We believe that these combined efforts make The Mercury an eclectic publication that reflects the creativity of the student body of Gettysburg College.

# THE MERCURY 2019 STAFF

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF: Jessica McManness and Ellianie Vega

PRODUCTION EDITORS: Jessica McManness and Ellianie Vega, *Spring*  
Sidney Caccioppoli, *Fall*

MANAGING EDITOR: Mackenzie Smith

FICTION EDITOR: Natalie Orga

NONFICTION EDITOR: Ellianie Vega

POETRY EDITOR: Lisa Maeyer

ART EDITOR: Autumn Brendle

PUBLIC RELATIONS: Aubrey Link

EVENT PLANNING: Jessica McManness, *Spring*  
Mackenzie Smith, *Fall*

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Julia Chin, Madison Cramer, Cameron  
D'Amica, Phoebe Doscher, Kira Goodwin, Aubrey Link, Jackie  
McMahon, and Ryan Sipple

FACULTY ADVISOR: Kathryn Rhett

COVER ARTWORK:  
*from "Gammel Strand" by Melissa Casale*

*Cover design by Jessica McManness and Ellianie Vega*

# THE MERCURY

*Note: Prize-winning titles are listed in bold*

## FICTION

---

- RYAN SIPPLE    *The Hug Monster, 13*
- BETHANY FRANKEL    *Time is On My Side, 26*
- CHRIS CHICK    *In the Valley, 41*
- VERA EKHATOR    *And On That Day, 55*
- MEGHAN JOYCE    *Outside The Lines, 66*
- NATALIE ORGA    *Hide and Seek, 79 and Mirrors, 91*
- JACKIE MCMAHON    *Still Life, 97*
- AUBREY LINK    *Discovery, 101*
- THADDEUS CWIKLINSKI    *Sheeransanity, 103*
- CLAIRE BICKERS    *The Blackberry Pickers, 122*

## NONFICTION

---

- MACKENZIE SMITH    *Death on Display, 7*
- SARAH TOKAR    *Beyond the Gray Green Gate, 17*
- CHRIS CHICK    *God in Retrospect, 50*
- MAY LONERGAN    *Womanhood, 75*
- JULIA CHIN    *Four Personalities in a Canoe, 111*
- DYLAN PRAZAK    ***A View with a Lake, 119***

## POETRY

---

- DEVIN MCPEEK    *Dizzy with the Deepness of Time, 12*

- BETHANY FRANKEL    *Bonedigger, 21*
- MAY LONERGAN    *Birthday, 24*
- REBECCA CAMPO    *Flower Girl, 31*
- LISA MAEYER    *Ghost Flowers, 33 and Sea Glass, 37*
- CHARLES STERNBERG    *Blue Picnic Blanket Blues, 39*
- CHRIS CHICK    *And Sometimes, Thorns, 47*
- TIMOTHY BLACK    *Patchwork, 60*
- JULIA CHIN    *Origami Love Lessons, 63 and First Person  
Plural Nonexistent, 64*
- REBECCA MONTROSS    *Like Baby Birds and Flower Petals  
Opening, 127*

## ART

- MAY LONERGAN    *Colorful Daydream, 6 and **Ominous Sky**,  
36 and Gettysburg Grounds, 40 and Open Up, 118*
- REBECCA CALLAGHAN    *Sunflower Sunset, 30 and Booth-  
bay Harbor, Maine, 110*
- MELISSA CASALE    *Nyhavn, 35 and Gammel Strand, 65*
- NOA LEIBSON    *A Plague that Aches, 49*
- VERA EKHATOR    *A Rose is a Rose, 71 and Fashion Forward,  
74 and Gods in Modernity, 95 and Apple of His London Eye, 96 and  
Work Break, 131*
- NATALIE ORGA    *The Creation of a Good Boy, 72*

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS, 132

JUDGE BIOGRAPHIES, 135



## Colorful Daydream

MAY LONERGAN



# Death on Display

KENZIE SMITH

I'm currently attempting to raise eight small plants; seven are varieties of succulents and one is a tree. Each one is unique, separated into a few different pots and glasses based on size and aesthetics. They reside on my desk, adding a vibrant pop of green and earthy brown to my day as I sit for hours and do my work. I water them when they look thirsty.

The first of my plants was purchased at Home Depot. I was running errands for my family, picking up blue paint for the room I was redecorating as a present for my father, and became distracted by the intricacy of the succulent display. It struck me as odd that the potted plants were so diverse, and yet they were all classified as "succulents" (the latin root *sucus* means juice or sap, which describes the fleshy, water-filled leaves of the arid-climate plant). Some were round and wide with tiered leaves like flattened pompoms. Others were tall and lanky with bubble-like protruding stems. Some were vibrant green, others yellow or pink with tiny red hats on the tips of their leaves. It was mesmerizing to see them all lined up in orderly rows; like a cute little army of plants, armed with weapons of beauty, waging war on the drabness of the hardware store. I picked out the nicest one- a squat fellow named *Sempervivum arachnoideum*. (*Sempervivum arachnoideum* are unique for their "cob-web" like filaments. I admit, I brushed these off the plant, not knowing they were both a defining feature and a survival tactic.) I then searched eleven grocery, craft, and dollar stores for the perfect glass in which to plant him. A week later, I transplanted my *Sempervivum arachnoideum* into a different glass that I felt suited his personality better. I replanted him again when I purchased the next six succulents. And then I moved him again. He has lost a large number of petals from the stress of the transitions.

My favorite of the succulents is a *Sedum adolphii*, and she sits alone in a shot glass full of topsoil (and gravel for proper drainage). I bought her because she reminded me of a sunflower reaching its head toward the sky; strong in its stature, held up by a thick stem. Still, with plump leaves, her face is much heavier than the stem itself. Perhaps that is why, like a drooping sunflower, the stem eventually bent with the weight of it. The rot started below the soil, unseen, using the stem as a pathway for death.

My tree is a maple sapling tucked neatly into a stout jar that used to hold maple syrup. I thought it would be an ironic form of poetic justice. (I didn't have an *Acer saccharum* sapling, the kind of maple that makes maple

sugar and syrup, as those are found north of where I live in New Jersey. Instead, I used an *Acer rubrum*, or “Red Maple,” which in reality is very different, but I think still holds symbolic weight.) I found the stunted leafy stem in my garden, right next to the side of my house. I knew the shadow of the house would have severely limited the sunlight he received, and maple trees need partial to full sun exposure. The lining of the flower bed also would have prevented root growth. He would have died there over the winter without a properly established root system and enough photosynthesized food stored away. I thought I was saving him by moving him into my little jar. But now he throws down leaves in protest of his new home.

I’m currently attempting to raise five small plants.

\*\*\*

I used to have a hermit crab on my desk instead of plants. My family and I were in North Carolina in January 2018, and my sister and I were sent out to pick up groceries. We spotted a surf shop that was having a sale on commemorative t-shirts and trinkets and couldn’t resist, so we paused our mission to explore. I found a display of hermit crab tanks, shells, sand, and food. The sign boasted a sale of one dollar for each item. My sister and I were excited because, at 21 and 19 years old, we’d missed out on the classic hermit crab experience as children. We bought the tanks and called seven different pet stores along the coast until we found one that still sold hermit crabs in the middle of winter. She named hers Shelly, for obvious reasons, and I named mine Bum, because he didn’t move much. We bought heat-pads to keep their crustacean bodies warm, but soon realized that the coils in the pads were too strong and would melt their tanks (and probably fry them) if we used them. I lost the receipt, so we couldn’t return them.

At the end of the week, my family and I returned home, and then my sister and I to our respective colleges in their respective states. My sister’s hermit crab died within the first three weeks of her adoption. When hermit crabs know they’re dying, they vacate their shells so another crab can use it and bury themselves in a small grave in the sand. My sister watched all this with disgusted curiosity, thinking her pet was changing shells. She only knew Shelly had died when I told her to keep a nose out for the fishy smell of rotting crab.

Bum lived a bit longer. I left him with a friend over spring break because I was going on a school trip. I had limited cell service on my trip, so when I finally came back in range, I received a flood of panicked messages from my friend asking me what to do if Bum wasn’t in his shell, then asking how hermit crabs die, and a final devastating one informing me of his death. When I returned to retrieve Bum’s corpse for a proper hermit crab funeral (flush), I discovered that the crab was in fact very much alive and my friend had been looking in the wrong shell. But he hadn’t been feeding him or

giving him water. After that, Bum was lethargic for a few days as he tried to regain his strength from a week of neglect, but he persevered.

Over summer break, I took another trip. I asked my sister to care for my hermit crab. I knew hers had died within only a few short weeks of her care, but I remained hopeful. When I returned two weeks later, my sister told me she didn't remember me asking her to look after the ugly little crab. Maybe I didn't. (If anyone needs a hermit crab habitat, I no longer have use for mine).

\*\*\*

Before Bum, I kept fish. I had a beautiful one gallon fish bowl with blue and clear rocks lining the bottom and a live plant to provide shelter for my shy, scaly friends. My first two fish were named Tiny and Bit; I intentionally picked out the runts of the school. They were of the same breed of goldfish, Ryukin (the ones with the rounded bellies). I enjoyed watching their shiny golden bodies reflect the colors of the blue gravel as they swam about in their small tank. But Bit died within the first two days. I brought him back to Walmart and asked for a refund, because they had clearly sold me a defective fish. The woman working the customer service desk had to ask her manager for help because they'd never had someone return a dead fish to their store. I knew they would administer the refund, though, because this happened to me twice as a kid. Tiny lived for another few months, until one day his gold faded and he became very pale. His fins fluttered less often, and his gills seemed labored. (As it turns out, goldfish produce more ammonia, a toxic excretory chemical, than most other domestic fish. As such, they need lots of space and proper filtration to ensure they don't suffocate. Much more than a one gallon tank).

I decided to try something smaller for my tank, so I ventured to PetSmart and purchased three guppies. (Many people think that "guppy" is a name for baby fish, but it is in fact its own species, *Poecilia reticulata*). I named them Blub, Chub, and Glub; Blub made lots of bubbles, Chub was larger than his two adoptive brothers, and Glub simply fit the naming convention. I'd sit at my desk with an open neglected textbook and watch them dart back and forth, opening their petite mouths to collect the food I gave them, blowing bubbles, flicking their colored snub tails back and forth. I came home one morning from biology class and found Blub floating like one of his bubbles. I determined the brothers died of broken hearts, since Chub followed a week later, and Glub a day or two after that.

I put my fish tank away.

\*\*\*

When I first entered college, before the fish and the hermit crab and the plants, I had decorated my desk with cut flowers. I would drive or walk to the grocery store every other week, and along with my assortment of fruit snacks, chips, cheeses, and iced-tea, I'd purchase a bouquet or two of flowers.

Spray mums usually acted as my base, with accents of daisies or baby's breath. Occasionally, when I wanted something a little more elegant, I'd spring for calla lilies. My Grandma hated calla lilies; she said they always reminded her of death. But I loved the way the strong, tall stems reached out of my dollar store vases and the delicate petals gently hugged their middles, protecting their hearts from the world.

I'd bring my flowers back to my dorm, arrange them, and watch them as they'd slowly wilt over the next week or two. The petals would fall, the stem would droop, and dark spots would appear on the leaves. But they were gorgeous as they died.

Perhaps I shouldn't say I'd watch them die, because cut flowers are already dead. They've been pulled from their roots, stripped of their nutrients, drowned in a vase of water and placed on a table for all to witness. I wonder if they were aware of their inevitable tragedy.

\*\*\*

On January 19, 2017, I sat in a room full of death; each of the four beige walls were lined with tables and pedestals that spilled over with bouquets of cut flowers. There were red roses and snapdragons, pink tulips, orange tropical lilies, yellow mini-roses, green ferns and baby blue eucalyptus for filler, indigo carnations and stacies, and white calla lilies. The only color missing from the flowers was black, but the attire in the room more than made up for it.

It's interesting how many people send bouquets to funerals. It seems like a nice gesture, a sympathetic attempt to provide beauty in a time of grief. But they don't understand that they are only sending more death. And people send too many flowers. It's almost as if they think the number of petals indicates their level of love and the extent of their grief, or in some cases, that the large bouquets excuse them from showing up in person. As if any of us want to be there at all.

Most Catholic funeral services take two days maximum: one for the wake and one for the mass and burial. Other religions take more time to publicly grieve and honor. Those who practice Hinduism observe thirteen days of formal mourning, and perform a remembrance service known as Sradha one year after the death. Islam dictates a mourning period of forty days. In the Jewish custom, the mourning period lasts thirty days; one week for Shiva and three for Shloshim. Buddhists hold memorial services up to one-hundred days after the loved one's passing.

But Catholics are only allotted two days during which we must perform all of our mourning (even though Jesus received three). And when these two days are over, and the mourners have returned to their lives, what happens to the remnants of the service? Where do all the flowers go? They are relegated the family members, who have to watch them slowly die on their

table until they can no longer stand to watch another living thing wilt away to nothing.

I didn't enjoy my grandmother's funeral service. There were too many tears, we ran out of cream cheese for the bagels, and there were far too many calla lilies. I hate calla lilies. They remind me of death.

\*\*\*

I gave up on cut flowers in February of 2017. I had watched too much death that year, and found it far too ugly. I wanted to care for something and see it grow stronger, not wither in my hands. I wanted to see life flow from the ground, as opposed to seeing a life put into it. I wanted to love something and refuse to let it be taken from me.

But after five floating fish, a crustacean corpse, and eight plants returning to soil, I fear I am no longer the witness but the executioner.

My friends were always concerned when I adopted a new living thing. They claimed it'd be dead in a few weeks, if not days, but I waved off their (incredibly valid) concerns. I was naively hopeful. Maybe this time, I would finally cheat death. I never meant for them to die. But everything does.

\*\*\*

I went to the store today. I walked right through the flower section with my head down, knowing that after a year and a half, a bouquet of calla lilies still has the potential to break my heart. But just beyond the cut flowers was a display of air plants. I stopped. They were cheap and seemed easy to care for. They're like Betty Crocker recipes, but instead of "just add water," I'd just add sunlight.

I continued on and tried to forget about them as I kept shopping, but I returned to the display before I checked out. I stood there for a long while, examining each plant for pre-existing flaws that might lead to an early death, calculating the worth of the purchase, contemplating the value of the life. What if I kill this one, too?

I bought it. We'll see.

# Dizzy With the Deepness of Time

DEVIN MCPEEK

I am a person in a place with a problem  
and it's 1a.m. and solving that problem  
seems like the least logical thing to do  
and though the Earth continues to revolve and rotate  
and my ceiling fan continues to turn  
I don't think anything could possibly be spinning as fast as my head.  
Time is relevant, they say.  
It is nameless and faceless and ceaseless  
and I have lost myself in my obsession  
with the measurement of it  
and I have made myself dizzy  
with turning clocks and ceiling fans  
and the ever-revolving, ever-rotating Earth  
that simply does not stop  
for all of the people in places with problems.

# The Hug Monster

RYAN SIPPLE

“Look me in the eye, Ihsan.”

Normally, after school Ihsan would at least have an hour of relative peace, since her mother worked until 4:00 and her father was usually passed out in the living room when she was dropped off from elementary school. First grade was hard and loud and too many classmates touched her; she hid from them in the bushes during recess and was forced out by the playground monitor. That caused a meltdown. But Ihsan was home now, and she could finally hug Flacco, the fluffiest, comfiest, cuddliest dog in all the world, and curl up against the carpet to take a very, very long nap.

But her mother was home early today. The onslaught had begun.

“You heard me, Ihsan. Look me in the eye.”

Why must we do these endless drills? Why does Mama want to see my eyes so bad? I hate looking at her eyes - anybody’s eyes. She knows that. Eye contact makes my face boil and sting like rats scurrying across my cheeks and between my skin and bones. Why do you make me hurt so much, Mama? Why do you want this?

All this and more Ihsan thought in between her mother’s questions, her eyes darting between her shoes. Just one of the many drills Ihsan’s mother and “therapist” subjected her to. Make eye contact, hug Mama and Papa, talk to the therapist and listen to his inane questions, even though the sound of his voice scrapes against the ears like sandpaper against a baby’s crying face. All to make Ihsan more presentable, more agreeable. More normal.

“Look me in the eye, Ihsan. I won’t ask again.”

Some days Ihsan could cope with this unrelenting pressure, or at least accept it quietly until her mother finally stopped and let her take solace in her room. But this day Ihsan could take no more.

Just as Ihsan’s mother moved to grab her daughter’s face, forcing eye contact as she has done so often before, Ihsan cried out a warrior’s shriek and slammed her hands against her mother. She whipped her arm back to catch Ihsan, but she was gone, speeding down the hallway and out the sliding glass door. Without a hat, without a coat, without even a pair of shoes, Ihsan bolted through the backyard, running without regard for direction or physical limitation. Her mother was shouting from the sliding glass door, but Ihsan was far too awash in the flood of emotions to make her words out clearly. Ihsan had no destination but forward and no purpose except to run far away.

She was not immediately pursued. Maybe Ihsan's mother was more concerned with putting on shoes than chasing her daughter into the woods, or maybe she was already calling the police; both were possible. Eventually Ihsan's sheer force of will was forced to give way to the realities of oxygen, and she collapsed on the edge of the woods, not far behind her house. Ihsan, of course, was never trusted in the woods, not even with her parents, but she loved to gaze between the pines whenever she helped let Flacco out into the backyard. In the fall, when wind storms made the trees dance like bowling pins ready to strike the ground, they were all Ihsan would stare at, sinking into their world. She was about to do so once more, far more dramatically.

Ihsan could hear the rushing water even from the edge of the woods, and her throat ached with equal parts thirst and exhaustion. As best she could, she slipped between the trees, looming far above her tiny head, and followed the rushing, its rhythmic flow calming her overloaded mind. At last she came to the river, which was much smaller than she was hoping, but the water seemed perfectly refreshing. Ihsan pressed her body against the water-front, lapping the water into her hands and against her face, basking in the sharp punch of the water's coolness. Had she not laid onto the shaky dirt part of the riverbed, she might not have fallen. But she did, and without warning the dirt gave way beneath her, and she splashed into the river. If only she could swim.

As she sank beneath the whirling waters, Ihsan felt all the senses that pricked and prodded at her lift away, like arms pulling away from a much too lengthy hug. While others would have grasped for air, Ihsan let the river envelop her, the watery blanket wrapping around her, tighter and yet far more warmly than any of the hugs she had ever been subjected to. Just when she was ready to go to sleep in this all-encompassing blanket, she felt teeth wrap themselves around her leg, pulling her towards the surface with surprisingly little force. The last thing she saw before her eyes fell shut was the sunken face of a miserable creature.

Ihsan was awakened by a piercing screech. She was lying face down in a grass clearing, the rush of water still lurking in the background, but more distantly than before. The grass felt not unlike Flacco's wonderful coat of fur, but the shrieking forced her to pull away and sit upright, to stop that terrible noise. She opened her eyes and found herself sitting face to face with the monster. A more miserable creature she had never seen before, except perhaps in the mirror during her meltdowns.

The monster was lanky and flimsy-looking; his skin barely fit loosely over his bones. He was much taller than Ihsan, and probably taller than her mother, but he was sitting down, legs crossed, swinging his body back and



forth and tearing his bony fingers into the dirt, digging deep into the soil. He had two equally dismal mouths: one a small pair of lips on his face sewn shut into an eternal frown, the other a giant maw encompassing the whole top of his head, screaming wide open but saying nothing. Worst of all were his eyes, downcast, barely open, and red raw from painful crying. Most people would have been horrified at the sight of such of a monster, yet Ihsan was enraptured. The eyes, the rocking, the clawing at the ground: she recognized them all within herself. Does he feel as alone as I do?

Ihsan scooted across the dirt, moving slowly towards the monster. At first he recoiled, throwing himself onto his back and sprawling backwards, dragging his fingers against the soil. Ihsan couldn't find the speech to comfort the monster and show her compassion for him, but she held her hands out and signed the words for "happy" and "hug." The monster didn't seem to understand sign language, but his eyes grew slightly brighter watching Ihsan move her hands with such passion, and he stopped pulling back. Soon the two were nearly touching knees, both shaking in the cold.

Ihsan opened her arms once again, leaning into the monster. She could feel the monster seize up in surprise, but soon he wrapped his arms around her in return. Despite his lanky limbs, the monster's hug was amazingly warm and comforting, second only to the fabulous Flacco in comfiness. The monster's shrieks gave way to soft breathing as his top mouth eased shut. His rocking slowed and matched Ihsan's own rhythm as the two, the girl and the monster, found peace.

At least until the fairy flew in.

Ihsan didn't like the look of the fairy from the moment he flew into the clearing. Sure, he was cute, in that generic archetypal style that the public imagines fairies to be. He was very tiny, barely the size of one of the monster's fingers, and he flitted from place to place like sparks from a candle, but Ihsan could see the fire in his eyes and the contempt in his smile.

"What are you doing with this little thing, ya big ugly brute?" the fairy asked, smirking as he weaved between the monster's legs and sauntered onto his shoulder. The monster's low hum already began rising to the shrieks of before.

"What's the matter? Little ol' fairy's got you scared, now? I ain't doing anything scary!" The fairy buzzed and twirled around the monster's ears and buzzing louder each cycle, stumbling around the monster's head like a drunken, belligerent gnat. To Ihsan, that's all he was.

"STOP!"

The fairy froze, hovering stunned in between Ihsan and the monster. The monster's cries at once faltered.

"Stay away from my friend, you mean awful fly!" Before either the fairy or Ihsan could totally realize it, Ihsan had grabbed a handful of rocks

from the ground and started hurling them at the fairy. As best as he tried to dodge them, too many for his comfort struck home. Shouting curses and profanities along the way, the fairy, hobbled but alive, flew off into the distance, never to bother the monster again.

The sky was dark now. All Ihsan could hear was the slow roar of the river and the soft hums of the monster. Ihsan worried what would await her on the other side of the woods, when she had to see her mother again, but the woods at night were too scary, even more so than her mother.

The monster shuffled over to Ihsan and extended his arms. Ihsan fell into them, feeling, remarkably, more comfortable even than when she hugged Flacco. She started talking to the monster, both in sign and increasingly speaking aloud, talking about her mother and her therapist and the children at school that were loud and busy and touched everybody too much. At first the monster kept humming its usual note, but soon the notes varied in pace with the conversation, from sharp notes of shared irritation to warm notes of support. Soon the two were walking beneath the trees, darker than ever but somehow less imposing than before, towards the edge of the forest and to Ihsan's house.

At the edge of the forest, Ihsan turned to the monster and squeezed him harder than she had squeezed anybody ever before, for she had never met anybody before that felt the same overwhelming sensations, the same anxieties, and the same desire for hugs on their own terms, before the monster. Maybe there's more like us outside?

I can't tell you what happened with Ihsan and her mother when she walked back into the house. I can't tell you if they fought, if the police were involved, or even if Ihsan spoke up for herself, like she did for the monster's behalf against the fairy. I can't tell you if she found the other children and adults like her in the world, or other monsters like the Hug Monster. I hope she did.

All I can do is speak for a moment about Orpheus.

Orpheus, you were too scared to trust in yourself, in Eurydice, and in your shared love. In fear, you turned to face her. Was she real, or only a shade? Your eyes made her become a shade. But had you trusted in love, perhaps she'd have been real. She could have been real in your head, at least. Isn't that enough?

I don't know if the monster and the fairy were real or shades. For Ihsan they were real, and she didn't turn around to check. That's enough for me.

# Beyond the Gray Green Gate

SARAH TOKAR

The musty scent of a car on its last legs filled my nostrils yet again as I leaned my forehead against the upholstery on the back of the passenger seat. My parents whispered to each other as though there was some magical barrier between the front and back seats, preventing me from hearing them. As if the words tumbled out of their mouths, ricocheted off the front dash, and slid down the center console only to...stop. Except that's not what they did, not really. As much as I'm sure my parents would have liked them to. I would catch bits and pieces of what they were saying, fragmentations really, not enough to draw much of a conclusion from.

"How much longer do you think she'll be in there, John?" My mother asked, voice wavering, dangerously close to letting the tears she had been so fervently holding back break through the dam.

"Not too much longer now hon, I'm sure of it." He lied so easily. I could tell what he really wanted to say was 'As long as it takes' with a non-committal suggestion as to the time frame that we might be looking at. "She's really doing great." He said as resolutely as he could possibly muster.

My mother kept up with her futile questions as if they could solve all of our family's problems, creating strangled conversation until she finally let her tears etch small rivers down the curves of her cheeks. My father kept his eyes on the road, a true steely gray. I imagined they were turning harder and more metallic with every passing second. Not wanting to let on that I had been eavesdropping, I pulled out my notebook and set to work. Pencil scratching meticulously on the paper, line after line of roman numerals appeared. I = 1, II = 2, III = 3, IV = 4, V = 5... I was well into my hundreds by now. The pencil scratching drowned out the noises coming from the front seat— well enough, at least. It was a poor substitute for the iPod that my ten-year-old self so desperately wanted but wasn't old enough to have. I knew better than to ask.

*I knew I was meant to feel excited that my family was visiting, but I remember dreading having to face them. While all of us in-patients waited for our various family members to arrive some of the aids attempted to distract us with art therapy, passing out scattered art supplies and pestering us with possible prompts to spur our creativity. The paint splatters did little to distract me from the fact that my little sister would be visiting me during what felt like my incarceration.*

*tion. It was embarrassing to think that she would see me at my most vulnerable, and would definitively know she was better at being a human being than I was. I was supposed to be her role model, but I couldn't stand to think of her following any one of my footsteps that brought me here.*

Our car carried us through the city until we finally turned onto the private winding drive that I had become all too familiar with. CXXVI = 126, CXXVII = 127, CXXVIII = 128... The trees that were once budding with hope now curled desperately over our vehicle, clutching at our windows and scratching at our morale. We slowed as we approached the guarded gate and gave our name in exchange for admittance. The sign read Sheppard Pratt: Center for Eating Disorders in large, dull, gold lettering— as if it was once the shining crest of an important aristocratic family before being downgraded to its current status simply alerting disheartened families to its presence.

“Tokar” my dad said with a confidence that was all too rarely seen those days. With that the rusty green-gray gate creaked open and we were searching for a parking spot. I had always hated this goddamn parking lot. Painted white lines too straight, too perfect. Why couldn't they let some imperfection into their lives? Imperfect patients translated into this need for structure falsely implanted in every possible nook and cranny of the institution.

I slammed the car door behind me harder than necessary, that satisfying thud no longer bringing a smile to my face like it so often used to. We walked up to the large front doors, my parents in front and me following closely behind. My dad reached over to ring the doorbell, and a shrill trill like that of an un-tuned piccolo echoed within the entryway announcing our arrival. An aid met us at the threshold to unlock the heavy metal doors and show us to the room where we would be meeting my sister for family therapy. I had been taken out of school early to come— something that my mom didn't often allow.

*We had already gone through our individual tutoring and therapy sessions for the day, and I remember thinking about the exhaustion that was sure to stem from the mandatory family therapy session that we were to take part in before family dinner. I couldn't imagine what my younger sister would think of these group therapy sessions where families were expected to open up about their deepest struggles to complete strangers purely on the basis that they were likely going through something similar. Sarah could always be counted on for a good burst of humor— I remember hoping that she'd be in a joking mood that evening.*

The hallways were a sterile off-white— ceilings, walls, and tiled floors— and there was a distinct pattern of paintings on the wall, as if to

distract the eye from the institutional feel of the building as a whole. This was in stark contrast to the room where family therapy was held— in fact the entire ambience shifted to a warmer, more natural feeling as soon as we found ourselves in the community center. Large overstuffed leather chairs lined the walls in tidy rows, and a few blue and green plaid couches completed what was meant to be the seating area. A stained glass window was the focal point of the room, casting the entire room in rainbow fractals.

Rachel was standing there cast in blue by the seating area talking with some of the aids, knobby knees, striking collarbones, taut skin and all. I remember her looking up and meeting my gaze with her own before hesitantly approaching us. She seemed so embarrassed, though of herself or of us I was always unclear. After a fairly successful hour of group family therapy, or so the nurses touted, it was time to have our weekly family dinner. Meant to normalize an in-patient's experience, family members were allowed to visit and share a meal with their loved one once a week. It was my first time attending. All of the in-patients gathered in a line to head to the cafeteria, family members trailing next to them in a line of their own like tag-along siblings.

*The timer at the front of the cafeteria read 45:00:00 and begun to count down. We had forty-five minutes to eat our meal, and if we were unable to finish everything in the time allotted, it meant we would have to drink an extra supplement in the evening to account for the missed calories. It was all about the numbers at Sheppard Pratt. How much time was left on the clock, how many calories we ingested, how much the scale proclaimed we weighed...nothing else seemed to matter as much.*

Dinner was served much like the middle-school lunch line I was accustomed to— everyone getting the same hefty portion of green beans, mashed potatoes, and peach cobbler alongside the main entrée of a drumstick. Despite being held in a cafeteria; I could tell that the staff had made every effort possible to make the meal feel as homey as possible. They set up the tables in such a way that it almost felt like we could be back in our dining room at home— apart from the probing eyes of the aids and the incessant conversation of the other families surrounding us. It almost seemed like we were actors on the set of a television show, constantly falling in and out of character with each other. Forced conversation peppered the sound of scraping plastic forks against paper plates— a constant reminder that many of the patients were in a precarious enough mental state so as to not be allowed to handle real silverware.

*That night they were serving us drumsticks. Everyone was watching me— our parents, the nurses, and I had never felt more self-conscious about what I was*

*eating. There was such pressure for me to do well; to prove that I was getting better to everyone who had taken the time to come and visit me. I distinctly remember cutting the chicken off of the bone and mom lashing out at me, saying “You never used to cut your meat off of the bone at home— why are you now?” She was always the caretaker of our family, and I knew it was hard for her to watch me here— her first born daughter, undeniably broken and unable to be fixed. I was also concerned with how Sarah would react to the rigid structure of meal times, but I could tell she was trying her best to crack jokes and normalize the experience for everyone else.*

It was dark out after we finished our dinner, and saying goodbye to Rachel was bittersweet. I remember being eager to leave the façade of normalcy that was Sheppard Pratt, but feeling destitute at the prospect of not seeing my older sister for another few days. It was difficult to understand that this would be our lives for the next couple of months until she was well enough to be placed in an out-patient program. I climbed back into our sedan— my nostrils yet again assaulted by its familiar scent— and prepared for the long drive back home. Pencil in hand, paper on lap, CCLIII = 253, CCLIV = 254, CCLV = 255, CCLVI = 256...

# Bonedigger

BETHANY FRANKEL

I buried my love on a Saturday,  
 when the earth was springing back to life.  
 The soil was soft and patterned  
 with the tracks from newborn birds,  
 the setting sun waiting to crash down  
 on the lingering horizon.  
 I left a note and took a walk  
 to my favorite canopied treetop spot,  
 pressed my hands into the dirt  
 and sighed.  
 This was my time.

In order for something to grow,  
 you have to plant it.  
 Lay it down in the earth,  
 turn your back and abandon it.  
 So I let my toes dip into the cold soil,  
 sank down to my ankles and  
 let out a smile.  
 When the dirt filled my lungs,  
 I closed my eyes,  
 and when the ground swallowed me,  
 I exhaled my goodbyes.

I buried my heart on a Saturday,  
 before love could blacken the golden and pure.  
 I packed seeds in my bloodstream,  
 watered my hair until it turned green,  
 offered wildflowers to the site where I lay,  
 unmarked but for a stone,  
 left to decay into gray  
 until some cruelty kicked it away.

I woke the other night in a sweat,  
 jolted in bed and clutched at my neck

in panic to feel the nonexistence.  
No pulse, just skin,  
there is no way for love to creep in  
without my permanent permission.  
Something clouded my sight,  
blinded by divine light  
that whispered for me to  
slip on shoes and wander  
through the clouded night.

Pink petals and obsidian stones  
sprinkled the ground around me,  
imposters of daggers and insidious outsiders  
that dragged me subconsciously  
to the girl that I buried,  
her murder cold but still fresh.  
The birds shrieked in the midnight moon  
and their distress draped my hands,  
still healing still bleeding,  
the caked red clay stains  
sunk deep into flesh.

I know this place by memory,  
see I can retrace it with eyes closed--  
it's ten steps into oblivion  
and a sharp turn to the left,  
slashing overgrown vines with fingernails  
in a frenzy to get to the final resting place  
and it has my name on it.  
I brought a shovel this time.  
I intend to make it back alive.

The ground still contains the last  
aspects of winter,  
blade slicing through bloodied soil  
with a final, metallic clash.  
The woods watch me and take in the view:  
the fading light, the tired  
weary eyes clouded and foggy  
from too many days displaying  
a heart to sun when I damn well knew  
the daylight would kill me if I let it.



Strands of hair fall into my mouth  
and my lips part in a sigh and I  
hit home--

I  
strike bone--  
oddly white in the earth,  
bleached and clean,  
pure.

I cannot wait to dig properly  
and I crash to my knees,  
an animalistic sound escaping from me  
as my greedy hands encircle  
the skeleton of my past,  
pulling out bone after bone,  
and building them back  
into some semblance of  
the girl I once loved.

I buried her so she would remain golden,  
but now I am a gravedigger  
and she is my home,  
a reanimated version of myself  
that believed in love at first sight  
and bloomed in the sunlight.  
I touch her bones  
and she comes back to life,  
exhaling magic and  
inhaling life.  
My ghost trades places with her  
and I cover my corpse  
with the spring soil.

I think,  
this time,  
I'm going to keep her.

# Birthday

MAY LONERGAN

Congratulations,  
It's the day you've been waiting for.  
All 365 days have led to this,  
A celebration  
Of you.

As a naive child,  
You eagerly counted the days  
Until your very own  
Special day.

Back then,  
You reminded all your classmates  
When your special day would arrive.  
It would be your time.  
A day dedicated to you.  
The teacher would sing  
And a bowling birthday party  
Would bring you  
New presents and giggles and  
The respect  
Of being another year  
Older.

With the cheers and claps of  
Those you love,  
You would proudly  
Puff your cheeks  
With all your might,  
To blow out the dancing flames,  
Magical wishes,  
That you actually believed  
Could come true.

You would stuff your mouth

With squishy chocolate cake  
 Layered with extra creamy frosting.  
 Ignoring the sticky sweetness that  
 Clung to your wiggling little fingers.  
 It was always just the way you liked it.  
 Delicious.

You would greedily rip  
 Open the pile of presents  
 Your mother spent hours wrapping.  
 Tearing into the packaging,  
 As if passing time would steal  
 The gifts from your eager grasp.

When did the excitement end?  
 Today is the day.  
*Your* day has finally come.  
 Yet  
 You told not a single soul at work.  
 No one sang, or hugged, or laughed.  
 And that present your mother sent you  
 Sits unopened in the console of your car.  
 And apparently, your favorite chocolate cake  
 Has too many calories in it anyway.

When did becoming older lose its fun?  
 When did you stop being a kid?

No matter what you do,  
 Time will fly by  
 And you will age.  
 All you can do,  
 And must do,  
 Is accept the change  
 And welcome the new memories.  
 It's a birthday,  
 Not a funeral.  
 Act like it.

# Time is on My Side

BETHANY FRANKEL

Open your eyes and all you'll see is gray. Once the world was seen in shades of black and white, but over time, the distinction faded like reels of film losing their clarity from decades of use. It's hard to distinguish between night and day when you glance out the window and you see only yourself reflected back in the cracked glass-- light hair floating around delicate curves and angled edges of a face, set against a backdrop of gray, like all the letters and words in the newspaper ran together.

Stacks of newspapers cover the dining room table, slabs of print piled haphazardly; a strong gust of wind whipping through the house would be enough to spill the contents of time. Clouds of dust drift in the air when you pass, your fingers trailing over the newspaper on the corner. The St. Charles Gazette, September 2, 1883. The air of change in this house has long been broken, the passage of time long forgotten. Everyday is September 2, 1883. Your name is printed on the front page of the paper, the four letters of Mona streaked across the thin page until a residue of ink remains on your fingertips. This is how everyday goes: wake up and wander through the empty house, moving past rooms long unoccupied-- lumps of beds and tables and armoires covered up in a hurry, large fabric sheets fraying into cobwebs-- take an inventory of items to make sure everything remains the same, and always end up in the same place. Everyday leads to you staring at the grandfather clock at the base of the stairs, studying its face like it might reveal something you've forgotten.

The clock is tall enough that it tries to scrape the caving ceiling, rounded on the edges and made of oak from the tree out in the backyard. Somewhere in your memory you can remember standing in the snow, bundled up in your coat red as blood, only your eyes visible in the cold. A man guided your grip on the axe and placed his bare, chapped hands over yours to help you bring the blade down. The wood split with a hearty thunk, the excess branches of the young tree scattered across the ground in perfect parallel lines. Whenever you pass the back window, however, a full oak looms over the house, its canopy spreading arms to shadow the back of the house. Something prickles at your head, possibly the wanting of clear remembrance, but you find your way back to the clock instead.

The clock is the only furniture free of dust, which spirals out in a circle from the base of the tower. Your footprints make perfect indents in the

thick layer, leading to and from the grandfather clock. You trace the path that the man once did, moving from the wood storage in the cellar to the workshop in the attic, back to the final resting place of his masterpiece. The clock he built with only his hands and his genius, matching each gear and coil precisely to his design. The clockface is inlaid with a rendering of the constellations he used to point out to you, with four letters carved in the wood to form the four points of a compass: M, J, A, G. Every September 2 you end up sitting back here, legs crossed and staring up at the clock, wondering why you can hear the clock ticking. The hands haven't moved in years, frozen at 2:56 in the afternoon. The gears have stopped turning, but you can hear the click of something still alive in this machine. The chimes of the clock echoing through the house wake you up every imaginary hour.

The faint whistling of the wind slips between the broken windowpanes, slips beneath the floorboards. You hear her coming up the front walk, tripping over the rose garden that has become a jungle-- dead vines and thorns snake along the ground, waiting to wrap around ankles of trespassers. She curses faintly and it is carried away by the wind and dropped in your lap, silently warning you to move closer to the clock. The heels of her boots click against cobblestone and then stop, a pause before the creak of the porch stairs. The door handle turns and you pull your legs up to your chest.

The intruder is a young woman, the fur collar of her coat drawn up against the chill in the air. Her eyes have the roundness of a doe, freckles smeared across her delicate face. She remains painted in the monochrome gray, though some similarity that strikes you makes you think you catch a flash of red when she tosses her hair behind her. She looks like everyone you have ever seen before combined into a single person, unrememberable and full of meaning. She looks straight at you but doesn't see you.

Her breath clouds the air in front of her as she takes a step towards the clock. The wood presses up against your back but your hands fumble for the texture of the oak and grab at nothing. When she moves towards you, you realize that the footprints you saw before match her shoes. She interrupts the dust and you are composed from it.

"Mona," she whispers, her voice barely audible, amplified only by the emptiness of the house that allows the word to echo. You have become your namesake, drifting through the halls with moans trailing behind like clear, silken strips of fabric, your face as blank as the painting your mother named you after. There's a hint of a smile hiding in the corner of your mouth, stuck between revealing your reactions and concealing them. Much like you-- stuck. Trapped between this life and the next, where time might start again.

Are you my mother? The words drift in the space, but you never opened your mouth. You haven't had the ability to speak in so long that your voice has rusted like the cogs of the clock.

“Mona, if you’re here, I hope you can hear me.” The woman laughs, the nervous sound reminiscent of the grinding of metal against metal that used to shriek from the attic. “I don’t know if you recognize me or know who I am. Your mother was my grandmother.” Her smile gives off enough warmth to forget about the continual cold creeping through the house. “It’s me, Caroline. Janie’s daughter.”

You shrink back against the clock. The names sound familiar but don’t make sense together-- when you hear the name Janie, all that comes to mind is a child with vicious curls, huddled over the latest letter from your uncle on the Union front lines, speaking in the halting language that comes with learning to read. The woman that stands in front of you--Caroline--looks like what would have happened to Janie if she got older, but that would mean...

“I brought something for you,” she says, growing more confident in her voice. She makes eye contact with you but isn’t aware of it. Bending down slowly, she unties her coat to reveal a newspaper rolled neatly. She unfurls it and leaves it at the edge of the dust-free circle as an offering.

If you had a longer life, this is what you’d wish for: to see your name on the cover of *The St. Charles Gazette* without the word “obituary” preceding it. To feel the warmth of the woodstove on your cheek once more. To understand why Caroline smiles at you like she can’t see you when you are right here. The newspaper offering tells you that contractors have bought the deed to the Evers Mansion and plan to turn it into a museum; they want the reconstruction to be finished in three years to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the state’s first unsolved murder case. The child was found on the staircase, a rough oak board dangling from her fingertips, splinters embedded into her palms. On her tongue was a single clock gear. The paper reads 1955. You can’t find the date of September 2 anywhere you look.

One look from Caroline and you know: you have been plunged into an eternal winter and broken clocks don’t make good company. It doesn’t take long to calculate the difference between 1883 and 1955. Caroline’s voice is quiet when she confirms it: “You’ve been dead for 72 years, Mona.”

The newspaper in your hands crashes to the ground with a thud. Caroline jumps back, but quickly recovers. She digs in her jacket and draws out the other contents of her person: a box of matches. The smile has been wiped from her face. She strikes a match against the box, holding it delicately between her thumb and index finger. If your heart still had the ability to beat, it would slam against your decayed ribs as she reaches the lit match towards the clock. You slam an invisible hand to the glass panel hiding the clock’s chimes and the surface cracks with a layer of frost. Caroline jumps back in fright and drops the match, but the wind whips through the house and two things happen at once: there is the sound of dozens of newspapers fluttering

through the air, and the match rolls under the base of the old, dry clock. One kiss of flame is all it takes.

You can feel the heat as soon as the flames touch the surface of the clock. One match and warmth swells from your stomach, radiates from your center to the tips of your fingers and toes. You sigh and the pattern of ice on the clock's glass crystallizes, meets the fire in a moment of deadly flirtation, and explodes. Shards of glass rocket through the front room and Caroline dives towards the ground. You whip around to see the constellations melt towards the dusty ground, the initials of the compass drooping towards the center of the inferno. You are so focused on the destruction of your private altar that you almost don't notice that the flames have transferred to you, climbing from your ankles up your body like a choking vine of ivy. Every part of you that the fire touches flashes back to its original color before disappearing. You forgot that the spots on your arms were not freckles but bloodstains.

When you look down at your hands and the fire that consumes them, you remember a little bit about the girl you used to be. You wore that red coat in the snow until your mother told you to come inside. She didn't want you to catch hypothermia. What she didn't take into consideration was how fascinated you would be by your father's inventions. No matter how many times she warned you to leave him alone while he was working, you wanted to help him build the clock. You once asked him if he would put a part of you in it. It was going to be a secret between you and him, a drop of blood on the central gear, the one that makes time move forward. You wanted the imaginary power to control time.

Open your mouth and a gear will fall out. You smile and it melts against your tongue. You see the red tint to the clock as it begins to vanish. You see the red of the flames as they lick your body like the softest embrace. The last thing you see is the minute hand of the clock creaking forward.



## Sunflower Sunset

REBECCA CALLAGHAN



# Flower Girl

REBECCA CAMPO

She's grinning from ear to ear,  
enthusiasm shinning from her face,  
like the only lamp in a room.  
Her happiness is forever preserved  
in a photo  
not sharp enough  
to capture any other emotions.  
The purple cupcake of a dress  
bellows out around her tiny waist,  
lace woven around the garment  
like string encircling  
the contents of a package,  
the bow in the back  
holding her neatly in this shape,  
the trademark  
of a Flower Girl.  
This was the girl that  
a year later  
I would stumble into on the kindergarten playground  
and recognize from Girl Scouts.  
This was the girl who,  
for 15 years of my life  
and still counting,  
would be one of my closest friends.  
This was the girl who  
would keep that purple cage  
locked in the back of her closet  
except to show me  
what an atrocity it was.  
This was the girl who  
hated being forced into any dress  
for school picture days  
or dances  
or weddings.  
This was the girl who

bought an American Girl Doll  
because the rest of us had one  
but kept it in her closet when we weren't there.  
This was the girl who  
never really was a girl at all  
but a boy tied into the shape of a girl  
by purple lace  
and a held in place  
by a tight bow  
right over his mouth.

# Ghost Flowers

LISA MAEYER

The branches of the weeping willow sweep  
 through the air above the liliated pond.  
 The water is chilled from the night's rain, but the morning sun  
 works to warm the incubator for coy fish and algae,  
 strives to dry the saturated ground.  
 From across the yard, I hear the leaves swishing in the wind,  
 like a painter's strokes on her blank canvas—  
 a fresh start to spring, the endless bounty of long-lost rays.  
 The leaves' green glides over the tree's muddy base.  
 It promises growth to the grass seeds I spread yesterday,  
 my inspiration rooted in blooming purple hyacinths neighboring  
 the rose tulips and yellow daffodils.  
 The lawn chair welcomed my weight when I sat to relax  
 in its embrace this morning, both I and the fabric exhausted  
 from the night's rain but thankful for the sun's comforting stares.  
 The sky has sprouted paper-white, weightless clouds  
 that pushed away the night's lightening.  
 The stars were absent amidst the bright banging,  
 for constellations are lightening are mortal enemies—  
 only one of them can shine at a time,  
 one of them is always more prominent in the sky,  
 like how the white flowers beside my tree always catch  
 my morning eyes before the rest of the gardened yard.

I watch the lingering storm clouds in the distance,  
 as they terrorize the next town over, but the willow calls me back  
 to my own yard, my own Earthly constellations:  
 my preschool Mother's Day painted pot,  
 my father's rake leaning against the tree,  
 the decorative rustic carriage wheel propped against the shed,  
 and the engraved slab planted to the right of the willow,  
 a memorial for my father's mother, a woman I never met,  
 but he says we would have seen brown eye to brown eye  
 and spoken the same language of sarcasm.  
 I smile at the piece of her left on Earth, a fragment of her memory.

I visited her cemetery in June, with a bouquet of Lily of the Valley.  
I thought it fitting: a flower that shared her first name,  
a gift from the girl who shares her last name.  
They grow to the left of the willow in my yard as they do  
every year, when their space in the ground is void of pooled water.  
I give Lillian the lilies from the valley  
in my backyard, though  
I miss the ghostly shining of their bright white.



# Nyhavn

MELISSA CASALE



# Ominous Sky

MAY LONERGAN

# Sea Glass

LISA MAEYER

The rink's brisk air swallows my hesitation  
 as I step onto a pool of ice.  
 My snow-white boots are mounted  
 firmly on silver blades, razor sharp  
 propellers that steady my strokes.  
 Shallow breaths escape from my chapped lips;  
 the tiny clouds of smoke outline the air,  
 give shape to the invisible molecules.  
 I imagine them transforming into frozen beads:  
 the spheres of glass drift up to float above my head.  
 Threads like lines of silk from a spider's carefully woven web  
 descend from the ceiling to capture the glass crystals,  
 bead them one by one.  
 Now situated on the lines,  
 the inconspicuous reflectors witness my waltz.

My blades carve the glass surface,  
 waves rippling across the glossy coating.  
 I tread through the cascading  
 lines, gliding momentarily before crossing right foot over left,  
 rounding the rink's edge.  
 I dip as my blades dig into the ice,  
 grip the slippery surface with their edges.  
 I twist clockwise to sail backwards, blind until I peer over  
 my left shoulder;  
 the corresponding knee bends, and my right toe's teeth  
 bite the ice behind me,  
 launch me into the sky.

I imagine spinning through the frosted jewels:  
 a thread wraps around each arm,  
 the strings lifting me closer to the beams above.  
 Smoke weaves through my splintering ponytail,  
 tendrils of hair twisting and knotting.  
 The air cradles my tightened limbs,

and I spiral through my recent exhalation.  
The ice beads re-gift me to the glinting surface,  
and the ice rattles as I land too forward,  
sending ice chips into my eyes,  
but my blade cements itself to the sea of glass.  
I cast my turquoise gloves out,  
color my peripheral vision.

The ice an opaque mirror of my movements,  
the speckled pane echoes my strokes,  
my balancing act of momentous rotation.  
I serpentine on the glass, dance as the invisible threads above  
overlap like streamers.  
The lines intertwine, crisscross above as I, below,  
glide through the ice palace,  
constructing a web of my own:  
blade trails overlap as I trace my steps,  
soar through the endless air.  
The glass web below my feet mirrors the constellation  
of strands above, a safety net for if I jump too high.

Triangle teardrops of reflected light fall on my shoulders  
as my final spiral leaves me at center ice.  
The palace complete and the ceiling a portrait  
of Picasso-esque strokes,  
my lungs burn as if my breath is on fire.  
The imaginary threads relinquish the crystal beads:  
the ice-gems fall free, drift down to the pool of freshly  
carved glass to cool my speeding heart,  
and to join the glistening diamonds at my feet.



# Blue Picnic Blanket Blues

CHARLES STERNBERG

Blue picnic blanket blues  
Ice tea breeze  
Warm ice cooler  
under the maple trees

There's a space on the sheet  
(an empty void of sky blue)  
Where a turkey swiss sandwich sits.

The milk for tea is curdled,  
The apples: brown and wormy,  
A colony of ants claimed the corn,  
And the clouds turned stormy

There's room here for two  
Today, tomorrow, or the next day  
    Or the next day  
    Or the next day  
        Or the next day...



# Gettysburg Grounds

MAY LONERGAN

# In the Valley

CHRIS CHICK

The air at the basin of the Blue Ridge Mountains in July lay down like blankets. The water trapped among it, too, weighed you down when you tried to stand up in it. At night, when the sun had gone away and lessened the burden of evaporating water from the summer night's prior rain, the streets would still steam. The clouds would finally gather, eventually, and pour down into the valleys sometime around three in the morning almost every night. The streets would be damp at first light, and dry by nine. The leaves would drop whatever water they held within them and release it up to the sun by noon. By six, the clouds would start to form again, and by about one o'clock, the stars would be, for the most part, hidden from the West Virginian valley below it.

There's darkness in the base of this valley.

The ever-present shadow under which Jim Klein lived made real by God himself; he took it as his divine authority to act as he pleased under the blanket of West Virginian clouds. And so, as he'd done every night for the past month, he sat in the driver's seat of a beaten, red 1978 Ford Pickup truck, and watched the shadows behind the curtains in the Suffolk home. They moved, sometimes grouping together to speak, and sometimes huddling close while the curtain was peeled back, and the face which peered out from behind the sheer white sheet was met by the back of the family dog chained halfway up the lawn, hair stood up, barking constantly at the silhouette of Jim and a small glow from inside his truck that lit the end of a shotgun barrel pressed nonchalantly against the window.

Across his lap sat his baby, a Benelli M2 he'd bought some ten years back when it first got released. He'd paid a gunsmith in Charleston to strip the polymer and replace it with slabs of cherry he'd stolen from the bed of an idling truck. His hand sat against her stock and he rubbed his thumb across the fading wood as one might against the hand of some woman they'd loved, though this was the only woman Jim had ever really seemed to love. Jim felt naked without his cherry-clad shotgun; the name Doris was engraved above the cartridge release. His mother.

He sat for awhile in the silence, unmoving and blanketed by coats of West Virginian darkness that turned to waves of rain. He cranked the window up and sat, still staring into the home. He did not blink. He did not move. The lights went out and the shadows disappeared behind the curtains;

the Suffolk's had gone to bed, but he stayed. He knew they were still watching him, and so he watched back. An old police cruiser drove by every so often, and though Jim would nod at them, they kept their eyes pinned forcefully on the road ahead. Jim smiled to himself as they did.

He waited until the Suffolks had long gone to bed and the last peeks behind the curtains stopped, and then would wait longer. He popped a cigarette from its pack past the filter and stuck it between his teeth, before reaching a hand that more resembled a paw into the inside pocket of his jacket to retrieve a red Bic lighter that was scratched and fading to reveal its white beneath it. He cupped his hand around his cigarette and sat there, still keeping his eyes on the home all the while. He inhaled and held the smoke sliding down his throat until it burned, stung, and then would exhale through his nose. When he'd finally finished, he cranked down the window low enough to flick out the burning butt into the rain and the browning summer grass of the Suffolk's. He kept it low enough, for a minute at least, that his eyes would be visible in the streetlight. He didn't break eye contact with the home until it was out of his view, and even then he kept his eyes locked on the streetlight at the corner in his rear view mirror until he had to turn again and even that too was out of sight.

Jim stepped onto the porch of his split-level ranch home sometime around two in the morning and took one more drag of his seventeenth cigarette of the day before dumping it in an ashtray. He stepped inside, allowing the screen door to slam behind him. He didn't lock it, nor did he bother to close or latch the oak door which followed it. The crossbreeze and the draft the open door offered kept the house cool in the summer without running the air conditioning. The open windows, too, let the wind sprint through his bedroom and slid the cool air across his bed and within the blankets under which Jim and his wife Marie slept.

He stepped heavy footed to the corner of the room and placed a hand on the top of the armoire. With a snap he jammed the heel of his boot into the 'U' of his boot jack, keeping his back foot on its wood and leather support as he leveraged his foot out of long, snip-toe elephant skin boots. He leaned over and took the boot by the heel and nudged it with his palm until it released, and then he set it on a faded spot on top of the armoire. The second jolt of a heel into the crux of the jack stirred Marie, but she simply rolled over and went back to sleep, allowing greying, thinning hair to fall across her face. After Jim had placed the second boot up in its place, he hung a wet suede jacket on a hook leaving the armoire open, allowing it to dry, both aware and uncaring of the damage he'd caused it and the punishment the suede would undergo from its time in the rain.

He made his way to the bed, undressing as he went, slipping his fin-

gers between his belt and under the buttons of the fly on his jeans to release them, finally dropping them and pulling off an old button down as he sat on his bed. He kicked off the jeans and slid them to the corner by the boot jack and tossed his shirt there as well. He left his socks on as he slid under the sheets with Marie and brushed the hair away from her face, giving her a kiss on her forehead.

With this, he laid his head back and stared up into the darkness of his room and past the ceiling, up into a sky he was sure was his. The crickets were loud, God's white noise. Taps of raindrop and acorns on tin roof drums drove him into sleep. He slept well that night. He slept well most nights.

Jim was always the first to get out of bed. His eyes would seem to snap open every morning before dawn, before school buses came and before most people got up to have their morning coffee and a shower; he wanted to start his day before anyone else did, a few moments alone to order and orient himself.

Regardless of his tendency to fall into a rut, or rather, in compliance with a tendency he was wholly aware and proud of, Jim's eyes opened around 6 or so, just as the sun dripped droplet rays over the peaks of the mountains. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and rubbed his eyes a little, before reaching to the nightstand and putting his glasses on, taking the added measure of wrapping the ends of their lenses around his ears. These glasses have been on his nightstand every night since 1989, when he bought them. As he made his way into the bathroom, he flicked the lights on with an old and yellow switch with a wooden cover that clicked hard into place. Turning a knob in a tub with hard water stains so deep neither he nor Marie even tried to clean them anymore, he got in the shower.

Floorboards creaked as Jim stepped onto the porch, as did the rocking chair when he sat back to enjoy his morning coffee. Black was the only way he drank his coffee, a conscious choice he made when he turned sixteen and went underground for the first time. Everything was black down there; this is his only relic of his mining days. With the coffee gone, the empty mug sat on the armrest of the chair, and it would stay there until Marie finally made her way out on her way to work, at which point she'd saunter back inside and put it in the sink to be washed when she got home.

Elephant boots slid on his feet and cradled the arches of his foot well. The Lucchese logo on the heel of his boots had long been worn off, though the grooves and gripping of the heel still stayed visible. A pair of light blue jeans with fraying hems rolled down the boots and left a small divot in the front. He stood up and slid a crinkled brown belt through the loops of his jeans and fastened it, before unfastening it, as he did every morning, to tuck in a white button down. His stomach hung over his belt buckle. With sleeves rolled up and cuffed, he was ready to make his way out for the day.

He started up the truck after a few turns of the keys and left the radio off, ensuring before he left that he had a fresh pack of cigarettes and Doris in his passenger seat.

The streetlamp on the corner of the Suffolk's street went out just as Jim was driving up. He parked there, in the same spot he had the night prior, and waited. Waiting, of course, was Jim's least favorite part of his morning ritual. The dog started barking as soon Jim rolled down the window. When the door opened and John Suffolk came out, a double-barrel slung around his shoulder simply to retrieve his morning paper, the dog would quiet. John would pat its head and continue by; its hair still stood up on the back of its neck but he stood silent.

Jim grinned at him through the rear view mirror. Not a smile, but a grin, eyes cold and shallow, and met back with the most stoic look John could muster up in the few seconds as he walked down a gravel driveway. Susan Suffolk watched her husband from the door in a white robe. An extra set of eyes should Jim do anything, though he never had. He just sat there. Unmoving. Everpresent.

John was halfway between the end of his driveway and his porch when he stopped. Mist had started to rise off the streets and out of the gravel under which he stood. It was getting hot; the steam slipped up his legs and under a freshly shaved chin.

"What're you doing here, Jim?" John asked. He hadn't turned around yet, but cocked his head back towards the truck so that he could make out just its rusting bumper.

"No idea what you're talking about, John," he replied, "just having a morning cigarette."

"You been here all night?"

Jim chuckled to himself a little, "You know I hadn't been."

John started his way back up his driveway to the porch.

"Man's gotta sleep sometime, y'know," Jim said again. He checked pockets for a lighter to start his second cigarette of the day, which was already perched between his teeth. "Must be pretty tiring stayin up that late, huh?"

"Wouldn't know," John muttered back at him, keeping his head cocked towards the truck and his eyes on Susan.

The creak of the truck door as it opened caused John to whip around with the shotgun shouldered, putting a ground down sight on Jim's lapel pocket. The dog barked again. Jim raised his hands a bit, not reaching them past his shoulders.

"Whoa there, can't a man get out and stretch?" He put down his hands and placed them on his lower back, leaning into them and cracking it. "Ooh, there we go," he muttered to himself, though loud enough for John to hear. He lifted his elbows up a little and rotated from side to side. "Y'know

there John, I can see those bags under your eyes from here. Why don't ya go on inside and get back to bed."

"Gotta get to work, just figured I'd read the paper with breakfast."

"Make sure those kids get off to school too, huh? Or, no... y'all both head out fore they do, don't ya? Not anymore, I guess, cause of the circumstances."

"Circumstances?"

Jim ignored the question, taking another puff of his cigarette. "No, no I mean it. You can just go on back up to bed and I'll make sure those little ones get off to school alright. What, a mile or so down the road? Pretty far walk for them don't you think?" John kept the shotgun shouldered and levelled on Jim's chest. "Tell you what, why don't I drive em? Johnny and Kate, right?"

John marched forward and put the gun a couple inches from Jim's face. Blackness down the barrel of a shotgun would make most men stand down; they shudder and let in envelope them. Jim, though, looked down at the end of his cigarette and put it back between his teeth.

"I wouldn't go doin anything stupid there, John. Whole family's watching. Why don't you just go head and put that down. Y'can tell Mrs. Suffolk up there she can stop pretending she ain't holding a gun on the other side that door, too." Another drag. "Let's just say I were to shoot you. Right here, right now. Ya think she'd be able to hit me from there? Cause I'll tell you what I think." Another drag, spilling smoke from behind yellow teeth. "I think I could bury one in your chest and even if she got a shot off, I'm sure she wouldn't hit me, and I'm damn sure it'd knock her over. Then what, hm? Daddy's bleeding out in the front lawn, with a door wide open and Mrs. Suffolk just lyin' there all... vulnerable." Another drag, and then a flick into the yard. "Be pretty ugly, John, don't you think?"

"I'm not sure you've got time to get that shot off."

"But you're not certain, are ya?" John lowered the shotgun and took a step back. "There ya go. Good boy. Now run back on up there, breakfast's probably gettin' cold."

John stuck a scarred finger up to Jim's face. "You stay the hell away from my family, or we might just have to see." Turning to walk back up to the house, he picked up the paper he'd dropped and slung the shotgun back over his shoulder. Susan finally started to relax, though only as much as she could with Jim Klein thirty feet from her front door.

"Oh, one more thing there John," he called out to him, "If'n you were smart, you're gon' keep your mouth shut bout what you saw at Taylor's last week."

"You're asking me to forget what you did to that poor girl? She was just a kid."

“Weren’t askin’ you to forget. Tellin’ you to keep your mouth shut ‘bout it.” Jim pulled his pack of cigarettes from his lapel pocket as he spoke. John turned to face him, putting his back to his wife as she laid a hand on his shoulder.

“Or what?”

“Or we’re gon see.” Jim chuckled and got back in his truck and lit another cigarette. “Enjoy your day, John.”

The door slammed shut and followed with the audible click of a dead-bolt. With a nod up to the peeking eyes of Johnny and Kate up in their bedrooms, the curtains dropped back into place. He slowly raised his hand as a gun and pointed at their window, closing one eye to better his imaginary aim. He let off a silent shot towards their window before cranking up the radio to try and finish his cigarette in peace. Peace, though the dog kept barking. Jim cracked his neck to his left, and back to his right, before grabbing Doris from the passenger seat.

With one hand on the wooden pump, he stepped out of the truck with a creaking door and easing suspension and walked towards the house. The dog ripped at its chain and snarled at him again, snapping its teeth at the threat now standing inches from its reach. Jim couldn’t see silhouettes now, in morning light, but he knew they were watching.

“And John...” he called out, putting his cigarette in his mouth. He leveled Doris and sent out a neighborhood quaking shot; the dog let out a high screeching whimper and laid bleeding in the grass, crying louder than before, and then not at all.

“...Don’tchu ever threaten me again.” Jim grinned into the living room window before turning his back to the home, the opening curtain, and the shock of both shot and sudden silence still quaking in the Suffolk home. He slid Doris through the open window of his truck before opening the door and dropping in the seat. He cranked the radio high. He resumed his stalking of the home in time to see the curtain finish its drop back into place. Finishing his cigarette and lit another, knowing he’d still be left untouched, he tapped his hands on the wheel to a song playing he didn’t quite know, undisturbed, watching.



# And Sometimes, Thorns

CHRIS CHICK

## I. Somewhere

nestled out in the great abyss  
is a world with thornless roses.

it's a world where isles of wheat ripple  
without tics or gnats,  
and where a loon's cry,  
or an owl's hoot,  
or the wolf's howl,  
are not distant songs played by mountaintop choirs.  
they're there. they watch you,  
and you watch them, and you're not careful to startle them,  
and neither they you.

it's a world with two suns,  
two moons,  
and rings that stretch out from their fingertips to the edges of their atmosphere,  
diamond debris scaling the jewels of the cosmos;  
skies that are technicolor purple hues  
and scarlet sunsets.

the inhabitants of this world dance  
with reckless abandon  
at the daily pentecostal kisses  
from a God who shows His face.

## II. Here

sailing with a cocktail of gravity and solar wind,  
is our world.

it's a world where isles of wheat ripple,  
and where children, or families, or lovers,

aren't the only creatures allowed to walk in them.  
where a loon's cry,  
or an owl's hoot,  
or a wolf's howl,  
are whispers carried from somewhere beyond where we can see them,  
and they cannot see you,  
though you both know each other are still there.

it's a world with one sun,  
and one moon.  
it has skies that drip water-born blues,  
and sometimes scarlet sunsets.

it is a world left cracked and brittle like old bones buried under fallen leaves,  
riddled with sighs, blackened, inkwell sores and blood,  
bullet casings and pieces of broken blades and still,

some of them dance,  
claiming to feel fire slip across their faces,  
sent by a God who refuses to show His face.

because Somewhere is only somewhere  
until it's not.  
Here is only there  
until it no longer is,  
and you become part of Somewhere,  
and Somewhere becomes there,  
and there becomes Here.

because somewhere there is a world with thornless roses,  
but Here is a world riddled with roses,  
and sometimes, thorns.



## A Plague that Aches

NOA LIEBSON

# God in Retrospect

CHRIS CHICK

It was less than an hour since we left Melk until we stood at the gate of Mauthausen concentration camp and stared blankly into the bunks, empty of sleeping bodies and mangled corpses for decades yet, still managing to incur a feeling of sadness and humility for anyone who saw them. The Mauthausen Camp guide was a young man with dark hair--I don't remember his name. I do, however, remember how great of an effort he went to to try and humanize the guards. He told us that too many people come there, to his home country, with a preformed idea about what had happened there and how it affected both the world at large, as well as the rolling grassy hills that sat below this twisted city of barbed wire and concrete.

I stared down a long stone stairway on the edge of a cliff adjacent to the camp, and the quarry that sat at its base. I couldn't help but imagine the ghosts of those opposed to and deemed unfit by the regime to which our camp guide's grandfather, our tour guide's great uncle, and one of the Abbey resident's grandfathers belonged. These ghosts still marched up those stairs and across the ridge. Every now and again, one would stumble and fall, and he'd be beaten. More than a few times, the stone would topple off his back and into the chasm around which the stairs wound, and he would chase it, following it in some feeble attempt to grab it. Though I can't be sure, there was a subtle emptiness in the quarry and in the bunks, the vastness of which I'm sure was infinitely apparent to those who resided here; God must have a blindspot the size of Eastern Europe or, as is more likely, there is no God here.

...

When my church went down to West Virginia to help rebuild the homes of people too poor to repair their own, we were all so afflicted with savior complex that we weren't even able to see the signs on other people; the boils such a disease forms were still too small to find when we'd look down our noses at each other, at the other church, or at the people whose houses we were coming to repair. We found ways to scoff at people who'd never been given a break for not having the money or wherewithal to repair their own roof, when they'd have an Xbox by the TV or a sports car parked out on the lawn. Still, though, from up on that high horse I was able to still find another pedestal to climb onto. I was there for the right reasons, I believed, because I was there to repair homes and not to repair a wounded spirit or failing faith.

Mine were strong. I was, savior complex or not, there to make homes warmer, safer, and drier, as the mission statement of the project claimed. I wasn't there for me, I was there for them, and I was, as far as I knew, entirely alone in that assessment.

That's why I liked to work on the roof. It was July in the southernmost county in West Virginia and that roof was the only spot that the sun peeked through the trees. You couldn't sit down up there because the tin roof we laid was even hotter than the sun itself would lend. You had to wear a harness too, as the roof, though only about ten feet off the ground on one side, sloped down to a drop-off that was, as we were told, closer to eighty or so. It might seem obvious that I, as well as anyone else who thought that the harness would slow down their ever important work, refused to wear them. There was something about the danger and the agony of being up there, without gloves, glasses, or a hat, that made it feel that much more real. The other teams must've spit stardust into spackle if they wanted to claim they did half the important work that we did. They didn't slice their hands open or burn them on tin, nor did they teeter just inches off of a literal cliff to put the last few nails of the frame in.

It was that Thursday when the storm rolled into Mullens, West Virginia. They came through most nights, drifting in quietly late at night and leaving the ground wet and clouds to roll down the mountains and slide into the valleys. Now, though, we saw the wall of grey crest over the mountaintop and drop into the valley adjacent to us, and saw the clouds cover the sun and cool the roof down to where we could work without burning our hands when we leaned down to drive a nail. The clap of thunder knocked one girl down to her knees and almost shook the ladder off the gutter on which it leaned. They all ran to huddle in the safety of the van whereas I, along with Ed, the contractor who led our group and Abe, another sophomore, grabbed the tarps and started trying to cover the roof up for the coming storm, as we had every night prior. We laid down the tarp and nailed a two-by-four over it to hold the water back, and then we laid another, and another. The water came down, but we worked. The thunder and lightning persisted, and the wind blew our untied tarps off the roof, but still, we worked. After about forty five minutes, Ed finally climbed down the ladder and found the last spot in the van covered, only after putting out the aluminum and plastic tailgating tent we ate lunch under to serve as some kind of cover for us. "Keep the tent low," he said, "and don't worry, these storms pass pretty fast. Just hang out here 'til it's over."

Worrying was never part of our plan, nor was sitting under the tent once the mud started coming in under the legs, forming little rivers around our boots. If it had rained like this for longer than the hour or two that it usually did, these mountains would have been reduced to shear rock, as the

mud and the houses stuck into it would be carried down the mountainside. To avoid the mini mudslide, we ducked out from under the tent and ventured out into the rain. As we did, Roy, the father of the family whose house we were repairing, rolled up on his ATV, not the least bit concerned in the face of the storm. “Y’all wan have some fun?” He asked, speaking out of the side of a smile that had more open space than teeth.

“Sure,” we called back, “what’ve ya got in mind?”

“Run on in th-house, grab Ronnie, tell ‘im tuh grab that lahter thar in the back closet.” When we returned with the seventeen year old Ronnie, and acetylene torch, and a speaker (which Ronnie insisted we’d need), we stood in the rain for a minute before we heard a deep mountain drawl over the wind. “Whatch’all standin’ thar for,” Roy called as he rounded the corner with a cardboard box of fireworks covered by a thin sheet of plastic, “getcher asses on up ‘err.” He used the box to gesture up to the roof. We checked that the van was in a blind spot and grabbed the ladder, put it up against the gutter where it had been, and stepped onto the roof, keeping low and steady. Roy and Ronnie, however, strode onto the roof in the face of wind and rain as though this was just their pastime.

Ronnie put the speaker down and draped a portion of loose tarp over it, trying (somewhat in vain) to keep it dry. He played something loud, something classic, and it felt as though it echoed over the valley, though I’m sure the sound didn’t travel much further than the edge of the roof. We lit fireworks, one after another, and shot them off into the valley, bursting in colors out and up against the canvas of a grey sky. They always rained down on a trailer below, or right back to us, but they never seemed to touch us.

Roy leaned against the roof where the slant changed angles and tipped his hat over his face, and then laced his fingers together behind his head, laid back as though the storm wasn’t raging around him. Ronnie tried to see how many fireworks he could hold and set off without blowing his hand off, launching spurts of sparkles out over our heads and into the valley below, while Abe danced and slid in the puddles on the roof making jet ski streams behind his heels when he did. We laughed when he slipped and fell hard enough to put a teenager sized dent in the tin we’d just laid. I stood close to the edge of the roof, never quite dangling my toes over the cliff but going close enough that a swift gust of wind would’ve carried me off.

I’d like to say I was thinking of God then. I wish I were, because maybe if I were able to identify the warmth I felt within myself as God, that sheer loosening of noose knots and the untwisting of the constant screwdriver in my stomach as something otherworldly, I might’ve actually been able to call it a conversion event. Of course, though, the knowledge of these kinds of moments is often only in hindsight. The conversion story seems to so often attempt to mirror that of the Apostle Paul that it never seems to offer leeway

or condolence for those who were raised in the church but only found God in retrospect, through the likes of a man who self-identified as Mountain Trash and had the humility to admit he didn't have the money to fix his roof on his own. To say I found God on the roof, to say I saw His light when the fireworks spit sparks over relative darkness, would be disingenuous. All I can say is that he was there.

Still, we stood and watched as the rain slowed and the clouds started to part, slithering out of the valley as quickly as they came. The sun had only just started to peak out of the clouds and the roof began to steam. Roy lifted up his hat when he felt the sun on the undersides of his arms and simply sat up, put a big pinch of snuff in his front lip, patted us on the back, and slid down the ladder without hardly a word. Ronnie might as well have done the same, leaving Abe and I up there alone, waiting for our crew to come out of the van and for all of us to get back to work.

...

To call even the parapets and gothic domes of the Abbey opulent would have been an understatement. We stepped off the bus outside Melk Abbey, cold and huddling together in our little cliques, the way every other high school group in the country would. We were already shivering in the Austrian air, a far cry from the spring-reminiscent air we'd had back in Venice, or in Padova. I was still in a T-Shirt, and had to run back onto the bus to grab the sweatshirt I'd decided I didn't need until now. Some of the other people on the trip had the foresight to pack warm clothes and coats; they were smart enough to prepare themselves for this weather when they got on the bus back in Padova. I am not, nor have I ever been, a forward thinker. This is, too, not to mention the fact that the drive was six hours of beautiful Italian hills and then two hours of snow-capped alps and an hour of winding Austrian roads. When we crossed the Alps into Austria, we were blanketed under snowbank clouds and snow-swept roads; we didn't see the white until we emerged from the last tunnel and all had our collective 'Dorothy and Toto' moments in our new Oz.

You would've heard that exact gasp again when we stepping into the sanctuary of the cathedral at the Abbey. They brought us in through a sort of employee entrance to the Abbey and showed us where we could put our things, change into our concert attire, and start warming up our voices, though eight hours of bus conversation with one another did more warming up than anything our director could've done. They gave us about five minutes before a man in a suit strode through the door and asked us all to follow him. We filed through a long narrow corridor and then stepped into the sanctuary. I'm sure there were lights on because it was bright but I was convinced that the only light within the cathedral was stemming from the gold upon gold that decorated the entire expansive room.

“It’s gold leaf,” they said, likely as a preemptive response to questions of church opulence or hypocrisy regarding the church’s attitude to poverty. I’d be lying, of course, if I said that question never once crossed my mind in the midst of all of it. It was, however, the least of my concerns while standing and staring up into the gold ceilings, the jeweled gold and silver cross that hung at the center above the altar, and hearing our dress shoes clunk and echo on the polished stone floor.

I stared into the pews and on fading kneelers, imagining the ghosts of weary souls and Sisters of this particular order alike coming together to kneel and pray to God represented by this cathedral, by this gold, by that opulent cross in the center of the shining organ pipes behind it. I was forced to wonder whether or not the Sisters of Melk Abbey knew what was going on an hour away. I have to wonder whether or not they brushed off rumors because most orders simply don’t concern themselves with politics, and to think about such things would distract them from their purpose there, as if wondering about lost souls would distract someone from prayer and the perpetual polishing of gold. I have to wonder if, when the Nazis came to power, they tried to take anything away from the Abbey to fund their efforts. I would assume the sisters and the Vatican would have both fought fervently against it had it happened. I wondered if they spent more time praying than polishing.

Still, when they put us on mahogany risers and we finally had our chance to sing, I turned off the visual awe and spiritual distress and sang. I kept my head buried in my music with a fervent desire to not be distracted by the light reflecting off golden walls and polished floors, until we hit the last note, the last chord, of “Wade in the Water,” after which we stopped and stood in complete silence, as did the audience, and listened to the almost five second echo lingering in the gold-reflected air, hanging in perfect pitch. Our choir director, Mr. Woodworth, had an enormous goofy smile on his face. Most of us closed our eyes, smiling, feeling it wrap around us and buzz as it clung to life until it faded out into a whisper. Someone in the audience, someone’s mother who came along for the trip, cried, I’m sure. I almost did.



# And On That Day

VERA EKHATOR

A man knelt in the kitchen of his one-room home. He holds a cast iron skillet, which has long ago rusted and smashes it against tiles which were once as white as the Himalayas.

“I want to know. I want to know! I don’t care if I understand but I want to know!” Again, he brings down the skillet, and splits the floor into tiny triangles. Then powder. Then dust. Until, the dust floats into his lungs, and turns his trachea and bronchial tubes into bleached coral.

“I want to know!” again. “I must know.” again. “I need to know.” again. And then, he coughs until he weeps.

\*\*\*

A woman sits on a bench halfway across the world. She hears every slam. They pound against her ribcage like mallets on a xylophone. She walks up to a tree and snaps off a branch. Then, with the branch, she plots off a section of land. It is hers because she has claimed it. She has claimed it because it is her own. From the branch’s spurs, flow a river that will later divide the earth. What has she done?

\*\*\*

In a country consumed by dust, a drone flies and drops a bomb. A lost eye. A severed arm. A last breath. A fallen lung. A war is fought around their homes. A war is fought and no one knows why, here, children grow ripe before their time. Here, a family of nine passes around an opium pipe. A family who can’t run, so chooses to escape instead. Among them, the youngest to smoke is six. She is a-d-d-i-c-t-e-d, addicted – even if she’ll never learn to spell it. Her brother is too. He is ten, but can pass for eight. At his age, he knows shame. During the day, he wears wrappings to hide his face. And, at night, he sells himself to lose himself in the opium’s haze.

\*\*\*

The pastor shouts, “Hallelujah,”. He is obese, yet moves with a serpent’s speed. The offering basket rotates like the hands of a clock. The money is put in like pinches of salt. “Give it all to Him. Give it all to him. Give it all to me!” The pastor drops to his knees. Sweat hangs at the end of his eyebrows like bait to a fishing rod. He spends the offering on a designer watch.

\*\*\*

In a desert, a rock is lassoed and squeezed until it becomes bread. The cult leader turns to his followers who praise, "It's a miracle! Satan lives and we are lucky to worship him." The leader spreads his arms and they embrace him. Then they pass around a gun and shoot themselves one by one. On their way to hell they see heaven. But heaven is their hell.

\*\*\*

An ancient woman approaches her 800th year. She has slain dragons. Overthrown tyrants. Lain with lions. Speared men with a golden sceptre. Grown grapes and eaten them with bees' nectar. And given birth to several nations. On her deathbed, she is told she never existed. She dies before she has time to think about this revelation. Some lie and say she is a work of fiction, others take the stand and say she'll be resurrected.

\*\*\*

There is a child who sits on his grandmother's lap. She pats his back and he listens as she tells him lies that he believes. Lies about women adorned in seaweed. Women who rise from the water singing promises that hitch on to the wind and wrap themselves around the necks of deaf individuals. Until, the feet of all those people dangled between scepticism and faith.

\*\*\*

A new woman stands in front of her black-spotted mirror and stares. Her shattered reflection stares back with wild eyes. She takes the razor to her scalp and watches her hairs waft down into the sink. Finished, she turns her head from left to right. Her father would've yelled not to clog the pipes. Her father would've yelled had he still been alive.

\*\*\*

A couple goes by the same name but comes from different homes. They sit in a tattoo parlour, watching as each gets a motto needled into the other's flesh. "Ink it, then live it," they say. Then, they go home to an apartment without running water or electricity and shoot heroine into each other's necks. Not long after, their bodies are found by a paramedic who is confused by their freshly tattooed gibberish.

The paramedic cocks his head, "They've barely, reached rigor mortis." Yet, the stench of rotting is overwhelming and thick.

He walks over to the refrigerator. When he sees, what is inside, the muscles in his face grow slack and his body, stiff. He stares past the world before him with eyes that failed to focus, "God, to only know a world that's

dark, lonely, and cold.”

He can't bear to shut the refrigerator's door on the smell's source – a swaddled infant with a mouth still open from crying.

\*\*\*

A pair of sky divers jump from a plane. Each of them see different scenes. The diver on the left sees a thriving cityscape: there isn't a single tower without an illuminated spire. She imagines that everyone within is busy at work, innovating. Look at the buildings and the people within them, counting numbers on screens. I can't wait to see what all of this work will bring!

The skydiver on the right sees an impossibly condensed ghetto. In the ghettos, are empty recliners. And not far off, opulent mansions separated by miles of distance. In the mansions are the people of the ghetto, cleaning for the occupants - occupants who are elsewhere, busy, working. All of our work is work without end. Upon thinking this thing and seeing these scenes, the skydiver is reminded that he hates himself and he is filled with tranquillity. It is easier not to open his 'chute because he hates himself. All he needed was a reminder. He turns to face the diver on the left and yells, “Why do we hate ourselves? Why do we hate ourselves? Why do we hate ourselves? Why-?”

The left diver cannot hear the right diver over the wind. As she struggles to read his lips, she reaches to release her 'chute but it refuses to work.

\*\*\*

The sun shines over a small town. The bell at a railroad crossing rings. A teenager sits in her car with the windows down. Fuck me. She sticks her head out of the window and peers over her sunglasses at the line of cars ahead. She notices a man who rushes toward the tracks with his daughter in hand. They reach the curb and stand. A maintenance truck drives down the tracks.

“Oh, looks like there's no train,” says the man.

“Aw, no train?” his daughter's fragile face shatters in the way only a child's can.

He stoops down and lifts her, “We can always see it next time.”

“When's next time?”

“Maybe tomorrow.”

“But what about today?”

He sees the currents running under her face and quickly says, “Why don't we go through the car wash today? Yea?”

The currents turn to electricity and the little girl beams. “Yay!”

The teenager in the car watches vicariously pleased. The car behind her beeps. “Oh, fuck off,” she whispers, smiling.

\*\*\*

In a hospital, a machine beeps a melody that matches the steady leaps of the organ in a young woman's chest. It is not her, but her great-aunt who is connected to the monitor. The room smells of heavily laundered sheets. The smell is tongue drying.

Her great-aunt stirs from sleep, "There's a certain kind of peace in death don't you think, sweetie?"

"Not for the living there isn't. Not for the living. And we're all living until we're dead. So, please, don't even think about it."

"Do you remember when I would carry you on my back, you were about 5 or 6 then?"

The young woman's heart is waterlogged with happiness. "I remember." She remembers so well it is as if she is there. Nose burrowed into her great-aunt's neck, which always had the lingering scent of moth-balls and mints. Together they would descend the steps, through the living room, and onto the porch. The girl would play using nothing but her imagination. If she got bored or tired under the heat of the sun then she would crawl up her great-aunt's leg, rest her head on her chest, and listen to the paired rhythm of their heart's steps.

The young woman takes her great-aunt's leathered hand, "Sometimes, I wish I could go back."

"I hope I haven't made you sad."

"No, not sad... I just don't understand. I feel like I've lost something. It's just not the same when it's all in the past. It's like something I have, but can't quite grasp."

Her great-aunt closes her eyes. "Someday, you'll find that you don't have to grasp. That it's better if you don't. After all, you can only hold so much at a time. If you let go, then you don't have to choose what to hold on to - you can just be."

"What if I want to be with you?"

"Why would you want to spend life waiting? I'm at rest, sweetie."

"Are you happy?"

"I started with nothing and yet, I've achieved my everything. There's nothing else I can be."

"But I can't bear losing you."

With effort, the great-aunt raises her hand to stroke a tear away from the woman's cheek, "Don't be silly, sweetie. You can never lose me. Now wake, you've not yet exhausted."

The woman jolts up in a room full of spirits. She pleads to one of them, through the chasm of darkness, "I know. Though, I wish I didn't. I can't help wanting to grasp. I'd rather just forget." Then she drinks until the spirits fill her before falling backwards into a wooden slumber. When she wakes again, her wish is granted. She remembers nothing. She feels nothing.

She feels worse, like something emptied.

\*\*\*

Yes, on that day, the stars bear witness, the Earth hung in space and looked utterly hopeless: rotating and rotating and rotating - without break. As for its people? They found themselves, together, on a planet of life surrounded by darkness. And none of them ever knew exactly what to do. Nevertheless, they found ways to continue – to think “about time”, to think about Time, to think about times, and to live through days.

# Patchwork

TIMOTHY BLACK

In the entryway  
hung my Granny's quilt,  
each square from one  
of her favorite sweaters,  
a patchwork of colors  
accented by cardinals and thrushes,  
by roses and daisies,  
Home Sweet Home  
embellishing the center  
in a deep royal purple.  
It was sewn by her hands  
as cancer sapped  
their strength.  
I often admire it  
and wonder what  
would make up  
my patchwork memory.

A square of blue fleece,  
covered in images of puppies,  
would begin the pattern,  
cut from a long hidden,  
but never forgotten blanket.  
The memory of story time  
and fears of thunder  
spun and woven into  
something soft and warm  
protective and nurturing.

Next a piece of polyester  
and spandex, black and white,  
from a Halloween long passed.  
Power Rangers were the obsession  
of the moment and a Halloween  
soon turned to six months.

Each day a new adventure  
 in a childhood imagination  
 with no seams.

A hawk's talons  
 clutching an S  
 on a field of orange  
 would be placed beside it,  
 with its distinct smell,  
 sweat, grass, and earth  
 all wash out,  
 competition never does.  
 As my fingers rub against  
 the fabric, a quiet chant or prayer  
 "safe" seems to still escape.

A simple black patch  
 from an awkwardly fitting robe  
 comes after that.  
 Three pins will be attached:  
 The Same S from before,  
 District Chorus 2018,  
 West Side Singers.  
 Pitch, tone, and rhythm  
 hemmed in with  
 a strand of nerves

I've tried to imagine  
 more squares to add  
 perhaps a big orange G,  
 for Gettysburg College,  
 or a piece of the flannel  
 that always seems to  
 smell like him  
 but I know a simple white panel  
 is placed in the center.  
 Embroidered in black thread is:  
 Do I dare disturb the universe?  
 The words appear like a tattoo  
 on alabaster skin.  
 The quilt will always be a plan,  
 faded memories never sewn together,

but rather grafted to my skin,  
a technicolor coat to cover me.  
So how unfortunate that no matter  
the fabric or color it will always be seen  
as a rainbow flag.



# Origami Love Lessons

JULIA CHIN

Pretty, patterned paper can be practical if it is  
 Deep cobalt, salt-sprinkled with constellations.  
 I chose it because no matter how much they  
 Twinkle and shine and give light to the Earth,  
 The stars will not bend to my will.

You left me with paper cuts on both of my  
 Ring fingers, the smell of scarlet rust soaking  
 Through thin layers of what were once trees,  
 Plus the inevitable feeling that I'll never be  
 An expert at this timeless craft.

Squares folded easily under my thin hands  
 Until I had produced an aviary of  
 Swans, cranes, doves, larks, and ravens,  
 Each a collection of geometrically cut edges,  
 And that's exactly what they did: cut.

Their paper wings fluttered inside my chest  
 Until I bled inwardly from the constant  
 Rubbing of sharp corners and creases  
 Against pink cardiac muscle  
 Beating to the steady rhythm of

you.

you.

you.

# First Person Plural Nonexistent

JULIA CHIN

they tell me that my poems about you  
are too bitter,  
that I paint my portraits with  
the violent hand of an ex-lover.  
I suppose that's what  
We  
are now.  
interesting, isn't it?  
giving a label to We, as if there  
was ever any Us.



## Gammel Strand

MELISSA CASALE

# Outside the Lines

MEGHAN JOYCE

Ellyda caught the scent of salt brine as indigo struck skin. It was scarce, barely a whiff, but it sparked a decade old anxiety. She glanced at her palms, their once aqua color morphing into a squash yellow while her twin sharks swam with frenzy, twisting and turning around kelp beds. Their eyes bored into Ellyda, almost confronting the poison leaking into her stomach, her heart, her breath, her blood.

Almost.

The twins were some of her best work, moving with such grace and power one could forget their dyed existence. Practically identical, save for Lamia's withered fin and Apua's feather-like gills, the two christened the shop. The first tattoos Ellyda bred within her own walls. She agonized for days and weeks on the style, spending nights scouring stores for the most vibrant ink. In the end, Ellyda decided on the Haida. It was the most her, with its abstractions bleeding together like black seeping out of a ballpoint pen. Combined, these shapes form an image, a meaning. An animal, or animals, symbolizing the owner. Offering protection. When she fashioned her guardians, no time was spent on pain or nerves. She thought of life, the ocean, shallow breaths. She recalled sand trapped in toenails, salt coating the tongue. Ellyda sketched and sketched until fingers creaked and her eyes were as unblinking as her creations. Even in their simplest form, Lamia and Apua lived, weaving through a personal sea. As Ellyda marked her skin, she scattered destiny into every line. Lamia would be her muse, passion's embodiment, while Apua remained a warrior, protecting his mistress. The sharks did not speak. They were sharks. Not human. But they were Ellyda's confidants. Her friends. Though a bit sad really, that she felt closest to her own illustrations.

An ahem interrupted Ellyda's panic, focusing her attention on the woman sitting in the too-old artist chair. The customer was about a week short of ancient, her skin lined with crooked wrinkles resembling a toddler's "straight lines." Still, her eyes flickered with a subtle tenderness and her lips twitched ever so slightly, as if a smile was just waiting to burst. Adorned atop her forehead was a horn the size and color of a baby carrot. Ellyda wondered whether the woman dealt in foresight or perhaps intellect. Most head and face Tell's were of that sort. Or maybe persuasion. Probably not, after all she was in the shop and her sincerity seemed real enough. The woman cleared her throat again before speaking.

“Excuse me dear. I don’t mean to pry but I believe your hands were blue before, yes? Is everything alright? I can come back another time if you need a break.”

Ellyda released a breath hoping the woman would mistake the relief for exhaustion. The air smelt only of antiseptic wipes and metal.

“Oh, I’m sorry ma’am. Sometimes I think too much, gets me nervous. My hands will be back to blue once I calm down a bit. Nothing to worry about, happens all the time.”

The old woman offered a nod, her hand grazing Ellyda’s wrist. A slight but gentle gesture. Cradling the tattoo iron Ellyda decided. It was a risk certainly, something she rarely did, but this woman had been kind and Ellyda repaid kindness. Her hands and mind worked in tandem, the same melody played in different keys. The forefinger memorized every crevice of the woman’s arm, studying its geography with a scholar’s frenzy. The right palm cleaned the canvas, wiping the skin raw. Then metal struck flesh and indigo overpowered cream.

The picture was simple: a turtle lazing in a seaweed bed. Not the most complicated design, but the woman had adored the sketch’s clumsy movements, the flippers wobbling every which way. To Ellyda, the turtle resembled a tipsy ballerina. To the woman, it was endearing. Maybe she had a penchant for broken things or just thought the turtle was funny. Ellyda didn’t ask.

For once the tattoo’s simplicity did not irritate Ellyda, the needle dancing across flesh as the mind wandered, dissecting memory until one moment remained. She had been five, maybe six, kicking sand into the air and feeling the summer snow latch onto her eyelashes. A mixture of caramel corn, taffy, and hot dog was caught in the air, snuggling its way into Ellyda’s nose while she laughed and laughed over nonsense, something only a toddler would understand. Kneading her toes deeper into the sand, Ellyda’s piggy toe brushed a leathery surface, smooth yet fragile. She had knelt down, chubby legs swaddled in sand, and cupped her hands around the object. There was a strangeness about the object, the color of spoiled cream but resembling a bleached stone. With wonder she had brought the stone to her lips and breathed a kiss. Maybe, she had thought, it will come to life. She could make a friend solely for herself. Even then, Ellyda twisted creation. A slight peck then another wracked Ellyda’s treasure until shards cascaded to the ground, revealing the creature within. Its skin was greyish-green except for the back, a shell-like tree bark replacing skin. Ellyda remembered the eyes most, dark and innocent.

In the tattoo parlor, miles from the ocean, Ellyda held to that memory, recalling every emotion, every thought. Hold on to that, she told herself, hold on to the beauty and the wonder. Remember the love, the heartbeat tripping beneath your palm, the new eyes against an old world. Pick every-

thing apart and find the simple. What defined the memory? She knew before switching from indigo to green: hope. Hope and possibility. Ellyda decided to add both. As the iron once again penetrated skin, Ellyda willed feeling into the ink, painting future into the budding turtle, hope passing into the shell, possibility into the flippers. A pleasant warmth filled Ellyda's fingers, her hands morphing from the blue to her favorite pastel purple. Please, she thought, may this woman gain her purest desire, nurture life, view a world free of cynicism. With a final shading, the warmth vanished and Ellyda's hands returned to blue. All was the unchanged, save for the indigo sea turtle wobbling down a wrinkled arm.

The old woman grinned, each wrinkle forming its own unique smile, as her turtle flopped into the kelp bed, rolling around in a satisfied display. Tears pricked the woman's eyes and she studied Ellyda's, the carrot-shaped horn glowing a subtle sunset. A spark of fear wheedled into existence. What if she knows, Ellyda wondered. What if that's her Tell, knowing others? What if she turns me in, lets them know what I can do, I can't go there, can't taint these hands can't taint these wishes I can't I can't I can't I can't....

"Thank you."

Ellyda's neck snapped back, a wave of whiplash crashing against her temple. The old woman was looking at her with a grin beaming like tumbled crystals. Her horn no longer glowed but seemed shorter by about a centimeter or two, the color dimmer as well, but the woman appeared livelier than before. A hand hesitated then inched its way toward Ellyda, the textured hand meeting the smooth.

"Thank you," the woman repeated, "I don't know what you did exactly but I can tell, whatever it was, it was important. So, thank you, for what you did and for my turtle, he's beautiful. You have a precious gift. Remember that."

Ellyda offered a nod only. She didn't trust her voice. Extending her arm to the woman, Ellyda helped her customer out of the chair and over to the cash register, finally waving farewell after the payment was settled. Customers like that woman were rare, people who appreciated the tattoos, not for their movement but for their life. Those were the people who received something extra, the ones that deserved it.

A clang interrupted Ellyda's pondering as a man paraded inside. Ellyda recognized him; he had arrived earlier in the week for consultation. The man was striking, like a frog disguising poison with color, though he possessed no visible Tell. His complexion was that of powdered milk, his nails filed to bladed point. His eyes, however, garnered the most attention, both a crackling green which flickered intensity. Ellyda didn't like him. To be fair, they'd only met for a few hours, but she could sense a sliminess about him, a tendency towards the cruel. In a manner suiting a prized peacock, he strutted

towards Ellyda and stuck out his hand for what appeared to be handshake. Ellyda grasped his hand with a single pump before releasing the grip, her hands now a soot grey.

“Hello Missss Ellyda”, the man said, exaggerating every s, “Could we make this quick, I’m sorry to say I have a very important meeting tonight that I cannot be late to. You understand, I assume?”

Ellyda replied, “Yes sir, I see, but you must understand my work takes time and a great deal of patience, especially with a design as complex as your own. I’ll need at least.... four hours or so.”

“Four hours?! You can’t be serious. I know your tattoos are .... different but that does not excuse unprofessionalism. I’ve read enough to know tattoos should take just two hours or less, but...fine I’ll accept it. For the record, you should tell your clients about the time restraint before they arrive. It’s only courteous.”

A scream clung to Ellyda’s throat like a vomit, begging her for release. Of course, she had told the client about the wait time during their consultation but he must have ignored her to focus on more “important” things. The tattoo he chose was complicated as well, a foot-long snake painted in amber and yellow scales, wrapping its body around a burning branch. Snakes weren’t too difficult but the flames were troublesome, the shifting colors and shapes difficult to perfect. Pointing to the artist chair, Ellyda semi-forced the man to a sitting position while fighting the urge to groan. As she loaded the tattoo iron, drowning out the man’s self-righteous droning, a thought slithered into existence. She couldn’t or at least she shouldn’t. Adding kindness was one matter but something.... darker. The idea was more than tempting, and as in all things, desire overshadowed sensibility.

Fingers poised to draw, Ellyda remembered. She conjured back a zoo field trip in the third grade, watching the snakes weave through the brush. Ellyda had thought they were graceful, beautiful even. Then, an eyelid viper had wrung a mouse’s neck, honeyed venom seeping into the rodent’s flesh. There wasn’t much beauty in that. That’s what I’ll give him, she decided. Fear. Sudden, short, but oh so real. A reminder of what he has to lose. Ellyda’s hand glowed lavender as she worked, stitching fear into a single scale, one out of three hundred and sixty-five. One fearful day out of a year’s worth of happiness. Not too bad when she thought about it. Completing the snake’s elastic tongue, Ellyda escorted the man out who, to his credit, mumbled appreciation for her work. He paid then hurried out the door.

Once nine o’clock rolled around, Ellyda closed down the shop and started cleaning, careful to sterilize every needle. Channel Four news echoed in the background while Ellyda worked, providing some much-needed entertainment. A barely in her twenty’s reporter stuttered on screen, summarizing the day’s mundanity.

“And in recent news, a body was discovered along the riverside by three teenagers. The teens immediately alerted authorities and the body was taken shortly after. No foul play has been noted nor has the body been identified. If anyone has information concerning this man’s identity please call the number below.”

Apua and Lamia gnashed their teeth as Ellyda sank to the floor, her eyes transfixed on a set of amber-yellow scales.





## A Rose is a Rose

VERA EKHATOR



## Creation of a Good Boy

NATALIE ORGA





## Fashion Forward

VERA EKHATOR

# Womanhood

MAY LONERGAN

As an awkward fourth grader, I desperately longed to grow up. I dreamed of graduating from trainer bras and finally transforming into the majestic models I saw on magazine covers. I basically had two models living in my own house. Well, not actual models, but I did watch my two older sisters graduate middle school and they enter something called *puberty*. I was never really sure about what puberty entailed, but the changes in my sisters were obvious, and I was jealous. Their hair grew past their shoulders, they bought bras that weren't one-size-fits-all, and most importantly, they gracefully shed their baby fat, almost as easily as taking off an oversized winter sweater.

As they developed, my little girl figure failed to slim to perfection. In fact, I felt like my body was growing in the opposite direction. I may have looked beautiful in the biased eyes of my parents, but in reality I looked like Pillsbury Doughboy with wild, blonde hair that fell just below my ears. To make matters worse, my hair was so stupidly short that I couldn't even braid it to seem cooler. Believe me, I tried and the braid fell out every single time. The best I could do was a set of pigtails, and that would have been way worse. Clips fell out, headbands itched, and my hair simply wasn't long enough for a full ponytail. In defeat, a giant bow clung onto the right side of my head and I reluctantly solidified my title as the "adorable little sister."

It may seem immature, but that was the first time I experienced true envy. I wanted that. To be beautiful. To be a *woman*. Only I had absolutely no idea how to go about it.

In my defense, no one ever handed me instructions on how to be a "grown up." Ever since Maggie McPherson told me all the gory details about parents having "sax" in first grade, I was shielded from adult topics and my childhood knowledge remained inside the constraints of a perfect PG movie. When my sisters decided to snap their fingers and become beautiful, curiosity took control of my brain, as I drowned in a flood of questions. To be honest, the mystery of womanhood was captivating, and I was starving for more information. Being a girl was already hard work, but being a woman seemed utterly impossible. Nevertheless, I was up for the challenge.

It was 2009 and without a cell phone or computer, my iPod Nano wasn't cutting it. I had to take matters into my own hands. If I truly wanted to grow up, that meant uncovering forbidden topics on my own, even with-

out the help of the Internet. I made the executive decision to become a self-employed eleven-year-old detective, and my sisters were my subjects. With my favorite pink diary in hand, I examined their beauty routines and took notes. Yes, the rainbow on the cover was childish for the job, but at the time I was low on resources and the book even had a handy little lock. Privacy was essential to *my* cause, but I was perfectly fine with invading my sisters' privacy, for the sake of research. You've gotta do what you've gotta do in this business.

For some reason, even with the right resources, my detective skills failed me. I thought I was doing a pretty fine job, especially for a kid with an elementary school education. I managed to remain undercover and I could've sworn that each note I took brought me closer to womanhood. Unfortunately, the data just didn't add up.

As I watched my sisters rub lotion on their perfectly bare legs, I glared at the blonde fuzz covering mine, hoping my death stare would magically laser it off. When that failed, I knew what needed to be done. After re-reading my notes, I repeated the same process, step by step. It was supposed to be easy peasy, but I should've known perfection would be hard to achieve. No matter how many times I showered and lathered on the same moisturizer, the hair refused to disappear.

Don't get me started on the manicure fiasco. Older girls always had their nails painted pink, blue or red, and of course, I decided that I wanted pretty nails too. I knew my sisters would notice if their nail polish went missing, so I used the next best thing: the ancient Wite-Out that was crammed into "that drawer" in the kitchen. Every disorganized household has one; it's basically a treasure box of random junk from the past five years.

Anyway, apparently people have to use actual nail polish for a true adult manicure. Even though Wite-Out has a handy little brush to paint on small surfaces, it never dries as smoothly as nail polish. Never. It is impossible to take off and no one wants nails that look like melting marshmallows. Trust me, I learned that the hard way.

It was only one week of intense detective work, but I already felt like a failure. I was too nervous to steal any nail polish, and the moisturizer I borrowed didn't work at all. To make matters worse, I didn't find anything useful in their bathroom cupboards. I continued my raids and searched through the boring stuff: old tubes of toothpaste, some stray hair ties, shampoo. I found nothing. Nothing could help me become a woman, or at least that what I thought.

Every good detective needs a reliable informant. Although I was not looking for one, I praised God for sending me Claire Maco the day she ran into the classroom with confidential information. After recess, the oblivious boys shuffled back to their desks, while a group of girls suspiciously accumu-

lated in the corner of the room. Of course, like all the other girls, I practically sprinted to the cubbies to hear Claire's juicy gossip.

"I'm telling you guys, there was blood everywhere, all over the toilet. It might have been a middle schooler, but you never know. My mom got hers super early," Claire exclaimed as she uncrossed her arms and looked at her audience.

She really must've known what she was talking about, because it seemed like the elementary school version of a TED talk. Although all the other girls were nodding in unison, I was beyond confused. I decided to bombard her with questions, but only because of my ongoing investigation.

"What happened? I mean, are they okay? Did you see who it was?"

"C'mon May. There was a bloody tampon, so obviously someone had her period. You know what a *period* is, don't you?"

Claire whispered the word "period" the same way Maggie McPherson had whispered the word "sax" all those years ago, and there was no way I could let an opportunity like this pass by. If I wanted to remain undercover, I had to act natural. She seemed cocky, but two could play at that game.

"Yeah, I know what it is," I lied.

"Oh really. Well, what is it?"

"It goes at the end of a sentence, Claire."

Well, that was definitely the wrong answer, because the roar of laughter that followed damaged, no, *destroyed* my ego. Blood immediately rushed to my head and I felt the burning humiliation scorch my face and ears. I thought I could die right then and there, but Ms. Phelan miraculously stopped the laughter by telling the class to return to their seats. I swear I could've kissed her I was so thankful.

For the remainder of the day I was restless in my seat. How could I possibly focus after a conversation like that? What I needed to learn about wasn't English. I needed to figure out what the heck a period was, because it clearly had nothing to do with grammar. Ms. Phelan's lessons eventually transformed into a "wah-wah-wah" scene from *Charlie Brown*, and I decided to focus on what was truly important: creating a plan for when I finally escaped this prison and got home.

By the time 3:15 arrived and I finally opened my front door, I knew right where to go: the bathroom, specifically, my sisters' bathroom. I knew I checked there already, but I was positive that I must have missed something, anything. I plopped myself onto the fuzzy pink carpet and frantically threw open the familiar cupboards underneath the sink. After tossing everything onto the floor, I reexamined the evidence closely.

Thankfully, something new caught my eye. A box labeled "Always Pads" was hidden in a grocery bag, and I greedily ripped it open to examine its contents. After unwrapping the layers of thin plastic, I found myself con-

fused, yet again. They looked like diapers but were supposed to go in a bra? The design made absolutely no sense, and I was never going to stoop as low as a bra stuffer. Unimpressed, I tossed the box onto the ground and threw the opened pad in the trash.

That's when I saw it: the hint of red on another pad in the trash bin. It was pretty gross, I'm not gonna lie, but research is research, and I continued to stare at it with growing curiosity. Why would bra pads be bloody? Could this be like the blood Claire saw earlier? Did *my* sisters have what the girls called a period—A proper period, not the grammar one?

“May! What the heck! What are you doing with my stuff? Get out! NOW,” my sister Gretchen shrieked as if she found me with a dead body, which was pretty ironic, considering the blood in the trash.

“Well, it's too late now! I know what a *period* is,” I proudly retorted, although it was complete bologna. I was acting pretty dramatic, but I had to sell the lie. I really didn't want to be laughed at again, and maybe this time I could finally be considered an equal.

I guess my extensive research and web of lies did eventually work, but the whole secret detective thing ended up being pretty anticlimactic. The next day, I found a book on my bed titled, *The Care and Keeping of You: The Body Book for Younger Girls*. It was eye opening for sure, and after reading it, I immediately resigned from my detective job. After all that work, I finally realized the harsh truth: I was definitely *not* ready for womanhood, and to be honest, I probably never will be.



# Hide and Seek

NATALIE ORGA

The day Summer disappeared, you were at home, feverish and ready for the phone to ring. You'd been waiting for that phone call all morning, hovering moth-like around the old-fashioned landline in the kitchen. Your friends liked to tease you whenever you used the ancient thing; the chunky, mustard-yellow receiver tucked under your chin, the ringlet cord that you absently twisted between your fingers while you chatted. Summer always said that you looked like the picture of 1980s adolescence when you picked it up, like you should be teasing your roots and giggling over a crush.

Now, however, it sat indifferently in its cradle, taunting you. Your head throbbed, the blood unnaturally hot beneath your temples. Your palms were damp, stomach clenched against an onslaught of painkillers. You radiated a halo of heat.

Outside, the morning hailed bright and crisp, mocking your migraine. Honeyed light spilled onto the lawn, illuminating everything with perfect clarity. Yellow leaves cluttered the ground like gold doubloons in a pirate's chest. The sun poured butter into your sink. You couldn't appreciate it, though; you were waiting for the phone call, the one that would mean you could finally stop worrying, crawl into bed and sleep like a hibernating bear.

Last night, Summer had called you and told you to meet her at the park. Her voice on the other end of the line was thin and dehydrated. At first, you were ecstatic to hear from your lifelong best friend, but the initial happiness gave way to dread. The two of you have communicated solely through handwritten letters since you've been in college; Summer relished the sweet sense of nostalgia that accompanied snail mail. A call was not a good sign.

The phone remained stubbornly silent.

You shuffled to the coffee machine, toes cold on the laminate floor, trying to distract yourself. You fumbled for the hefty form of your favorite mug with one hand, poured black coffee with the other, the fragrant steam cloying against your cheeks. Past the unwashed window, a cluster of wooden wind chimes enshrined the concrete patio, flailing and buffeting each other in the autumn air. Your mother loves little decorations like that; painted glass, sanded driftwood, sculptures made of old car parts. Your dad teases her incessantly about her "tacky" taste, but that only encourages her. He'd comment on her garden gnome statuette, and the very next day he'd be confronted by two outside the front door, smirking from beneath their pointed red caps.

Brrrrrrring!

The sound of the phone startled you from your reverie. You slid the coffee pot back into the machine, taking a hasty swallow from your mug and wincing. It was bitter and weak.

“Hello?” you lifted the archaic phone to your ear, relief swelling in your chest. Summer has called. She’s okay. It’s all okay.

“Is this Robin Harlow?” a man’s voice crackled on the other end of the line, deep and leathery and most definitely not Summer’s.

“May I ask who this is?” you responded cautiously.

“This is the Piper County Police Department. I’m sorry to interrupt your morning.”

Your heart plummeted.

“It’s alright. What can I do for you?” your voice was cheerful, but you clutched the receiver with both hands.

“I was wondering if you had any information pertaining to the location of Ms. Summer Hayborn. Her mother tells me you are her best friend.”

“Location? She’s not at home?”

“No. I’m sorry to have to tell you this, but Ms. Hayborn is missing as of this morning.”

A fresh wave of nausea jolted through you. You suddenly wished you hadn’t drank any of that coffee. You’d told Summer to stay the night, crash on the couch. No big deal. But she’d insisted on going home. Once Summer had her mind set on something, there was no diverting her.

“Robin?” the officer prompted. For a moment, you are in the park, watching her scrunch her freckled little nose at you; I want to hide. You seek. She can’t be denied. You opened your mouth, silence bounding into the receiver like an untold secret. Finally, you heard your own voice, detached and hollow.

“I have information.”

\*

You were in kindergarten when you first met Summer. It was a boiling day in late August, and the playground in your neighborhood was teeming with restless children and their exasperated parents. You hid behind your mother’s knees, watching as the other kids swung like primates from the brightly-colored play equipment. Two boys with curly hair kicked at the ground from the see-saw, and a cluster of children sat on the swings, pumping their short legs futilely. A few girls dashed around the playhouse, their sneakers kicking up sprays of wood chips. Sweat gleamed on every forehead, shirts sticking to chests, shorts plastered to thighs.

Your mom dislodged you from her clothes and gave you a gentle push. You whined half-heartedly in protest, but eventually wandered onto the playground, a wary explorer stepping into the jungle. You sought the shelter

beneath the monkey bars.

“He-llo!”

A small, red face appeared suddenly before you, hovering upside down. You jumped backwards as the face began to cackle.

“Did I get ya?” it asked, its voice lilting with an accent that you’d never heard before. Later, you would learn that it was Texan.

The owner of the face was a little girl swinging from the monkey bars, dangling precariously by her knees.

“I guess so,” you said, watching in awe as she flipped her agile body from the bars and landed on her feet. She wore velcro shoes with cartoon dogs on the toes.

“Cool! Do you wanna try? I’ll teach you!”

You look at your mom, standing at the outskirts of the playground, wiping her forehead with the back of her hand.

“Okay,” you shrug, already enjoying the way her seafoam eyes light up with delight. She clambered up the ladder, and within moments was watching you from a crouching position on top of the monkey bars. She had a mop of frizzy red ringlets, her pale skin pinkening under the blaze of the sun. You liked her immediately; her enthusiasm, her red, upturned nose, her disregard for the rules and for your shyness.

Twenty minutes later, when you were laying in a pile of wood chips with a fractured arm, she ran to your mom and pulled her by the sleeve to the spot where you’d fallen. She followed you home, watched while your mom dialed up the emergency clinic, studied your tear-stained face with wide, frightened eyes. When you returned from the hospital with your arm in a plaster cast, Summer was waiting in your driveway, a nub of sidewalk chalk in her hand.

\*

“Summer has a boyfriend. Or she did. He’s terrible,” you told the police officer. Papers rustled on his end, the click of a pen.

“Do you think he has something to do with her disappearance?”

“I know he does.” You didn’t mean to say it with so much conviction, not to a police officer. But when you thought about Simon’s thin-lipped, cigarette smirk, shivers combed your back.

“How do you know?”

You’d only ever met Summer’s boyfriend one time, but you didn’t need any more encounters to figure him out. And after what you had seen last night, you had all the evidence you needed.

“I saw Summer last night. She’s running from him.”

\*

Summer broke all the rules. You learned quickly that she would do just about anything in the pursuit of fun. Being her friend, especially as a

timid, obedient kid, was exhilarating. Possibilities unfolded at your small feet like an expanse of clouds. You and Summer spent elementary school whispering with your desks pressed together, swinging from the trees in the school courtyard, painting each others' faces with your mom's acrylic set, and sleeping in the living room at your house, laughing hysterically as you rolled across the floor in your sleeping bags. You got accustomed to being in trouble, but nobody ever suggested that you stay away from Summer. One look at the two of you doodling on each others' notebooks, and they already knew it was impossible to separate you.

Every day after school, the two of you would head to the neighborhood park. You both laughed about the monkey bar incident (I've been messing up your life since day one! She'd giggle), although you swore your arm still ached whenever it rained.

Her favorite game was hide and seek. You did most of the seeking, but you didn't mind; she was so overjoyed when she scurried off to hide. There weren't very many places to conceal yourself in the playground, but she didn't mind. She only hid for a few seconds each time, waiting for you to walk towards the spot where she was lurking before she leapt out at you. She never failed to startle you, even after months. It would go on for hours: you'd cover your eyes with your hands, lift them, and there she was, clutching her stomach as she laughed at your shocked expression.

One day, you opened your eyes, and she was screaming.

"I don't want to go home!"

"Tough shit, kid. Move your ass."

Summer's dad loomed beside the tube slide, looking out of place. His head was buzzed, and his throat bore a faded tattoo of a snake eating itself. His metal-strapped boots crunched the wood chips like autumn leaves. Summer looked slightly green. She scrambled her way into the tube slide, her silhouette darkening the space she occupied.

"I told you not to come here anymore, and now I'm getting pissed."

You backed towards the playhouse; her dad looked like the type of man who wouldn't hesitate to punish a kid that wasn't his.

"Why can't I come here?" Summer chirped, her muffled voice emanating from inside the slide. Her dad's chest expanded, eyes narrowing.

"Who said you could ask questions? Get. The fuck. Out. I have shit to do."

For a moment, there was silence. You watched the dark shape inside the yellow tube. Silently, you prayed that she'd move. Please, Summer, just this once.

"Okay, your way or the highway," her dad shouted, throwing his arms up jerkily. You watched in horror as he bent down and stuffed his torso into the slide. The sight of his massive boots sticking out of the end might have

been funny, if it hadn't been for the sickening thumping sounds that echoed in the tube as he dragged her down the length of the metal cylinder. In one swift motion, he emerged, brandishing Summer's ankles.

She dangled upside down, blood trickling upwards from her lip, tears sliding towards her hairline.

"Oh, shit. Now your mom is gonna be mad. Fuck."

Her dad flipped her to her feet as easily as if she were a rag doll, clamping his hands on her shoulders. He rubbed at her mouth with the back of his hand, then wiped it on his jean shorts.

"Home. Now."

After that day, Summer told you a lot about her dad. How he was mostly mean, but sometimes would get nice and make her feel bad for being angry at him. How he smoked rolled paper and stank, how he pushed her, pulled her hair, but took care to clean her up before she went to school. How he yelled. He seemed to hate her the most. She ran away frequently, almost always to your house. More times than you could count, you arrived home from school to see Summer cross-legged in your driveway, waiting for you, just like the day you met. Sometimes, you glimpsed the yellow rind of a bruise on her skinny bicep before she tugged her sleeves down.

\*

"She called me last night, told me to meet her at the park."

"And did this alarm you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

You felt like acid was eating at your throat, but you couldn't bring yourself to sit down.

"She never calls me. We write letters to each other."

"And you met her at the park, right?"

"Yeah."

A slight shuffle of papers, like a moth's wings against the receiver.

"How was she then? Did she seem upset?"

"Very."

\*

By the time freshman year of highschool rolled around, you and Summer had given up hide and seek in favor of more grown-up things, like sticking googly eyes to inanimate objects, and making fun of pop stars, and dreading the Fitnessgram Pacer Test. Her hair darkened to an auburn. Her Texan accent faded to nonexistence. You started running in the mornings. You still congregated in the park after school, sometimes lugging your backpacks to the old playhouse and flipping through textbooks. She liked to find the most hideous photographs and point at them matter-of-factly, asking what your picture was doing in a book. You cackled together in the playground until it

got dark.

Summer quickly developed another new interest: boys. In particular, one boy--

“Jacob,” she’d sigh, tilting her chin up dramatically, gazing to the heavens. You swatted at her, snickering.

“Oh my god, he’s such an ass!” you protested. Although you were laughing, you weren’t joking about that. Jacob was a senior, and six feet of pure, overgrown child. He was infamous for starting fights with kids in the hallways between classes and bringing water bottles of vodka to class. But it wasn’t just his shitty choices that put you off. He exuded a sense of aggression, untapped and unchecked. Summer thought his blue eyes were dreamy; you thought they were empty.

“But he’s hot, isn’t he? Lay off!” she shouted teasingly.

“Doesn’t change anything!” you pointed out. She tossed her hair, suddenly far-away and wistful.

“I’m sure there’s more to him than meets the eye. He just need to be fixed a little.”

You shivered slightly. You’d once heard Summer’s mom say that about her dad, before she got on a bus to who-knows-where. She’d been standing in your kitchen, scooping veggie dip out of a ceramic dish and chatting with your mom. He’s a fixer-upper, that’s for sure.

That year, when Jacob asked Summer to go to prom with him, you swore that you wouldn’t get involved. But it wasn’t long before he was her boyfriend. A boyfriend who didn’t like her leaving the house too much, or hanging out with people he didn’t know intimately, or going to parties or events. When Summer stopped eating, you called the school’s administration office anonymously.

“I don’t want to disclose my name, but I am almost certain that Jacob Hyde has drugs in his locker.” You hung up quickly and listened to the blank pitch of the dial tone, heart thundering.

The next week, Jacob was transferred to a different school. The rumor mill reported that he had been busted for coke. You watched in guilty agony as Summer cried for a couple of days, but she regained her weight, started smiling again. Her eyes were still distant.

She didn’t run away from home anymore. She had learned not to argue with her dad, or fight back. Once, you saw him push her against a staircase and storm into the living room, breathing heavily into the end of a cigarette.

“When is he going to stop doing this?” You followed his hulking form with furious eyes. When you turned back to Summer, she was expressionless.

“He’s not. This is how life works. It doesn’t scare me anymore.”

“Then what does?” you asked, incredulous. You could still picture her

first grade self in your mind, trembling lips, scrawny arms wrapped around her knees. Now, she was considering your question with squinted eyes.

“If he was good to me. Then, I think...I’d be terrified.”

\*

The police officer on the phone was scribbling your description of Simon’s car on a notepad. A black Ford F-150 with red underglow. He was so proud of it. When you’d met him over the fall break, he’d been intent on showing you. You’d watched him saunter around the raised cab, slapping the warm metal proudly.

“Could you come down to the station, Robin? I’d like to get a formal statement, let Missing Persons talk to you a little more in-depth.”

“Of course. Should I leave right now?”

“Yes, please. Time is of the essence.”

\*

You and Summer ended up going to different colleges, despite your best efforts. You wanted to stay in-state, saving up your money by living at home. She just wanted out. The summer before freshman year, she was filled with the kind of yearning for the outside world that you only associated with prisoners. You would catch her in the middle of a conversation with her pale green eyes drifting and unfocused, glass bottles bobbing in the sea, and you realized that she was already gone.

After she moved into her new dorm in California, she’d started writing you letters. It was more romantic that way, she’d said, more fanciful. Every week, you’d find an envelope full of Summer in your mailbox, her looping scrawl covering sheet after sheet of looseleaf, the paper smattered with stickers and doodles. You held the letters against your chest, blinking away the sting of heat in your eyes.

I have a boyfriend, one of the letters proclaimed, and he’s perfect, I think. He grounds me.

What she meant by that, you later discovered, was that he controlled her.

Summer met Simon at a fraternity party. She went out each weekend, hair loose and lipstick smeared, hunting for free beer. Simon was a tall, muscled frat brother in a rumpled suit. He fed her popcorn in between kisses, then brought her upstairs with him. They started dating a week later.

You read her letters carefully. Summer told you about their fights, which were frequent. He threw her Himalayan salt lamp at the wall once. She stopped going to parties, started hanging out with his friends. Each letter from her made your throat tighten with anxiety. There was more, you could feel it. You were back in elementary school, and she was sitting on the pavement outside your garage, lips knotted into a pale line, massaging her forearms and telling you that her dad had only yelled at her, it was fine, he just

yelled a little bit, and now she was here.

Last night, when she called you, you knew that she was running again.

“Robin?” her breath crackled like static through the phone.

“Summer? What’s going on?”

“Nice to hear from you too,” she tried to joke, but it fell flat. Her heart wasn’t in it.

“Sorry. It’s just--”

“I know. Listen, I’m coming home tonight. I need to see you.”

“Is everything okay?” Of course not. Why would she be coming home if it was? Stupid. You pressed the heel of your hand against your eyes, trying to clear your vision.

“Yeah, I just...I need to get away for a little bit. I’m already on my way. I’ll see you in an hour.”

The kitchen was dark, veiled with watery light from the street lamp outside. The microwave clock read 12:13 AM. You glanced into the shadowed living room, the couch where you’d been half-dozing strewn with crocheted throw pillows. Sometimes, when you missed Summer more than usual, you’d sleep in the living room instead of your bedroom. There, you could almost see her, chin tilted towards the window, eyes glinting mischievously.

“Where should we meet?” You asked sleepily. But of course, you already knew.

“The playground.” She hung up, and you were alone with the shrill of the dial tone.

\*

A figure was perched on top of the monkey bars when you arrived, one leg bent, the other dangling laconically. There was only one working street lamp at the park, but you didn’t need it to know that it was Summer. Without speaking, you ascended the ladder, the damp rungs chilled against your palms. Your arm ached almost imperceptibly with the memory of falling, and for some reason, you had the wild urge to laugh.

“Hey. Sorry for waking you up like this. I just needed to...” her voice slipped away as if caught in a strong tide.

“I know.” You settled beside her, legs hanging over the bars. It was strange to be so close to her after months of separation. You were acutely aware of the smell of her shampoo, a floral coconut scent, as familiar to you as your mother’s perfume.

“It’s Simon. He’s...I don’t know. He’s being kind of shitty lately, but I don’t think I can break up with him.”

You studied your sneakers swinging beneath you. You didn’t need to look at her to see her pained face in your mind’s eye: her eyes narrowed to slits, lips twisted.



“Why not?”

“I think...I think he’ll be angry.”

At that moment, a small car slinked past, tires hissing quietly on the pavement. The beam from the headlights flared across the two of you, the metal bars beneath you gleaming wetly. But that wasn’t what caught your attention.

“Shit, Summer...Your face,” you breathed. The air snagged in your throat.

In the harsh glare of the headlights, you could see everything. Her left eye was swollen, puffed and pink as a marshmallow peep. A deep purple streaked across her cheek like a comet, leaving a trail of faded yellow. Her lower lip was split, chin and jaw sporting little patches of fungus-like green bruises. Images rushed into your mind, unbidden; Summer hanging by her ankles from her dad’s fists, tiny and bleeding. Summer sitting cross-legged on your living room floor, drawing hearts on your cast with a sharpie. Summer with her cheek pressed against yours, sharing her dreams in a whisper, conspiratorial. I want to live in the rainforest and protect the elephants someday. Or maybe I’ll be a singer. Your rage was icy and acid. She’s still a kid, still a little girl with a sense of adventure that’s too big for her body. She’s your best friend.

You reached out towards her, aching to do something, anything. Stroke the bruises from her skin, knit her cuts together. The hollows beneath her cheekbones were carved in marble, angular and dark. You wanted to replace that layer of skin with a smooth, fat layer of love.

She flinched at your motion. You drew back quickly. You would never hurt her. Never. But her body was hyper-alert, watching with eyes of its own.

“Stay at my house. We’ll get him.” What you meant was, I’ll get him.

“I can’t. I can’t,” she dragged in deep, shuddering breaths, “If he even suspects I’m avoiding him...”

“Let him. He’ll be in prison before morning.”

“No! I can’t do that.”

“Why not? Just come over. Please. I want to help you,” your voice broke, suddenly high-pitched as a child’s.

Her hand found yours in the darkness, shockingly hot and damp against your frozen skin. She squeezed hard.

“I’m staying in my house, in my town. I’m not running away anymore. I’ve spent too much time being afraid of men.” She sounded calm, certain. “I’m not letting him drive me out of my own life, Robin.”

You searched the darkness for her eyes, but couldn’t find them. You could argue, but that would only make her feel more alone. When it came to forcing her into something, you knew you didn’t have a shot. If she didn’t want to do it, she wouldn’t. Her stubbornness both frustrated and inspired

you all your life; when you broke your arm, you told her to go home, but she looked at you with responsibility heavy on her eyelids. She said she would wait for you to come home first, and she did. She waited for hours.

“I just...I hate seeing you hurt,” you whispered lamely.

“I know. But I’ve got to fix it for myself this time. I don’t know what a good relationship looks like, Robin. I wouldn’t know one if it punched me in the face.”

You sat in silence for a beat, both kicking at the air with your muddy sneakers, watching the moths beat their feather wings against the street lamp. No matter how many times they barraged it, they couldn’t accept that it was unattainable. They couldn’t help but slam themselves into that burning wall of glass.

You walked her home that night, a damp mist clinging to your jackets. You offered to spend the night at her house, just to keep an eye on things, but she said that she’d already been enough trouble. At her front door, she turned towards you and gripped both your of hands. Under the warm porch light, her eyes looked glassy and sleepless, but earnest. You tried not to stare at the collage of pain on her skin; her arms, now visible, bore bracelets of bruises.

She gave you a weak grin and pushed a thick envelope into your hands. It was glossy with stickers, hundreds of Minnie Mouse faces beaming up at you. Each one was bedecked with doodled-on armor, mustaches, and afros.

“I thought I’d deliver this one in person.”

Right then, you could have talked to her for hours. You had the sudden urge to remind her of everything; the days when you would whisper together, co-write stories, play pretend. Remember when, remember when? You just wanted to check, to be sure she had captured those moments, too. Remember, Summer? Do you remember that summer?

The flicker of the television spilled from her living room window, onto the shrubbery beside you. Her dad was inside, ignoring the bruises, the cuts, the sunken eye sockets.

“Well, I should go. Thanks, Robin,” she turned towards the front door, then wheeled back around.

“Do you want to go to the park again tomorrow? Maybe...” she chuckled sheepishly, “we could play some good old fashioned hide and seek?” She giggled, but you couldn’t bring yourself to do the same. Looking at this child in that battered adult’s body, you suddenly felt very old, and very, very tired.

“I would love to.”

“Cool. I’ll call you tomorrow,” she beamed, disappearing behind the front door.

You sat in her driveway for a long time, watching the luminous wash of the television screen flicker over the bushes. Every car that drove past was a truck to you, a black Ford with red underglow. But he never showed up like you expected him to, shouting and ready to raise hell. After two hours, you crawled stiffly to your feet and hobbled home. You could feel an illness coming on from your stint in the freezing outdoors, a headache collecting in the back of your skull like old rainwater. You resolved to wait for that phone call the next day, the one that would tell you that Summer was safe, your best friend was free.

\*

It took hours to get processed at the police station, but it was only a few more before a car matching the description of Simon's truck was spotted in a town just out of state. You were sitting in the same bleached, sterile room you'd been questioned in all day when they gave you the news. Two people had been seen in the car: a young man with dark hair, and a small, red-headed female. The paper coffee cup you were holding crumpled in your fist. The officer who told you about the truck looked at you like you were an abused dog; pitiful, but still slightly dangerous.

"The police are on their way to apprehend him now. It's almost over. He's going to jail."

They released you without warning into the razor-sharp sunlight with another paper cup of weak coffee and a bundle of assurances that they'd call if anything else happened. When you arrived home again, you stood in your kitchen for a long time, gazing at the mockingly cheerful yellow telephone. Your fever had broken, but you didn't feel much better. Your stomach was still a sour knot, and you didn't feel like eating. After a few more hours, you shrugged your coat back onto your shoulders and headed outside again. You didn't want to miss that phone call, but you couldn't lurk in that kitchen for one more minute. You needed to breathe.

At the park, everything was silent. Last night's mist had dried to reveal chilly sunshine, but to your surprise, no children ran amongst the playground equipment. No laughter echoed from within the tube slide.

Now, you sit atop the monkey bars, shivering slightly. The metal beneath you sparkles optimistically, so you squeeze your eyes shut. You should have stayed at her house. You should have insisted that she come home with you. You could have been a better friend. You could have been better.

You think about Simon, man-handling his truck down the highway, exhaust billowing from both massive pipes, and Summer, stuffed into the passenger seat like an asylum escapee. You wonder what's happening at this moment, and you picture the flash of handcuffs, the bellow of sirens, the carnival panic of the flashing lights.

You cover your eyes with your palms.

“One...two...”

When you lift your hands, she will be there. She'll be crouched behind the playhouse, braced to leap, beaming at the prospect of shocking you.

“Three!”

You snatch your palms away, gazing at the empty playground. You wait in stupid trepidation, ready for her to jump out at you, but everything remains as it was: motionless and silent, stagnant as a bad habit.

# Mirrors

NATALIE ORGA

“...But in her web she still delights  
 To weave the mirror’s magic sights,  
     For often thro’ the silent nights  
 A funeral, with plumes and lights  
 And music, came from Camelot:  
 Or when the moon was overhead  
 Came two young lovers lately wed;  
     ‘I am half sick of shadows,’ said  
         The Lady of Shalott.”  
 -Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “The Lady of  
     Shalott.”

“So...you sure you’re okay?”

Lacie’s sister stood facing the oven, her hair gleaming like a sheaf of wheat in the fading afternoon sun. Her elbows jutted out as she lifted the kettle from the burner, steam curling around her wrists.

“Yes, Anna. I’m fine. I mean, of course I am,” Lacie responded. She sat cross-legged on the kitchen table, picking at pills in the sleeves of her sweater. It was her favorite; massive and knitted, a hideous heap of burgundy fabric. Their mother hated it, but Lacie kept it year after year. It calmed her.

“You are? You’re fine? Because it looks like things are getting...maybe...worse?” Anna’s tone was one of carefully manufacture nonchalance. She didn’t look at Lacie as she opened the cabinet and grabbed two mugs, the ones that Lacie had made as a kid. Little glazed pictures of foxes and squirrels dotted the sides, their faces smiling and impossibly round. Lacie had left the background of the mug blank, the animals floating against the white ceramic. When their mother asked her why, she’d said that the animals were playing in the snow.

“What do you mean?” Lacie asked dryly. Of course, she already knew what Anna was referring to. She just wanted to hear it said out loud. Or maybe she didn’t.

Anna sighed, her shoulders drooping, and turned to face her sister. She was only twenty five, but as much as Lacie hated to admit it, she looked older. Anna’s round, smoke-grey eyes were surrounded by webs of worry lines,

the space between her brows perpetually creased. She had a thin frame that always seemed to be straining against the weight of many lives. Now, with a massive baby bump bulging through her loose t-shirt, Anna seemed especially burdened. Lacie had always been told that pregnant women glowed, but Anna just looked small.

“You know what I’m talking about. It’s...” Anna trailed off, rubbing her temples, “...It’s the mirror thing.” Her eyes darkened with concern, flitting involuntarily to the gleaming silver surface on the table beside her sister. A hand mirror.

Lacie instinctually reached for it, tracing the old-fashioned brass frame with a fingertip.

“Yeah. But it helps me. How can it be bad if it helps?”

Anna turned back to the oven, reaching for a tin beside the coffee machine. Lacie didn’t drink coffee, but since the device had been a gift from a friend, she had felt strange getting rid of it right away. “I feel like it might be making you even more scared of the outside world. Like it’s...enabling you, or something,” Anna continued hesitantly, rummaging in the tin. Her hand emerged with two paper-packaged tea bags.

“Enabling me?” Lacie swung her legs from the kitchen table, a bubble of frustration rising in her stomach. “Do you think I want to be trapped in a crappy old apartment, terrified of walking out the door? Do you think this is my choice?” Anna winced.

“No. I don’t think that at all.” Anna whispered. She flattened her palms against the kitchen counter, stealing a glance at her sister. Lacie swung her legs restlessly from her perch on table, staring dejectedly at the mustard-yellow linoleum floor. She hadn’t left the apartment since she’d moved in three years ago, and it showed. Lacie was pallid and delicate-looking, with mousy brown hair that fell to her hips and a scrawny, un-muscled body.

Anna couldn’t help but be reminded of a ghost. And maybe that’s what Lacie was. She panicked at even the thought of walking out of her door. She couldn’t even look out the window anymore; she had started using a hand mirror to look outside, claiming that staring out of the window itself was “too direct.” Every day she seemed to retreat further.

Anna pressed the heels of her hands against her eyes, fighting a sudden stinging sensation. When she removed her hands, Lacie’s mugs sat before her, the gallivanting foxes and squirrels grinning up at her smugly.

“The mirror calms me down. I’m agoraphobic. Shouldn’t calming things be encouraged?” Lacie was saying, sliding from the top of the table and onto one of the kitchen chairs.

“Lacie, I don’t want to argue with you about this. I just came here to bring you milk,” Anna sighed, lifting the tea kettle and beginning to pour. Hot steam clung to her cheeks, reminding her of winters at their parent’s

house. Their mother always made them hot chocolate when they came inside after playing in the cold, back before Lacie stopped leaving the house.

When was the last time Lacie felt cold, truly, wildly, bitterly cold? Cheek-pinching, nostril-stinging cold? A decade at least, Anna thought.

Anna set the mugs of tea on the table and grabbed the half-gallon of milk from the fridge. She sat down heavily in the chair across from her sister, using her arms to lower herself. For a moment, there was silence as the women stirred their tea, lost in their own minds as the golden sunlight began to melt into dusk.

"I'm due in three weeks," Anna finally spoke, passing her hand gently over her stomach.

"I know. You still don't want to know the gender?"

"No. But I have a theory. I think it's a girl."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I just know," Anna smiled, lifting her mug to her lips, "And you know what else?"

"Hm?"

"I want you to be there with me. When she's born."

Lacie set her cup carefully onto the table. It was their parent's kitchen table, marred and stained from hundreds of cups, meals, card games. Now only Lacie used it.

"That's not fair," Lacie said quietly.

"I'm not trying to guilt you," Anna rushed, "I just wish you could be there. That's all."

"I would love to be there, but you know I can't go. You're just being cruel."

"No, I just want my sister with me. When this little girl comes into the world, I want you to know her. I want her to know my big sister. Please, Lacie," she folded her hands over Lacie's, her grey eyes pleading and wet.

Lacie tugged her hands free. Silence enveloped the apartment.

"Look. The sunset," Anna murmured, more to herself than to anyone else. Lacie lifted the hand mirror, tilting it to reflect the sky.

It was pale blue, but the clouds were stunning. Crimson and violet, rimmed with gold as bright as a renaissance painting. A memory rushed into Lacie's mind, unbidden: her and Anna, ages five or six, rushing outside after the first snowfall and tumbling like puppies into the crisp expanse of cold white. Above them, dusk was falling rapidly, dying the snow pale pink. Their laughter rang out loudly long after the sun had set.

"Shit!"

Anna had reached for the milk without paying attention, her hand knocking the bottle. It now laid on its side, the milk gulping faintly as it gushed onto the wooden table. Anna leaped from her chair and hustled off

towards the sink, hunting for paper towels, but Lacie sat motionless, stunned. Some of the milk had splattered onto the mirror.

She gazed at it, transfixed, watching the creamy droplets travel and collect at the bottom of the frame. Her hand tilted the surface, just a fraction of an inch, but it was enough. Lacie could see the grass outside her window, and the little sidewalk winding through the apartment complexes. But with the milk dashed across it, the mirror showed her something else, something that she remembered in the marrow of her bones.

Snow.

Slowly, Lacie stood. Her pulse thrummed in her ears, heart hammering. As if she were sleepwalking, she drifted towards the door.

“Lacie?” Anna tore her eyes from the window. “Are you okay?”

Once, the two of them had built an igloo in their backyard. Most kids didn’t have the stamina or the patience to press so much snow into so many blocks, to line them up and wedge them together in the freezing cold. But they were determined. Countless hours were spent building up those crystalline walls, until finally it was just the two of them, huddled and impossibly warm, pink-cheeked and safe from the rest of the world. The two of them had created a home together, and Lacie thought that it was the igloo that made her feel so safe. Now, however, looking at Anna’s soft, worried gaze, she realized that it was her sister that made her feel that way. Her home, all along. The door was inches from Lacie’s face, taunting her. On the other side, the world waited. Actually, it was just the quiet apartment hallway, but it was close enough.

The familiar sensation of panic seized Lacie’s throat, closing it as if a hand were wrapped around her windpipe. Her breath came in hard, shallow gasps, sweat gathering above her lip. Her hand was clamped on the door knob, and although every nerve in her body screamed at her to snatch it away, she tightened her grip until her knuckles whitened.

Anna watched, shocked and silent, one hand on her belly. Lacie thought about that belly, that little girl.

That little girl who would want to build an igloo someday. With a quick thrust, Lacie shoved the door open. For a moment, the silent hallway stared at her in surprise, the carpet muffled her breath. Then it was over. The door was closed again. Anna was beside her in a moment, her arms clutching, her breath whistling in her ear.

“I...I didn’t think...I can’t believe...” she stuttered, her voice choked with tears.

“I’ll be there, Anna,” Lacie whispered, “Three weeks from now.” Suddenly, she was almost certain. And if she wasn’t ready then, she would be, some day. One little step at a time, she would make her way into the snow.

“I’ll be there.”





## Gods in Modernity

VERA EKHATOR



## Apple of His London Eye

VERA EKHATOR

## Still Life

JACKIE MCMAHON

The stool was beginning to hurt her backside and Eva readjusted her position, careful to keep her left arm draped across her bare chest in what she hoped was a seductive-yet-tasteful sort of way. She'd never been particularly good at being sexy, or at least that's what all the casting directors said to her. Like a Barbie doll, they said to her once. Pretty and thin and blonde, but too wide-eyed and innocent. An ingénue when she needed to be a leading lady.

At his easel, Charlie stuck his paintbrush between his teeth as he stared at his canvas, a splotch of red paint dripping onto his white T-shirt. His eyebrows were scrunched together like they did when he was thinking really hard – he always got that look when he came into the diner, sketching away in his notebook as Eva brought him his food, and he'd had that look earlier tonight when he asked Eva if she would considering posing for him. She liked Charlie, liked his boyish smile and his bushy, scrunched up eyebrows, liked the look of his strong, steady hands as they held his coffee cup or his paintbrush. Her mother had told her once that you could tell a lot from a person's hands, and Charlie's were manly hands, with long fingers and broad nails, a thin layer of red hair covering the pale skin. There was a bandage across his right palm where he'd accidentally stuck himself with a screw while trying to put a bookshelf together, he'd explained. Eva liked that. She liked a man who did his own dirty work.

"How much longer?" she asked. She didn't want to complain, but her back was starting to hurt from holding her pose for so long, a pain tingling down from the top of her spine to her tailbone.

Charlie glanced at Eva, then back at his work, and pulled his paintbrush out of his mouth to dab at the canvas. "Not much longer," he said. "I'm just trying to capture the spirit of you now." His dark eyes met her bright ones. "Try thinking about something else. Watch TV or something."

Charlie had a small TV mounted on his wall, the screen cracked as if it had been dropped on one side, the opposite corner horribly pixelated. The 11 o'clock news was on and Eva watched in silent rapture for several moments, mouthing the words silently to herself, as she was prone to do. Whenever she watched something on TV she always liked to whisper the lines to herself. It made her feel like she was a part of it all. To herself she repeated the words of the peppy blonde news anchor (who, ironically, looked very much like Eva, though Eva thought her nose was much nicer than the anchor's), as

the woman went through stories about the new baby panda born at the zoo and the NFL player who pulled off a grand surprise for a Make-a-Wish child dying of leukemia.

Suddenly the anchor's smile died and Eva closed her mouth, the only sound the sound of Charlie's paintbrush gliding across the canvas as he painted the yellow hue of Eva's hair. "Today, a spokesperson for the NYPD confirmed that the body of a young woman found last week in Central Park has in fact been linked with the Signature Killer. This unidentified corpse is the twelfth known victim..." The images that flashed across the screen were so horrible that Eva wanted to cover her eyes, but her body felt frozen in its unnatural position as she watched in abject horror. Even though the photographs were censored to shield the bloody mutilations of the dead women's naked bodies, the sight was still horrifying to her. As the news anchor read the statement from the police chief, Eva stared at the twelve successive crime scene photographs. One of the victims had been gutted like a fish. Another had been choked with rope tied around her neck. Yet another had been cut from the corners of her mouth up to her ears, her face stuck in a permanent smile.

"It's something, isn't it?" Charlie said, snapping her out of her trance. His eyes had left his painting to stare at the TV screen. "Twelve women in three months, and police don't know why. There's not any distinctive pattern: one a married attorney from uptown, another an unwed college professor from Brooklyn, another a teenager visiting the city on a high school class trip. The girls don't even look alike. And he probably won't stop there either."

"Why do you say that?"

Charlie shrugged a single shoulder and looked back to his canvas, sticking his brush into a jar of white paint. "He's got twelve already. Probably looking for lucky number thirteen, right?"

A shiver ran down Eva's naked spine, and she suddenly wished to put her clothes back on. "How do they even know it's the same guy?" She asked. "If there's no common thread, couldn't it be twelve different killers?"

Charlie didn't look up from his work as he answered her. His bushy red eyebrows were knitted together again. "Because," he said nonchalantly. "He signs all of his works. That's why they call him the Signature Killer. SCW, they must be his initials. Always left near the body, and always signed in red. Seems it's his favorite color..."

"Signed. Like it's a freaking painting." Eva muttered to herself, but Charlie didn't seem to hear her. On the TV, the news anchor had moved onto another topic, a feel-good story about an elderly same-sex couple who had finally wed in their nursing home after more than seventy years together, but Eva's thoughts did not stray far from the images of those dead women. "My mother told me not to move to the big city." She said aloud. "She said they

did bad things to girls here.”

Charlie gave her a thoughtful look. “So why did you come then?”

The arm draped across her chest pressed tighter. “They do bad things to girls everywhere in the world.”

Charlie had no answer for that, his eyes flicking back to the painting.

All of the lingering excitement Eva felt about sitting for a portrait suddenly waned, the old-fashioned novelty of being an artist’s muse gone. She wanted nothing more than to put her clothes back on and flee from Charlie’s apartment, but she’d foolishly left her car back at the diner, having taken the subway downtown with Charlie in their rush to get here. “Charlie,” she said, and she had to repeat his name three times to finally get his attention. “Can you take me home?” She’d forgotten her MetroCard.

“Can’t you wait a few more minutes?” He asked, shooting her that boyish smile that always made her knees weak. “I’m almost done.”

Still, Eva persisted. “Charlie – ”

“I said I’m almost done, all right?” Eva flinched at his harsh tone. He’d never raised his voice at her before. Charlie was usually all polite words and bashful grins. Annoyed, she turned her head and kept her eyes trained firmly on the wall for the rest of the session.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Charlie pulled back to examine the canvas, a self-satisfied smile appearing on his face. “Are you done?” Eva asked, craning her neck in an effort to catch a glimpse. But Charlie took the canvas off the easel, holding it behind his back away from her.

“I know this probably sounds stupid,” he said. “But...well, it makes me nervous showing my work to someone for the first time. If I give it to you, can you promise not to look until I’m out of the room?”

At his words, all of her warm feelings for him returned. It was this shy, good guy demeanor that had attracted her to him in the first place. “Sure.”

Charlie placed the canvas down and Eva got up, scanning the floor for her clothes. Her work uniform was nowhere in sight and she padded about the room naked while Charlie cleaned his brushes. He told her that he’d put it in the washing machine, because Eva had spilled coffee on her skirt at the diner this morning and he didn’t want it to stain. How sweet. Eva thought with reverence.

Her foot accidentally hit something and she looked down, her eyes falling upon a cardboard box filled with books: art books, biographies, true crime tomes. “Haven’t loaded up that new bookshelf yet?”

Charlie only said that he was going to check on the laundry and she was welcome to look at the portrait once he was gone. As the sound of his steps faded away, Eva crossed her arms over her bare chest and approached the easel, nervous with anticipation.

She greeted it with a gasp.

The woman in the painting was naked, legs splayed, with a rope shoved into her mouth and blue eyes wide from fright. Entering the frame were a pair of masculine arms, the hands wrapped about the woman's throat. They were large hands with long fingers, pale skin covered by a fine layer of red hair...

That can't be me, Eva thought with horror. That's not me.

She heard the footsteps reappear behind her and suddenly, Eva's whole body felt cold. "Your name's not really Charlie, is it?" It wasn't really a question.

The sound of the lock on the front door clicking into place was her only answer.

# Discovery

AUBREY LINK

Scan. Print. Print. Print. Jam... Print. Every file must have two copies. There are stacks of them, filling that whole collapsible table. Fifteen stacks at least. Sorted by date and not alphabetical order. Yes, all of them must be copied. Who will copy them? Well, me of course. But it's not a job just anyone can do.

Copiers are temperamental; they won't work for just anybody. First the settings have to be changed to two copies and then if it's under fifty pages, the automatic stapler can be selected. Over fifty, the copies have to be wrapped in rubber bands. More than four hours of straight copying and the machine will overheat. A blinking yellow square on the screen means it's out of paper. There are new boxes under the table.

Every day I walk from the table to the copier for four hours. Just those five steps. Back and forth. I've never dropped a file, but sometimes it makes me dizzy taking that walk. Sometimes my vision goes blurry as page after page pours hot from the slot.

I read the files sometimes. That's my favorite part. In between refilling the tray and walking to pick up a new file I have to do something. I watch each sheet as it comes out. Most feature domestic abuse. If I'm lucky, there's a murder. Those are far more exciting than the DUIs. If there are pictures, you have to scan them first, before you can copy them.

Sometimes there are text messages. Those are the easiest to read because they are usually nice and big. Once I read a woman Facebook messaged a friend to call the police because her boyfriend came at her with a knife. It's essential to make sure the order does not change when flipping through the pages. Everything has to be in order.

I get a lot of paper cuts. It's not until I'm driving home that I notice the little stings when I grip the steering wheel. I never know I have them when I'm working.

When the copier overheats, it smells like it's burning. It's hot to the touch and it jams continually, trying to receive a respite from my persecution. No one is allowed breaks. Not even me. The smell lingers all day, not enough to set off the alarms, but enough that it sticks in your nostrils. I've smelled it for hours after my shift. I wonder if it lives in my clothes.

Sometimes the interns or attorneys need my copier. I have to step aside. It irks me. Attorneys always have urgent printing that needs to be done

immediately. My precious discovery can wait. No matter what, I know who really controls the machine. That's me.

I despise cutting off a file right in the middle of a copy because someone else needs the copier. It's just rude. That's how I came to be here. It was last Thursday past when I was in the middle of a job and a female attorney came right over. I had been going for two hours, fading into that state where all that matters is the next file. She took the pages of the file right from the scanner. From the table to the copier, those pages are mine. No one else touches them. Not even the attorneys.

Everything was going along, her pages flinging themselves into another tray while mine sat incomplete. I tried to be patient. I was listening to the pages. Scan. Print. Print. Print. Jam... Print. I'm not quite sure how my hand wrapped itself into her hair, but there it was slamming her skull into the edge of the machine to the rhythm of fresh copies being created. Scan. Slam. Slam. Slam. Jam. Slam.

I don't see why it's such a big deal. Her blood didn't even splatter on the pages. She didn't damage the copier. I just let her slide to the floor and took out her copies, keeping them together with a paper clip. The file I worked on was completed and I bound it together in rubber bands. I was quite confused when I was taken away from my work and placed in handcuffs. Like I said, nobody is allowed touch the files but me.



# Sheeransanity

THADDEUS CWIKLINSKI

I.

“As far as musical impersonators go, Elvis still reigns supreme. Scores of sequin-clad, slick-haired, suave-toned frauds migrate to Las Vegas every year. There’s nothing original about them; most even hold down other jobs! Impersonating’s their hobby. This would be a lifestyle. I want to put my name out there and shake things up. I’ll be a game-changer. An iconoclast.”

“Kev, I don’t think the time is ever right for something like this,” Geraldine said to her husband. “The kids will notice. Frankie wants to drop out of college and form a doowop group...”

“That’s my boy.”

“It’s not funny, Kev.” She set to work scraping congealed Spaghetti-O’s from a pot in the sink. She hesitated. “Doesn’t the singer have to be dead first, anyway?”

“Not necessarily. Look at Rain: the Beatles are still two for four, assuming you discount that ‘Paul is dead’ theory and they’ve been around for a while. Soon they’ll have their own tribute band.”

“How about someone else? You’re six foot five and a little plus-sized. And the beard would have to go...”

“Like who? Who else would be as real or as raw? I need this. Let me be Ed.”

“How about Meatloaf!? You look the part, and your voice closer.”

“You’re kidding.”

“I’m not... well, maybe about the Meatloaf thing, but Kevin, I believe, from the bottom of my heart, that you’re not cut out to be an Ed Sheeran impersonator. I swear to God that you never should be.” Geraldine gesticulated forcefully with several chopping motions of a steel spatula, as if she were brandishing a hatchet.

Geraldine could see the hurt in Kevin’s nose; his nostrils constricted, as if to make themselves smaller targets of her wrath. Kevin’s eyes never really betrayed his emotions; they were dull and unchanging like a snowman’s. His nostrils, though: they told all. She felt slightly bad as he guiltily gathered up the garbage that had fallen behind the bin. His wide face had the benign, bewildered look of a panda bear or a whale. That had been what had made him different from any other beau-- his homeliness. Her other suitors had been reasonably good-looking and successful carbon copies with coffee breath,

stable jobs in the financial sector, and affluent families. What made Kevin so appealing was his lack of appeal.

Tonight, though, he was setting the bar of unappealing exceptionally high. I had two children with this man. Two! Geraldine thought. She wistfully watched as he galumphed out the door to take out the trash, trailing garbage behind him, oblivious to the ketchup stains on his sweat pants. The bottom of the bag gave out, and Kevin hurriedly stumbled out the door with one of his hairy arms supporting the excess garbage. Maybe it isn't so bad. Who am I to tell him what to do? Geraldine mused. He can sing alright, too. Not as well as he thinks, of course. But he can carry a tune, especially a sappy one.

“Incidentally, honey, have you seen my goddamn guitar picks?”

Kevin yelled from the garage.

Damn! The guitar picks!

“The wooden ones, not those cheap plastic imitations!”

Damn again!

“Daaaaad,” squawked a small voice.

“Just a minute, sweetie,” Geraldine told her six-year-old. “Daddy’s being delusional in the garage.”

“What’s that?” asked Kevin, poking his bearded visage in through the garage door.

“Pretty please sing me a lullaby or I’ll bite your arm,” said Cate.

“As soon as you hop in bed, dear, and I find my guitar picks,” he replied.

Geraldine snorted quietly. The rosewood guitar picks made virtually no difference, but her husband insisted only rosewood produced “that smooth sound”. Cate scampered upstairs and Kevin found his picks underneath Lady Diphtheria, his guitar. He played a few chords from a song Geraldine despised and warmed up his vocals.

“Let’s buy a lava lamp and beta fish/ to signify our love with kitsch.”

It felt good to hold the guitar, his oldest friend and best investment. The base was chipped, and a thin yet defined crack in the veneer had grown just below two of the frets, but the strings, as always, were minutely tuned. He thumped the guitar appreciatively, as if to congratulate Lady Diphtheria, and walked to the stairs. Knowing that the journey would leave him winded and his melodious voice slightly wheezy, he braced himself for the climb. A true artist always suffers for his work. Geraldine grabbed his elbow, and cautioned him not to sing anything by “you-know-who.” A minute later Geraldine heard the intro to an Ed Sheeran song as Kevin’s winded voice wafted down. Damn!

## II.

Kevin pulled the bedcovers up to his chin and off his humungous feet, thinking deeply. He had wanted to be an entertainer all his life, but productivity had never been his forte. He'd only written one song himself, and "Girl, Why You Gotta Waste My Time and Eat All My Goddam Hummus?" perplexingly, never did go platinum. He dropped out of college after a year, garnering no musical accolades. Still, he yearned to perform, to belt out hits he could make his own, even if he could create nothing of his own. Never before had he been intent on impersonating just one artist-- when he was young he could do a whole repertoire, from Frank Sinatra to John Denver, but no longer. Never before had he felt so strongly the need to personify or to be anyone other than himself. But there were two sides to Kevin Fayleur's torn inner psyche: now he was Kevin Fayleur, loving husband, stay-at-home father, and housekeeper, but he also desperately wanted to be, no, he desperately needed to be Ed Sheeran.

As he lay staring at the blinking red light of the smoke detector, Kevin hoped that he'd have a dream in which Ed would appear to give guidance. Instead, he lucidly dreamt that he had eaten a forty-four pound shoe sole on loan from the public library, and that Geraldine was fending off librarians in black suits and top hats with a tomahawk.

In what seemed no time at all, he awoke, gasping, "I'll reimburse you in good time, gentle scholars!" Sweat-soaked blankets bunched around his body. It was ten minutes before his alarm. With a relieved grunt and much exertion, he rolled from his bed like a seal flopping about in the surf. Geraldine snored lightly. Time to wake up Cate.

Kevin opened Cate's door. She lay horizontally in bed, clutching a three-legged stuffed raccoon, one of its remaining legs grasped tightly in her pudgy fist.

"Catie," Kevin whispered, eliciting no response. "Cate."

"Just shake her, Kev," came Geraldine's voice, muffled through the wall.

"CATE!" Kevin half-shouted-- it sounded broken and raspy. Not quite the syrupy smooth vocals of Sheeran, he thought.

"Good morning! Ringo says that you better make waffles today, or he'll give you rabies!" said Cate jollily, suddenly alert.

"Honey, it's getting late!" yelled Geraldine from the next room.

Cate popped down from her bed, unceremoniously hurled Ringo the Raccoon against the wall, and scampered to her dresser. Kevin burnt waffles, took Cate to school, and then returned home to recline on the sofa while strumming Lady Diphtheria and warbling.

### III.

As the barber combed Kevin's freshly-dyed russet bangs out of his face, he looked at himself in the barber shop mirror. Wait until the world sees this. He thanked her profusely. She smiled unenthusiastically as she swept up the prematurely grey locks that she had trimmed before dying. She had advised Kevin against dying his beard to match his unnaturally orange head, but he'd bellowed, "Damn the pocketbook, I'll complete the transformation!" She declined to make any more small talk, having no desire to discover what "the transformation" referred to.

The owner of Lubberstown Hair Choppery, a round little man with spectacles as thick as magnifying glasses rang Kevin up. Kevin slapped a healthy tip on the counter with a flourish.

"Hold it, you remind me of someone ..." said the bespectacled manager, whose nametag read "Fatjon".

"What contemporary artist would you say I resemble?" Kevin asked the barber, who suddenly became fixated on sanitizing her clippers.

"I... don't know," she looked up. "A big Ron Howard maybe?"

Ron Howard. Kevin scoffed.

"You remind me of my son-in-law, that's who!" said Fatjon. "He's about your size! And you're right! He's a musician. Plays the oboe like it's nobody's business."

"Intriguing," said Kevin, genuinely interested, forgetting to sulk.

"You play instruments? Or sing?"

"I dabble."

"Well, maybe I should put you two in contact."

Kevin wholeheartedly agreed, giving Fatjon a vigorous handshake, his full name, address, cell number, email, and defunct linked-in account. As his customer with preposterously-dyed hair departed, Fatjon shouted, "Come to think of it, you do look a lot like that Ed Sheeran guy!"

"Not in the slightest," mumbled the hairdresser.

Kevin didn't hear her. He felt a newfound vitality-- he couldn't remember a better feeling since age 36 when Cate had been born and he had gotten a seasonal gig at a German restaurant to play Krampus. He swaggered out of the barbershop and into the parking lot, mentally "translating" the words "one haircut closer, one haircut closer" so they were in a rich British accent. He inhaled deeply, taking in Lubberstown's smoggy air, an atmosphere permeated by grime, a grime brought on by smokestacks, outdated sewers, and the town's ubiquitous feral pigeons. As Kevin walked towards his parking spot, he looked down at his scuffed size 14 spats, skirting the edge of the faded crosswalk.

He took his eyes off his shoes as he thought with elation: I have the hair of an auburn angel. He never saw it, but a car's tires squealed like an

off-pitch high note. His large frame was thrust onto the hood with a cataclysmic thud. The world lost its lucidity as flea-bitten, human-sized pigeons and guitars with legs danced in circles. Somewhere, somehow, soft pop played in the background.

IV.

Kevin awoke in the backseat of a minivan rolling down the interstate. His head was pounding.

“We weren’t supposed to run the poor guy over. Just rattle him,” said the driver’s sleepy voice.

“It was your idea to pick him up. We could have just left him. Or even waited and said it was an accident,” snarled a second voice. “Now we can get pinned with reckless endangerment too.”

Kevin opened his mouth to speak, but was petrified by the sight of a small silver object in the passenger’s hand. A gun! Horrified, Kevin slowly reached into his pocket for his phone to text Geraldine that he wouldn’t be home for dinner. It was gone. Upon looking closer, he realized that the object in the passenger’s hand wasn’t a firearm; it was a banana shoddily wrapped in tinfoil to resemble a handgun.

“Music?” asked the driver.

“Fine,” the passenger replied. “As long as it doesn’t wake the sweaty prince.”

“Excuse me, I don’t mean to be a bother, but would you turn on 89.5 the SPUD? I’d rather not listen to anything if not 89.5,” said Kevin.

The wiry frame of the passenger jolted as if he’d been electrocuted. The driver glanced at the overweight abductee. The passenger regained his composure and leered menacingly. “Two things: One, my van, my radio. I decide what we listen--”

“Usually he decides,” the driver interrupted. “On the way here, we listened to my Whitney Houston CD.”

“Correct.” The passenger sounded irritated. “But for the most part it’s smooth jazz or National Public Radio, sometimes both.”

“Lousy stuff,” added the driver.

“Could be worse,” said Kevin. It couldn’t hurt to be diplomatic.

“Second,” said the passenger, “don’t mess with Ed. He takes things personally. He may seem a sensitive soft soul, but that’s what he wants you to think--he’s a mogul with an iron fist. He doesn’t want just anyone imitating him. And what Ed Sheeran wants, Ed Sheeran takes because it’s rightfully his.”

“That’s true,” said the driver.

V.

Ed paced back and forth between pews. He had rented a megachurch from a group of enterprising Pentecostals under the pseudonym “Shed Ear-hand.” Unable to buckle down to record his latest album, “Love Schmuck” in the sacristy, he’d preoccupied himself by fiddling with a fog machine and perusing his ornamental cape collection. He hadn’t wanted to waste henchmen on an ignoramus. Yet Kevin had proven frustrating to nab. Ed knew he should have put someone more competent on the job. Terrence and Aaron staked out Kevin’s neighborhood to get a feel for his daily routine, only to discover that he didn’t have one. Ed revved the fog machine next to his throne to ensure that he’d make an impression befitting Oz the Great and Powerful. The iron doors of the church burst open with a resounding echo. A huge man with preposterous hair and a silly grin stumbled in alongside Ed’s goons, who laughed uproariously.

“...so anyway, I says to her I says, ‘You know, Ger, why don’t we just buy a timpani?’”.

Aaron dissolved into giggles. “Boss, we brought him.”

“I can see that,” said Ed, taking in the sight of his artificially-orange superfan. “Is this guy a literal clown?”

Kevin stared at the auburn-haired angelic figure before him shrouded in mist. Could this be heaven? He fought to stand, willing his legs not to buckle underneath him. The figure hacked from the smoke machine’s fumes. Kevin cleared his throat.

“Sir. I’m speechless. It’s such an honor. I’m your biggest fan. Well, one of them; I’m a very large individual. My favorite song of yours is--“

Ed waved his hand dismissively. “Enough words.”

“Oh--of course! Anything for you Ed!”

“Can you sing? I have to be selective about impersonators. I have an image to uphold.”

“I know how you feel. Guitar please!”

“Girl, Why You Gotta Waste My Time and Eat All My Goddamn Hummus?”  
an Original Song by Kevin Fayleur

Girl, I know you think that I’m a mess,  
With more body hair than Mr. Tumnus,  
But that’s no reason to waste my time,  
And eat all of my goddam hummus.

I know that it’s just garbanzos,  
And garlic, oil, and salt,  
But baby I am real starving,

And it's really all your fault.

\*\*\*Four Verses Redacted Due to Copyright Infringement\*\*\*

It's hard to put a shape on love,  
 But our love would be a rhombus,  
 But it doesn't matter anyway,  
 Because you took my hummus.

[GUITAR RIFF]

I'll try my best to forgive you,  
 But some debts cannot be paid,  
 The debris that was once so delicious,  
 Will haunt me to the grave.

So please listen careful baby,  
 And leave my heart in one piece,  
 I don't want to always think of you,  
 As a lowdown hummus thief.

There is one surefire solution,  
 And it's a delicacy from the Middle East,  
 So if you make me a batch,  
 Then we'll have a hummus feast.

"Nice," said Ed. "It sounds a little like a Marvin Gaye song."



# Boothbay Harbor, Maine

REBECCA CALLAGHAN



# Four Personalities in a Canoe

JULIA CHIN

*“I’m going to die here on this highway, and when the police come and find our bodies together under this canoe, they’re going to think, What happened?”*

I may never have a completely accurate answer for those state troopers who never came: everyone remembers it in their own way. However, I will never forget that day, the lake, each of you. Here’s to my most unexpected friends—Fire, Earth, and Air. I love you more than I’ll ever know why. Our story is for you.

## I. FIRE

The wooden tower caught Fire first. It captured his eyes, climbing to the sky and challenging the surrounding evergreens. As if that weren’t enough, the edifice stood on a hill, outranking everyone else for miles. Damn. Talk about machismo.

A tug on an aux cord killed the mariachi trumpets just as the car’s engine cut out, the silence marking Fire’s official arrival at camp. Fire knew that was the end of mariachi for the next week: the only thing Mexican in this whole place was himself, and he had come reluctantly.

He could have been gone by now: his last exam was five days ago, and the trek back to Texas was far, but it wasn’t that far. The way he saw it though, there wasn’t anything waiting for him there that he couldn’t come home to later. He had gotten up early for this and was here now, so he might as well make it interesting. Just some trees, friends, and God—oh God.

An enormous mansion looked down at him as he slung his black duffel over one shoulder. Four stories tall with a wrap-around porch and rocking chairs, it was the whitest thing—literally, the paint was a Jesus’s holy teeth shade of blinding—Fire had seen since he saw his friend Air earlier that morning.

For the first of many times to come, Fire thought *What the hell?* in a Christian camp.

Speaking of Air, a head of blond curls materialized out of the foggy mist beside Fire, a pale hand clasping his tan one jovially with a fraternal closeness.

“Bro!” Air attempted in Fire’s characteristic accent, and Fire laughed. White people, bro.

As the two boys carried their bags across the lot, Fire glanced at the

hill again. This time he noticed them: a bunch of canoes latched onto a trailer at the base of the tower, sitting like bright bananas at the woods' dull green edge. Fire knew fun when he saw it, and fun was on top of that hill.

What anyone else thought was irrelevant.

“Taco Tuesday” was a disgrace. Pale lettuce, shredded cheese, and diced tomatoes did not a taco make. As with all of his meals, Fire had saturated the culinary failure in Old Bay—a taste he'd acquired from befriending Maryland students—just to give it a flavor.

One of the zealous, thirty-something-year-old camp counselors had sat at their lunch table and just introduced himself when Fire decided to get real, real fast.

“What the hell?” he said with a deadpan expression, gesturing at the taco-trocity on his plate. “They say in the Bible not to offend your brother, but then they put this in front of me.”

And the man *laughed. Politely.* Nothing fazed these people. Everyone was so calm, so unaffected, so . . . so lame. Yeah, that was the word he was looking for. No one knew how to have fun.

Luckily for them, Fire did.

On Thursday afternoon, Fire rolled out of bed, having skipped another mandatory Bible study in exchange for a nap. He spotted Air again in the dining room, sitting around a table with two girls also in their year, Earth and Water. They were hard to miss, as Earth was a ginger and Water was a minority.

The three teenagers were starting to clean up their lame food after another lame lunch, and all Fire could think about was just how lame they were. All these college kids sitting around, doing nothing, when there were so many things they could do. Even better, so many things they couldn't do but should anyway. Blue, green, and brown eyes flicked upward as Fire approached the table, his next words lighting the first match.

“Hey! I'm going to the canoes. Who is going to come with me?”

## II. EARTH

She hadn't eaten much but lettuce since Sunday, and it was now Thursday. Earth was a vegetarian, and the grass flattened by her pacing sandals was beginning to look tempting in comparison with her empty stomach. Yet, she could handle starvation, alongside chronic panic attacks. But Grand Theft Canoe with this crew?

Earth glanced at her trio of accomplices and inwardly sighed an expletive involving lofty vocabulary and a condemnation of the male species. This was mostly Fire's fault by virtue of who he was, but Air wasn't helping, as he

only continued to fan the flames.

Fire stood in stark contrast to the undisturbed greenery around him. Stripes along his gym shorts matched his stop-sign red shirt, and his yellow sneakers were the color of caution tape. Truthfully, Earth had only followed him up the hilltop because she didn't trust him to not get everyone hurt. Not that she necessarily trusted herself, but at least she did a lot more than she trusted anyone else.

Air, on the other hand, was a child. He wasn't quite as bad as Fire, but he would go wherever the wind took him, laughing all the way, even if it was to their watery graves or juvenile detention after this stunt. Except they weren't even young enough for juvie anymore. Excellent.

The sleeping Snoopy on Air's grey shirt mocked Earth, outlined by the caption #RELAX, a word Earth was generally unfamiliar with. Her sandals kept treading infinity loops into the ground before stopping at small, blue shoes pointed towards her. Placid as a frozen lake, Water held her gaze, the soft silt in her brown eyes meeting the growing green worry in Earth's. She smiled knowingly, taking Earth back to the previous night on that same hill.

Dinner had been too loud. Too many people. Not the right people, of course. The seniors whom Earth had come to depend on were having seniors-only night because graduation was days away and that was fine and good and all but what wasn't fine was that Earth couldn't control the fact that all her closest friends were leaving her. She couldn't control much anything anymore.

Exhausted from a week's growing hunger and anxiety, at least Earth had been promised vegetarian lasagna for dinner. Of course, it had bacon in it.

Among a table of laughing and chattering youth she barely spoke to, Earth couldn't even scream or whisper to anyone *I'm not okay*. Except Water asked.

"Do you want to get out of here?"

No sooner had she followed her up the hill, far from the crowded, white mansion, than the sky opened. Raindrops echoed hard around the perimeter of their sheltered pavilion, the downpour invisible through the black night.

Water sat on a picnic table, perfectly still as Earth paced excitedly in front of her, walking five feet only to turn and retrace her steps in the opposite direction. Earth talked for hours because it was fine and she knew it was fine but she didn't *feel fine, you know?* Water would nod and hm occasionally. No words could truly fix it.

Unlike then, Water now wouldn't stop singing in smiley, soprano

tones to distract Earth from the present reality of the canoe crisis. A chorus of laughs from Water and Air followed, and it almost worked. But there was Fire untying the top canoe from its holding rack, and Earth was taken back to chapter one of her unending autobiography titled *Anxiety*.

“Whoa, whoa, wait. Hang on a second.” Air pulled one of his classic, split-second mood swings, his joking grin replaced by a furrowing brow. “Aren’t we supposed to wait for the truck to come up here and drive the canoes down?”

Finally, someone other than Earth with a scrap of logic!

“Yeah, but I want the canoe now,” Fire replied, his burly hands still removing cables and constraints. “We can carry it to the lake.”

“Um ...” Earth and Air speculated in high-pitched unison.

“Or we could just sit in the canoe and slide down the hill,” Water mused.

Goodbye, logic.

“Oh SHIT! I love that!” Fire exclaimed, and Earth realized he was actually going to do it.

“Wait, but what if we hit a car?” Air wondered.

“Or, you know, trip and break our arms?” Earth interjected, not joking in the slightest.

But the boat was already halfway free. Fire grabbed the front just as the rest began to slide.

“Air,” he commanded, a general going into impossible battle, “get behind me.”

### III. AIR

The canoe was heavier than he thought. Obviously, Air understood, it was meant to hold the four of them—Fire, Earth, Water, and himself. Any boat that could hold that many personality clashes in one vessel had to be sizeable to say the least.

A tried and true Boy Scout—with the campfire stories and chatterbox sociability to show for it—Air had surprisingly only ever been in two-person canoes. With his “the more, the merrier” attitude and Fire’s ride-or-die motto of “more,” period, the boys were just naturally four-person-canoe kind of guys. At least Air’s lean height and Fire’s stocky brawn enabled them to actually carry the thing above their heads, progressing down the steep hill at a semi-cautious pace.

Their female companions, however, were definitely two-person-canoe people.

Willowy Earth somehow managed with the boat’s stern, and Air was impressed that she had stuck with them up to this point. She dealt out lots of spontaneous sarcasm to match her blazing hair, but from what little he knew

about her, she was extremely rooted. Most times he'd seen her, she always had places to be and people to meet with a neat styrofoam cup of tea in one hand and a pristine Bible in the other. He knew Earth liked schedules, but he really doubted that she'd booked "boat-stealing" into her planner under the noon-time Thursday slot. She was a Type A anomaly.

In front of Air and a head shorter, Water's black hair bobbed against her shoulders, shaking with the physical strain on her smaller frame. Maybe Air didn't really get her either. Maybe he just didn't get women.

He'd passed Water on his way back to the dorms on Monday around midnight. She hadn't made a sound as he'd almost walked right on past her spot in the common room, but her face said she'd been crying. She hadn't offered him an explanation.

Of course, Water hadn't been the only person there. Because also sitting on that couch had been her, Air's crush and Water's proclaimed BFF, holding the miserable girl in a tender embrace.

She had started off like a mother to them both, Air and Water, taking them under her wing soon after they started college. Air adored her for her three-years-older wisdom, warm heart, and faithful direction. Adoration turned to affection which turned to something more. A reciprocated yet mutually denied something more. It didn't change the fact that she was graduating at the end of the week.

Having just finished his first year that May, Air couldn't deny that he had the reputation expected of a social butterfly who did his job well. He rarely walked any distance at all without recognizing someone and offering up a friendly fist bump and beaming smile. Extroverted to the extreme, he filled his days with people and their energizing company.

But the camp gave him too much free time. Sure, he ate meals in the dining room and played cards on the couches and hit volleyballs around the court a bit. But when he wasn't with anyone else, he was thinking about her—where she was, what she was doing, how much he wanted to be with her.

In already too full moments like this, carrying this ridiculous canoe, Air didn't think of her at all. His goofy self was here in the now with these three oddballs, having one hell of a hilarious adventure. He would add it to his growing collection of "Stupid But Memorable Mistakes" to tell his kids someday.

In the moment, this was all he needed.

#### IV. WATER

For the first time in nearly a week, she laughed. It's important that

she laughed, not smiled, because she smiled all the time anyway. Most people smile in happiness, but Water smiled through everything: sadness, awkwardness, madness. And so it was important that she laughed because it was the one indicator of joy she had never quite learned to fake.

Child-sized hands struggled to hold up her fraction of the canoe's weight, but Water simply could not stop quivering with amusement. Giggles bubbled from her mouth, filling the otherwise quiet outdoors, save for the sound of a familiar laugh behind her.

She suddenly remembered that she liked him, Air. That they were, in fact, friends. Their identically crinkled eyes met, and they only laughed the harder for it. Water realized that she herself was laughable, victim to a constant hydrologic cycle: freezing, then thawing, and melting her heart in turn.

In some ways, it was her fault.

Water constantly built up sand castles of expectations that almost always got washed away when high tide reality came in. She knew it was foolish to have such high hopes, but she indulged in them anyway, splashing through waves that would ultimately drown her. For Water, this week was supposed to be about faith and friendship but also about buying time before goodbyes she'd dreaded for months.

Unfortunately, she had overestimated herself. She had forgotten that people had lives and other friends and no one needed her half as much as she needed them. Lost in a sea of hundreds of faces from day one of camp, she'd never been so overwhelmed nor felt so alone.

Stress and sleep deprivation fed one another in a vicious cycle, culminating in the first midnight meltdown less than 24 hours after Water's arrival. Curled up in her friend's arms, she'd felt thirteen again: weak, dependent, and wanting to be loved. As per usual, Air had to be there.

Uncharacteristic anger had poured into her sorrow, but she'd bottled both emotions within. She had dammed up frustration at Air, whom she felt monopolized those final days with her best friend, leaving Water in straits of physical and emotional isolation. Resentment made her small and pathetic, but heartbreak and abandonment were foes she had no chance of conquering.

When Earth had verbalized her sadness over similar goodbyes and the absence of bonding among their own year, Water couldn't give her a perfect solution. It would have been like a doctor prescribing antidepressants that she herself was still adjusting to.

Yet, though they weren't close, it didn't mean that she didn't care. Water never thought much of fellowship within their class, but she saw how much it meant to Earth. When Fire proposed the canoes, she'd looked at Earth and said yes for her.

Her laugh reverberating with Air's inside the upturned canoe, Water replaced loss with love, filling the hole in her heart she'd let grow void. She was cracking up so hard that she might burst with uncontainable joy. Of course, it didn't assist in her struggle to harness any upper body strength, so Fire made her switch places with Earth at the back.

"I'm going to die here on this highway," Water lamented as they crossed a mercifully empty road, and the foursome erupted with laughter again at the morbid plausibility of their untimely ends, "and when the police come and find our bodies together under this canoe, they're going to think, *What happened?*"

## EPILOGUE

None of the sophomoric youth died that day, in fact. Only a small death of pride ensued when they finally reached the lakefront after carrying the canoe a third of a mile downhill and an unexpected truck pulled up at the exact same time with the remaining canoes attached via trailer hitch. No one could argue that God didn't have a sense of humor.

At their journey's end, the four teenagers piled into the canoe single file: Earth, Air, Water, and Fire. Gliding away from the dock was peaceful. That is, till the canoe started spinning in circles before its occupants grasped the concept of balanced paddling. It was a lot like the four of them: uneven, completely incongruous matches for one another, yet somehow better together. Their differences evened out on the lake, making way for friendships deeper than surface-level personas.

Fire provided the impetus for their course, catalyzing the majority of their movement from the back, and Earth refrained from commenting when he discarded his legally mandated lifejacket within the first minute. Even Air was quiet, allowing the magic of the moment to live just a bit longer. Water smiled out of genuine happiness this time, finally at peace in her element.

Nature was silent, quiet bliss broken only by a quartet of paddles dipping in and out of the lake until Earth had a thought, a rare compliment for her free-spirited foil.

"Wow, you're good at this," she hesitantly remarked. "Do you do this a lot?"

"No," Fire replied nonchalantly. "This is my first time in a canoe."



Open Up  
MAY LONERGAN



# A View With a Lake

DYLAN PRAZAK

I received meager hours as a lifeguard during my summer at Lake Paran so the majority of my time was spent weeding. The lake developed a notorious milfoil problem during the hottest parts of the summer. With roots embedded deep in black silt that oozed along the bottom of the lake, milfoil grew up towards the surface in green wire strands and tickled the feet and legs of swimmers. This, of course, was unacceptable; someone had to pull the stuff out.

I remember the first time I was asked to weed. I was shown my tools: a red-orange canoe, a splintered paddle with an Indian chiefs' head painted on the handle, a pair of scissors, a cinderblock with twine tied through it, and a twenty-five foot long beach rake.

Mrs. Haaslich, a grade school teacher of mine, gave me the position. Over the summer holiday she managed the local lake and she hired me as a lifeguard with a concentration in odd jobs. The lake was man made and about a century old. It was a low and wide bowl of pond soup with a steep sloping hill between itself and the official entrance. At the top of the hill was the snack shack and next to it the pavilion. In between them townspeople funneled through like obligated citizens, paying three dollars and two quarters if they had it. If they didn't, there were many unofficial entrances to accommodate.

The town I grew up in was divided geographically. As if residents had physically trickled downward with continued generational misfortune, the valley held the housing projects, the motels, a profusion of liquor stores, a lousy diner and the municipality's high school. My old high school. The hills were where well-to-do folk lived, and they lived with little connection to anyone in the valley.

The lake was in the valley and the people who lazed on the grass were a reflection of that. People came to escape placidly staring at their TV's, maybe so that at the end of the day they wouldn't feel stung by the time that had slipped by them, wasted. A politician might seriously scale back his plans in office if they were to visit Lake Paran on the wrong day. The lake was also nestled just off the campus of Bennington College, a school where swank art students went to declare their love for Kandinsky, post-modernism, and walking barefoot to classes. They also came to the lake but predictably never paid and always sat on the Y dock that jutted outward on the far left of the

lakefront.

Work started at 11 each day. I would borrow my dad's Peugeot and pedal, the breaks squeaking at every stop. It was a downhill ride and only took five minutes. After setting my bike against the back wall inside the snack shack I would grab my tools and head down to the Y dock to meet my canoe again.

Shoeless, in black running shorts and a plain white t-shirt I would carefully tie the cinderblock to the yoke of the canoe. With ten yards of slack on the line between the cinderblock and its fastening point I would use the cinderblock as my anchor. I would put the rake next to me, the scissors behind me, and keep the paddle in my hand. Then push off onto the still water, my weight in the back of the canoe so the bow came lifting out, and paddle.

I would paddle until a thick of milfoil surrounded me. By this time the sun was already high. No escaping it on the lake. It beat down on my shoulders, beat down on my arms and hands and reddened the tops of my feet. It leathered the back of my neck. The sun cooked my mop of hair. The sweat it drew ran down my face, stung my eyes, soaked my skin and mixed with dirt to streak my body. Standing in my bathroom one night I shaved my head into the sink.

At the milfoil patch I dropped anchor port side. Standing up, balancing over my arches I plunged the head of the rake into the milfoil, letting the weight of the rake pull itself down into the water. The rake slid deeper, deeper, until it either hit the bottom or only a foot of rake was left above water. Then I would turn the rake clockwise. Turning and turning with the resistance gradually increasing until I couldn't turn anymore. That meant it was time to pull. Standing in the center of the canoe, bending at the waist to lean over the side I would get low before thrusting my hips forward and my head back, squeezing my eyes shut while ripping out thousands of milfoil strands. Eventually I wriggled the mess aboard and would cut it off the rake with the scissors. My boss always said I looked like Tom Sawyer.

That would be one "pull" and each pull the teeth of the rake would delicately slice my fingertips and palms. A good pull would fill about one twelfth of my canoe and weighed as much as two cinderblocks — another thing I sometimes had to dredge. In the morning I would fill and empty the canoe twice, then take my half hour lunch break to scarf down a grilled cheese sandwich. After the half hour I would go out for one more boatload.

I spent long days on the lake alone. I daydreamed a lot to spend the time, thinking of wild fantasies and scenarios where I was a hero. Sometimes I thought about true stories. The effect was the same. For a few hours I lost myself. Swimmers generally avoided my boat, giving it a wide berth if they had to swim by. From the patrons eyes I must have been grunting and haul-

ing that slop in a labored and unsettling way. There was only one person who came my way intentionally. Snapped away from a thought, I would sometimes see her gliding through the water. She was a tanned figure with long golden hair. Her name was Emily. I didn't understand why she came to the lake, but on better days she did. She didn't fit into the different groups that came here either. She moved like the poor people, the garbage, and the humidity that weighed everyone down weren't all there. Swimming along my canoe she looked up at me as if the sweat, putrid silt stench, and sunburned skin covering me couldn't bother her at all.

After swimming over to my canoe we would talk about anything. While we were talking she would help me from the water. Her help didn't speed things up much at all, but that was okay; the conversation was nice. I already don't remember any details from the talks we had, but I remember her smile. It was the only earnest thing on the lake. She had the kind of smile that might remind someone of home, or standing in sunlight. It never made sense to me that such a sweet thing chose to stay around such a lousy place.

A good pull meant I had gotten the milfoil by the roots, which further meant that the green tail I hoisted aboard ended with a thick coating of black silt. With each pull I had to squeeze the silt from the braid. Holding the braids black end over the water I would squeeze my hands around the silk, feeling the wet clay push through my fingers and along the palms of my hand as it slid off the milfoil into the water. The silt stained my clothes and my skin. Bleach got it out of clothes, but nothing got it off of me. Over the summer my hands and forearms darkened and my fingernails had a murky, black, dead look to them.

Before long the job became automatic. It was completely mindless, and because of that, soothing. The cuts on the tips of my fingers had no feeling. The leathered skin on the back of my neck had no tingling. The sweat in my eyes stung without ferocity. The rocking of the boat no longer frightened me, and the black stains on my hands, which I had tried indignantly to remove, no longer bothered me. At the end of the day my hands bled, my neck peeled, and the black stains that danced up my elbows wouldn't come off. And I was okay with it.

# The Blackberry Pickers

CLAIRE BICKERS

Once, when night blanketed the forest in cool serenity, and the moon and the stars offered the only meager illumination, Adan forgot her father's warnings and followed the little wisps deep into the forest. They were candle-fire blue and bright as the brilliant heart-star of the great dog. Thick branches draped in autumn-painted leaves blocked any sky-bound light, so she followed the only lanterns to be found ever deeper into the trees.

In the distance, through the maze of tree trunks and knobby roots, a soft glow appeared. It was dim, but it dazzled her night-accustomed eyes. Adan pulled her leather jacket a little tighter, her cable-knit fingerless gloves doing little to keep out the brisk October night.

The light grew as she approached; she kept her eyes locked on it, no longer needing the wisps' guidance. Intricate details peaked through the branches, offering promises from another world.

Adan stumbled through the last of the sentinel trees and froze, staring in awe.

The lake in the center of the clearing glistened with the song of dying stars and infant galaxies. In the center of the lake was a palace of moon silver, thin patterns curling across its delicate facade. Although it seemed to have no warm fire lanterns, it gleamed with an icy flame's shaking dance.

"Hello."

She started. And then she saw the girl to whom that voice belonged. She froze.

The girl was made of night: dark and limitless, full of melodies that the morning sun would chase away. Her eyes were the same shade of blue as the midnight sky, and the girl stared right back at her from near the edge of the water.

"Who are you?" Adan asked, watching the night-girl.

"I am what I am," the night-girl laughed, gesturing for her to come closer, "Now, come here."

Adan sat down criss-cross by the night-girl. The night-girl examined her, and Adan blushed, knowing that she was a cheap imitation of the ethereal, locked into mere mortal humanity since birth. "Your hair is fire," the night-girl said, after a long pause.

"Yeah," Adan tucked some of her curls, the same color as a bonfire's licking flames, a gift from her fiery father, behind her ear.

“But your eyes are water,” the night-girl continued.

“Yeah.”

“Are you human?” The night-girl phrased the words as a question but said them as a statement.

“Yes. Are you?” she asked, but the night-girl just looked at her. In the back of her spine, she could feel the primordial part of her that still feared darkness quake, but the rest of her, the parts of her that was the product of millions of years of evolution and change, knew not to be afraid.

“You’re not supposed to be able to come here,” the night-girl’s brow furrowed. “How did you find me?”

“I just followed the wisps. They lead me straight here,” Adan looked around, at the castle of constellations and the lake that reflected more stars than she had ever seen. It was unlike anything that she had ever known. “Where is here, exactly?”

The night-girl looked around with a small, sad smile, “My home.”

“It’s beautiful,” awe ached in Adan’s voice.

“I suppose.”

“What’s the matter with it?” she asked.

“Nothing’s the matter with it, particularly, it’s just that it’s the only place I’ve ever been.”

She stared, “You’ve never left? Not... not ever?” Her mind raced, remembering all sorts of wonderful things: screaming school spirit at Friday night football games, and admiring her sister’s art at the local community center, and going on dinner dates with friends. She remembered the freedom of horseback and the wafting scent of fried-everything from state fairs. She remembered all the things that made life worthwhile.

The night-girl shook her head, “Not ever.”

Adan stood up, brushing her jeans clean of the earth. She offered a hand, “Come with me?”

The night-girl looked at her hand, and then back at the palace, “I don’t think I can.”

“You said it yourself; I’m not even supposed to be here. Why not try?”

The night-girl smiled, “All right, then.”

Adan grinned, “Let’s go.” She pulled the night-girl to her feet and led her to the edge of the clearing.

The night-girl placed her palm on one of the bordering trees and just said, “Please?”

A tight wave of silver passed through the trees, shaking them from the roots up. Adan wrapped her hand even tighter around the night-girl’s, and then Adan led the girl who was not quite human out of the forest, holding on to her in tight defiance. It took less time to reach her house on the edge of the woods than it had taken to reach the clearing with the palace and the girl,

and the full moon still hugged the eastern horizon, offering bright light in a cloudless sky.

“This way,” the very human Adan said, leading the way to her rusty green pickup.

They got in her truck and drove too fast over miles of twisting asphalt peppered with pot holes and past corn fields that swayed in a gentle breeze. She rolled the windows all the way down, and the night-girl hung her arm lazily out it, grasping at the air as it slipped between her fingers. She turned up the music until it was so loud that it drowned out everything but the whipping wind. And they laughed, raucous ecstasy filling their lungs.

When they finally reached the field, she pulled over and parked on the grass. “Come on,” Adan said, already jumping out of her truck.

The night-girl leapt from the truck with unparalleled grace, and paused by the door, her hand resting on the window. “What do I?” the night-girl trailed off, looking to Adan for guidance in this new world.

“Follow me?” Adan offered, and then turned and sprinted into the field.

The night-girl followed, and soon they were chasing each other through neat rows of blackberry bushes. When Adan finally caught the night-girl, she whirled around and sent them both toppling backwards. Their joy bubbled over, uncontained elation filling every breathy giggle.

Their laughter finally died down as the bright full moon reached its zenith, illuminating both the ripened berries and their grins still stretched far too wide. Adan showed the night-girl the deep purple of the sweetest berries, and soon, their fingers and lips were stained purple-red, berry juice gluing their fingers together. They sat down and dug their nails into the dirt.

She couldn’t stop staring in awe at the night-girl, a girl of twinkling stars and shifting planets. Their eyes locked for a moment, before she looked down and away from the night-girl’s intense gaze. Adan let herself fall on to her back and stare at the stars. The night-girl fell to the ground beside her and tucked herself into the crook of Adan’s elbow. They stared at the sky in silence for a long time, letting the song of the stars echo in their irises.

“Most of them are dead now.”

“What?” Adan asked, turning her head to look back at the night-girl.

“I’ve watched the stars come and go, but the best ones always die long before their light reaches us,” the night-girl was locked in a wistful memory. “But their light still does. It carries on, even after its maker is gone.”

Adan looked up at the stars, pockmarks of a dying universe. “That’s so... sad.”

“Maybe,” the night-girl said. “But I’ve always thought about what kind of courage it takes, to know that you’re creating something not for today, and not for yourself. To give completely and know that you will get

nothing in return.”

“Like a legacy?” Adan asked.

The night-girl nodded, and they lapsed back into silence. They watched the stars move overhead, picking out constellations almost sub-consciously; there was the guiding tail of the little bear, and the belt of the hunter, and the red eye of the boar. The seven sisters twinkled bright, and the night-girl’s words echoed in her mind.

She wasn’t sure what the signal was, but somehow, they both knew that the night had come to an end. They stood up, Adan’s chin bumping the night-girl’s forehead and inspiring laughter at their ineptitude. It quieted quickly, hanging in the still air. The girls held hands as they walked back through the labyrinth of blackberry bushes, towards the western moon dipping over the horizon. They climbed back into Adan’s car, and she drove them home.

This time, Adan drove fifteen miles per hour under the speed limit. The night-girl had her face turned out the window, catching the breeze as it came, chin resting on her hand. The other she used to hold on tight to the human girl. “What is this place?” the night girl finally asked, looking out over the rolling fields.

“Hm?” Adan glanced away from the endless road to look at the night-girl. “We’re in Kentucky.”

“It’s so beautiful.”

“That’s Kentucky for ya,” Adan chuckled. “Prettier than people give it credit for.”

“Kentucky,” the night-girl repeated, tasting the way the word fell on her lips, head still turned out the window.

The sky began to lighten behind them, but Adan refused to speed up; she just continued at forty-five, defying the passage of time.

Her headlights illuminated her family’s run-down farmhouse on the edge of the woods, and an ache formed in the back of her throat. Adan pulled into the gravel driveway and turned off the ignition. The car rumbled to silence.

The two girls sat in the car for only another moment, but it could have been a lifetime. They finally opened their doors and hopped out of the car, and they walked towards the edge of the woods. Adan didn’t want to break the silence, but when neither girl had said anything by the time they reached the first trees, she knew she had to.

“I can’t follow you, can I?” something in her bones knew it was true before the night-girl could say anything.

“No, no, you can’t,” the night-girl’s voice was melancholy. “It’s time for me to go home.”

Adan was at a loss for words, but after a moment she managed, “I

don't want you to go.”

The night-girl leaned in and kissed her. It was soft, and gentle, and long, the kind of kiss where you breathe into each other's very existence. When they finally broke apart, the sun was peaking its first rays over the edge of the horizon.

“Thank you. For everything,” tears traced the night-girl's cheeks, and she didn't bother to hide them.

Their foreheads rested against each other for another infinite moment, and then they broke apart. The night-girl squeezed Adan's hands, and then let go, letting them fall back to her side. The night-girl turned and walked into the forest, picking her way through fallen branches and upturned limestone. Adan watched for a long time, but the night-girl never looked back.

Eventually, Adan turned away from the forest and back towards the east, towards the sun, and watched it paint the sky a million shades of red and gold.



# Like Baby Birds and Flower Petal Opening

REBECCA MONTROSS

*a poem about a productive trip to the therapist*

I'm sitting in her office  
glancing at the yellow box of  
tissues next to me

and it dawns on me that  
I haven't cried in a long time –

has it been weeks? months?

I don't know, but I don't  
want to think about it  
too hard.

I try to explain how it feels  
is my chest all the time –

like there's something  
trapped in my ribcage  
like something  
needs to be let out.

I want to ask:  
can pain be like a baby bird?

Naked and translucent,  
slimy and blind,  
does it know anything?

It can only cry in  
the dark,  
until I feed it  
and I feed it  
until down grows

fuzzy yellow,  
the pigment of dandelions.

I feed it until  
its crying  
turns to singing,  
praising the petals  
of flowers,  
soprano melody hung  
lightly in the trees

wondering what it would be like  
to feast in a garden.

I feed it until  
I can detect the  
fluttering of petite  
wings against my sternum,

eager to fly, eager to leave.  
But,

    don't leave yet. But,  
    I really think you should...but,  
    don't leave yet...but  
    you really don't belong here anymore...

If pain can be like  
a baby bird,  
it's time for this one  
to fly

because the nest in my chest  
craves new life,  
a new heart,  
no broken egg shells,  
no baby to feed,

just me.

I don't say any  
of this to her  
out loud,

because now isn't the time  
to be poetic.

But I do ask  
if it's possible  
to hold onto pain  
for so long  
that the thought  
of letting go  
is absolutely terrifying...

and she nods,  
giving me that  
"I see where we're at" look.

She recites this quote:  
"And the day came when the risk  
to remain tight in a bud was more  
painful than the risk it took to blossom."

And immediately I  
picture a flower –  
with rosy pink petals  
the color of blood  
underneath skin before it  
rises to the surface

Her petals are pressed  
together  
a feverish orb,  
trembling,  
terrified.

Is she afraid of  
being seen?

Is she afraid that  
no one will admire them?

...maybe it's just easier to stay inside.

maybe she'll wilt,  
maybe she won't.  
maybe she'll wilt,  
maybe she won't.

she can't have her petals plucked again.

But the sticky seal on those  
petals hurts more  
than whatever would happen  
if she opened them.

It was a risk she was willing to take.  
It was a risk I was willing to take.

One by one she let the  
petals lift from  
her center and fall  
neatly in place.

She was open,  
as if it was always  
meant to be this way.

That yellow box of tissues  
is in my lap,  
and I want to be in the light.

I thank her, leave the  
office and when I step  
outside, I feel the heat  
of the sun hit my face,  
drying the tears on my cheeks.

I think I'm finally there.  
I think I've made it.  
I think I'm ready  
to blossom.



Work Break  
VERA EKHATOR

# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Claire Bickers** is a junior majoring in history with minors in public history and writing, from Fort Mitchell, Kentucky.

**Timothy Black** is a junior Political Science major, with a Spanish and Writing minor. He is also president of Creative Writing Club.

**Sidney Caccioppoli**

**Rebecca Callaghan**

**Rebecca Campo** is an English major with a writing concentration on the Education Certification track. She will graduate in May of 2019.

**Melissa Casale** is a senior Art History and English double major at Gettysburg College. She spent the spring semester of her junior year in Copenhagen, Denmark where she expanded her already vast love of art and photography.

**Chris Chick** is a senior Religious Studies major and Writing minor. He is a brother of Sigma Alpha Epsilon and a former football player for the Bullets.

**Julia Chin** is a sophomore English major with a Writing Concentration and a Music minor. She writes for *The Gettysburgian*, sings soprano for

College Choir, and swing dances for herself—everyone should have the chance to laugh at the delightfully silly messes they become now and again. She is in love with words.

**Thaddeus Cwiklinski** is the prolific author of many sub-100 word autobiographies. His last work in the 2017 version of *The Mercury* was “A Deliverance Story”. He has always wanted to go spelunking.

**Vera Ekhtor** ‘19 is an Philosophy major. She says, “How would I describe my life? By breaking it up into tiny pieces.”

**Bethany Frankel** is a junior English major with a writing concentration and has a minor in Peace & Justice Studies. When not writing her novel and drinking copious amounts of coffee, she can be found working on her music or petting dogs. She was born and raised in Delaware, which is, in fact, a state.

**Meghan Joyce** aims to complete an English major with a writing concentration as well as a Biology minor. She has enjoyed writing since she wrote a Cinderella spin-off play in first grade and has continued this passion throughout her academic and non-academic careers. Though a lover of all literature, Meghan is of-

ten found devouring any prose-based or novel works she discovers.

**Noa Leibson** is a member of the class of 2020, a double major in anthropology and art history, and member of the equestrian team. She does not always know what she's doing, but she's having a good time.

**Aubrey Link** is a senior English Major with a Writing Concentration and a Philosophy Minor. She has been published in *The New Southern Fugitives Magazine* and is working on her first novel. She lives in Huntingdon Valley, PA with her four dachshunds.

**May Lonergan** is a sophomore majoring in Psychology.

**Lisa Maeyer** is a senior, majoring in English with a writing concentration and minoring in Philosophy, on the pre-law track.

**Jackie McMahon '21** is an English major with a writing concentration who aspires to someday become a writer of mystery and suspense. In addition to *The Mercury*, Jackie writes for *The Gettysburgian* newspaper and is a member of *College Democrats*. In her free time, Jackie likes to spend too much time on her literary-centric Tumblr blog, obsess over fictional characters, and pet all the cats she possibly can.

**Jessica McManness** is a senior double majoring in anthropology and

English with a writing concentration. She is currently Senior Editor for *The Mercury*.

**Devin McPeck** is a Biology and Spanish double major at Gettysburg and has been enjoying the pleasures of creative writing since she can remember. She loves to write poetry but also dabbles in fiction and creative nonfiction writing.

**Rebecca Montross** is a junior English major with a Writing Concentration with a minor in Peace & Justice Studies. She is also in the Secondary Education Teacher Certification program. Recently published in the *Cupola*, she adores writing poetry. She believes that poetry can be an incredibly cathartic way to make our triumphs and trauma into something beautiful. Other than poetry, she enjoys reading, music, biking, traveling, and drinking lots and lots of coffee. She proudly hails from New Jersey.

**Natalie Orga** is a sophomore English Major with a concentration in writing and a minor in studio art at Gettysburg College. She lives in Bear, DE with her wonderful family and sleepy dog. She hopes to be a published novelist one day.

**Dylan Prazak** Vermonter with a passion for writing and philosophy.

**Ryan Sipple** is a sophomore majoring in Political Science and English from Felton, Delaware, which is

remarkably a fairly decent place.

**Mackenzie Smith** is a junior at Gettysburg College. She is studying Environmental Science and Public Policy with a minor in writing. Kenzie serves as the managing editor for Gettysburg's literary magazine entitled *The Mercury*, she is a writer for HerCampus, and holds three part time jobs on campus. Kenzie's favorite authors include Jodi Picoult, Sarah Dessen, and Emily Dickinson. In her spare time, you can find Kenzie baking extravagant cakes, watching endless hour of "Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives," falling out of trees she has tried to climb, or participating in various other forms of tomfoolery!

**Charles Sternberg** is majoring in cinema media studies and minoring in writing. In his free time he enjoys riding his bike, listening to music, and camping.

**Sarah Tokar** is a current senior at Gettysburg College studying Classics and Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies. In her spare time she enjoys getting in touch with her more creative side through the art form of stippling and writing.

**Ellianie Vega** is a junior English with a Writing Concentration, WGS major, and Japanese minor. She is currently Junior Editor for *The Mercury*.



# JUDGE BIOGRAPHIES

**Grace Timko** (*fiction*)

**Nazli Inal** (*nonfiction*)

**Ela Thompson** (*poetry*)

**Erica Schaumberg** (*art*)