The Mercury 2014

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THE MERCURY
2014

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COVER ARTWORK
2014 cover artwork edited by Caitlin Magness from “Dream in Color” by Rachel Martinelli
THE MERCURY

HISTORY & PROCESS
The Mercury is a student-run art and literary magazine published annually in April since 1894 at Gettysburg College. All students of the College are invited to participate on the staff and to submit their work for possible publication. Editors for the next year’s issue are elected in April by the entire staff. Submissions are accepted from September through December at cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/ and are reviewed and chosen anonymously by the staff.

EVENTS
The Mercury holds a publication reception 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 2013, The Mercury hosted its second Write 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, judged by alumni active in the fields of art and writing. We would like to thank The Mercury Prize judges for 2014: Alexandria Barkmeier ’07 (Fiction), Karl Utermohlen ’12 (Nonfiction), Candise Henson ’12 (Poetry), and Jennifer Spindler ’10 (Art). The Mercury Prize-winning titles are bolded in the Table of Contents. This year’s winners are Carley Grow (Fiction), Tony McComiskey (Nonfiction), Merissa Cope (Poetry), and Abigail Campbell (Art).

PUBLISHING
The Mercury was printed by The Sheridan Press in Hanover, Pennsylvania. We would like to thank The Sheridan Press, especially Kelly Freeburger, for their support. This is the fifth environmentally-friendly edition of The Mercury, printed on paper from sustainable-harvest forests with soy-based inks. This year, The Mercury became part of The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College, an online, open-access repository hosted by Musselman Library. Our thanks to Janelle Wertzberger, Zachary Coble, and Lauren Roedner for making this possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The Mercury would like to thank the Provost’s Office, especially Barb Herman, Maureen Forrestal, and Jack Ryan. Thanks to the magazine’s advisors, Kathryn Rhett and Fred Leebron, for their guidance. And a special thanks to all students who contributed to The Mercury by sending in their work or serving as staff members. Julie Day organized Write Night this year and Kris McCormick updated our handbook. 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 a publication that reflects the creative side of the student body of Gettysburg College.
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If There Is a Word for the Moments Between Asleep & Awake, That Is the Title of This Poem
Or: Twilight of the Mind

Merissa Cope

Butterfly my chest and show me open to the world
I am rib and sinew, no more
(my molten heart longs to drip free)
not worthy of the title of human, not yet allowed to die

Do not sew me up
the wind whistling through my ribs feels so lovely
chills my molten heart
(the wind whistling through my ribs is the lullaby I can finally fall asleep to)

go fight your noble battle somewhere else, child of Cain
Teeth Grinder

Carley Grow

Right now I'm sitting in the pediatric dentist's waiting room and nobody can figure me out. I'm nineteen and I don't have baby teeth and Dr. Alexander will be seeing me shortly, could I please initial the bottom form.

In the waiting room I look at everyone. Probably they are all noticing me. I want to hand out explanations like business cards, especially to the boy making a mess of the magazines. He seems like the kind of kid that wrecks sand castles and breaks bones. Mommy, what's that old girl doing here, he would shout because he can't whisper. Mommy would shush him because he's not at the age where she can tell him to shut up. I would put a hand on his shoulder and say, I'm here because the dentist for old girls is all booked and life's a real tragedy.

The boy doesn't ask any questions. After a while one of the hygienists calls my name and leads me to the first room. She waits until I'm in the chair to joke about the situation. She's laughing and laughing like she just had her wisdom teeth removed and the anesthesia is making everything ridiculous. Maybe I am ridiculous but I am also desperate so I give her all of my reasons. I tell her my teeth have been sensitive since August. It's November now and I still can't drink cold water without feeling the flame of every nerve in my mouth. Well that's no fun, she says, and then she asks me if I'm in college. I tell her where I go and she says she has a nephew there, do I know a Benjamin Reed. There are twenty thousand undergraduates at my school. I don't know any Reeds but I do know a few Benjamins. She says Benjamin Reed is a junior and he's going to be an aerospace engineer. His G.P.A. is 3.8. I ask her if my teeth are always going to hurt like this. She asks me if I've decided on a major yet. I can see we don't understand each other.

When she leaves I look at everything. There's a certain madness in this office and it's in the sucking straws, the bins of sticker prizes, the psychedelic ocean mural on the walls. The sea turtles have braces and an octopus is holding a toothbrush with its tentacle. It's a room of all my old decisions. Would it be the bubblegum or grape fluoride, green floss or pink floss, the easy way or the hard way. In the dizziness of cavities and toothpaste I could only say, I don't know, I don't know. I'm nineteen and I'm still dizzy but now everyone needs answers.

In the distance a tantrum is born. I can hear a child boxing the air.
in agitation, a hygienist exhaling into a mask. Then Dr. Alexander enters the room and I shift my focus to a handshake. He doesn't ask me if I know Benjamin Reed or to calculate the square root of my career path. Instead he offers me a temporary tattoo of a lizard from a prize bin. He tells me Dr. Lee sent over my X-rays and we'll see if we can fix me up. I'm thinking help me, it's November and it's been a year of hurting too much. I stretch back in the chair and Dr. Alexander turns on the light. I'm flossing here but not there. There is a little cavity on one of my back molars and if I don't wear my retainer more often I'll need a wire on the bottom. He recommends a special toothbrush from Canada for the tricky spots.

But what about the pain? I ask.

It's nothing catastrophic, he says.

Dr. Alexander gets up from his chair and I'm wondering if that was the grand conclusion. He picks something up by the sink and suddenly there's a Teeth Grinding and Your Child pamphlet in my hands. You're grinding your teeth at night, Dr. Alexander says. Have you been anxious lately? Repeat after me: boys are pond scum.

I don't know, I say. Actually I'm grinding my teeth over a girl, I don't say, because people have their own languages like they have their own toothbrushes and they only understand yours when you translate. In the grocery store there's no words for it's been four months of bad days so instead I ask where I can find the string cheese. I want to tell the pastor I'm questioning Adam and Eve but I can only drink the wine and bow my head. I tell the dentist my teeth have been sensitive since August. What I mean is I fell in love with a girl in a parking lot and in a Providence bar she fell in love with someone else. It's not only my mouth that's all wrong. It's the inadequacies of X-rays, it's the D.M.D.s who can't see the trauma in the grooves of your teeth.

I've decided the appointment is over because I'm crying and I need anything but mouthwash. I get up and I don't look at Dr. Alexander even once. Probably everyone notices me walk out of the building. I tell myself I don't care about anything anymore but I'm thinking about boys being pond scum. I wonder if girls are pond scum, too. No, they are the pond lilies, the shells beneath the edge of the water, a thousand creases in the waves.
Our heads collided mid-race and the world went dark. My lungs filled with chlorinated water, causing my body to slowly sink to the bottom of the tiny aboveground pool. For ten seconds, I remained still, face down on the pool floor. Tony McComiskey, the nine-year-old swimming superstar, was dead. Or at least that's what I wanted Lauren to think.

I heard a muffled scream and felt her hands pull me to the surface. Eyes shut and body limp, I kept the act going for another few seconds before I looked at Lauren and squirted water at her through the abnormally large gap between my two front teeth.

"Gotcha!" I said laughing.

Lauren was covering her face and didn't say a word. At first I thought that I might have gotten water in her eyes, but then she began to sniffle. I reached out and gently squeezed her arm, which she slapped away, revealing her face. There was a rage in her turquoise eyes that I had never seen before. Lips pursed and tears streaming down her cheeks, Lauren said nothing. She only glared.

"Look, I'm really sorry—I was only messing around. I didn't mean to scare you."

An awkward silence passed before Lauren finally muttered, "I thought I killed you."

I tried to calm her down, but she turned away and swam towards the wobbly plastic ladder. She left the water, walked over to her back porch, grabbed her favorite Pokémon-themed towel, and sat on the steps blankly staring at the pool. Being a nine-year-old, I didn't know how to handle the situation so I stayed in the water and tried to think of a game plan. After all, this girl was my first crush. Sure I had fun coloring *Toy Story* characters with Jenna Gallagher the previous year, but that was just a silly kindergartner crush. What I had with Lauren was the real thing. Not only did we share the same favorite Pokémon (Blastoise), but we were also next-door neighbors. It was obviously destiny.

Unsure of how to fix my screw-up with words, I decided that impressing her in some way would get me back on her good side. With little to work with in the pool, I swam over to the ladder. Lazily bobbing up and down, the ladder had four steps and wasn't attached to the bottom of the
pool. Just as I was about to step out of the water, the idea hit me.

*What if I swim through every gap between the ladder’s steps? Lauren would be really impressed and completely forget about my prank. Genius!* 

Thrilled with my stroke of brilliance, I cannonballed back into the pool in an attempt to get Lauren’s attention. Without even checking to see if she was looking, I plunged my head through the top gap and began weaving through the second with ease. The third gap proved to be difficult, forcing me to twist my thin body into a snake-like structure, but it was manageable. Upside-down with my head now behind the ladder, I attempted to push it through the fourth and final gap. I was able to poke my face through it, but the rest of my tangled body refused to move. Furiously, I tried to push a little further, but it was useless. I failed.

In desperate need of oxygen, I admitted defeat and attempted to unravel myself, but the ladder wouldn’t let go of me. My head was above the fourth step, my torso was contorted in a U-shape around the third, and my legs were wrapped around the second. I was trapped.

Panicked, I thrashed around as much as I could manage. Pounding on the wall from underwater and violently kicking the edge of the pool, I desperately tried to get Lauren’s attention. Tears and black spots began to impair my vision and my muscles were too oxygen deprived to keep calling for help.

Lauren wasn’t coming. She thought she killed me, but I killed myself.

*This is how I die.*

My lungs filled with chlorinated water and the world went dark. When I opened my eyes, I was standing in the center of the pool. Amazed, I turned to the ladder, which was once again lazily bobbing up and down, and then to Lauren, who was once again glaring at me from the porch.

“You didn’t think I was really going to fall for that again, did you?”

To this day, I don’t know how I escaped.

When I think of hell, I don’t feel flames surrounding me or hear people screaming for help. Instead I’m trapped behind block four in a humid, dimly lit natatorium where my nostrils have been sentenced to the ceaseless scent of chlorine.

And there’s cheering. My parents, my teammates, my midget Russian swim coach. With this cheering comes pressure and for all eternity I must endure the weight of it. I’m only wearing a Speedo, but it feels like I’m equipped with a bullet proof vest. My stomach is in knots that anxiety crafted specifically for the occasion and I’m impossibly exhausted, but the 200 Individual Medley is about to start and I’m the favorite to win despite
only being a high school sophomore. The idea of being the best typically excites people, but not me. It only makes things worse, only adds to the pressure. But once the race is over, the misery washes away as I dry off with my maroon and gold team towel, a rectangular piece of heaven after any swim. Regardless of whether I win or lose, only one fact matters—it’s over.

Standing behind block four, I look down at my four-foot, ten-inch coach, Oleg. His wispy blond hair looks thinner than usual, but I refrain from making my typical Donald Trump joke. He gives me a quick pep talk while twirling his neon orange timer around his pudgy index finger. First clockwise, then counterclockwise.

My eyes follow the stopwatch as he babbles on about how I should swim my race. Kick hard, gotcha. Don’t breathe off of the walls, sure. Be like a bull and assert dominance, no probl—wait, what? No time to ask questions though.

“Swimmers, step up.”

This is one of my least favorite sentences, next to “Yes, we put nuts in our pistachio ice cream” and “Let’s pregame with flavored vodka.” Reluctantly, I lower my absurdly tight goggles over my eyes and step up onto the slippery block.

“Two laps butterfly, two laps backstroke, two laps breaststroke, and two laps of any stoke other than the first three. Swimmers, take your mark…”

I blackout.

From the moment my body hits the water to when I finish the race, I remember nothing. It was painful, which is evident from my aching muscles, and I lost, but it’s over. Nothing else matters. I hop out of my watery nightmare, walk over to the sidelines, and reach for my towel. Right as my hand grasps the dry cotton, I’m transported back to block four and the neon orange timer continues to twirl.

~~~~

It was the third day of my family’s two-week trip through the Hawaiian Islands when we landed in Kauai. As we pulled up to the resort, we were greeted by multiple stereotypical Hawaiian brochure scenes. There were attractive women wearing hula skirts and holding leis; surfers conquering massive waves in the distance; and mysterious bright flowers that looked like they were painted by the Easter Bunny. As I stepped out of the van and into the balmy Pacific air, I ignored the leis, the flowers, and the surfers. I was only focused on one thing: the waves.

Eight feet tall, they were absolutely dominating everyone in their path. Teenagers were propelled down the shore on their boogie boards and adults were struggling to stand after each wave crashed into them. Knowing full-well that these waves would destroy my puny sixteen-year-old self,
I ran to my room, changed into my bathing suit, and had the warm white sand between my toes within five minutes.

The tide was violent, but I wasn't afraid. Water and I had a love/hate relationship that went back years. Despite hating the sport of swimming, it gave me a growing dependency upon the physical feeling of being submerged. I cursed every second of the miserable freestyle set during practice, but once it was over, I wouldn't run to the escape of the locker-room like everyone else. Instead, I would wait until the water was calm, slowly make my way to the center, and sink. Staring at the ceiling through the still pool water became a post-practice ritual for me in high school. After looking at the pool floor for hours while swimming, I appreciated the sanctuary of staring at the black square ceiling tiles. It turned out that my freedom was in my jail cell. The small shift in perspective made all the difference in my perception of the pool. It kept me calm when life was crazy. But in Hawaii our roles reversed. Life in the Aloha State was calm, so it only made sense that water was crazy.

I sprinted towards the ocean and dove headlong into the first of many eight-foot waves. When I did this the day before in Honolulu, I was able to swim underneath the wave, but that wasn't the case in Kauai. The wave deflected my attempt and spit me back out onto the shore with such force that my body made consecutive circular tumbles. But that wasn't going to stop me from trying again.

For the next hour, I was a tire that kept throwing itself back into the mouth of a monster that wanted nothing to do with it. I'd barrel in, it'd spew me out. Whether it was backwards, forwards, or sideways, I'd always roll away. Honestly, it's impressive that I didn't break my neck. The wipeouts hurt, but I was having too much fun to care about a few sand scrapes. There was something about surviving self-induced danger that made any minor injury worth the risk. Just as I was starting to get tired of voluntarily beating myself up, I saw it. In the distance, a colossal wave was forming, noticeably superior to the eight-footers that had dominated me all afternoon. Apparently I wasn't the only person to notice it because at least twenty-five of the thirty people around me began to find a safe spot further up the shore to avoid the impending collision of land and sea. I didn't want to watch the wave smash the sand, though—that'd be too easy. I wanted it to crash into me.

I wanted to roll.

The water around my feet began to rapidly recede back into the ocean as if it were being summoned by its master. The waves I had been battling turned out to be nothing more than the children of this one massive monster. They seemed to be afraid of her, but I wasn't. Just as she began to crest at around ten feet tall, I ran down the shore and dove head-first
into her stomach. As if I hit a force field, my body was launched backwards and, for the first time all day, I didn't roll. Instead, the wave body slammed me to the ground and propelled me up the beach on my back. For ten seconds, the world went dark as my ears, eyes, and mouth took on water while my back was assaulted by the sand. Finally, I began to slow down. When I opened my eyes, I was well beyond where the other waves had dumped me and I began to smile as I coughed up water. She may have thrown me further than her kids did, but I was still in one piece.

Satisfied with my victory over the mother of all waves, I began to push myself up, but was suddenly jerked back onto the sand. The undertow was pulling me into the water feet-first at an alarming speed. Normally this would just be another fun aspect of getting wiped out by a wave, but this time was different. This time a massive Hawaiian man was in front of me.

With no control of my body, I watched with horror as my stick-like self torpedoed towards the immense man. Wearing nothing but a tan Gil- ligan bucket hat and a pair of navy swim trunks, this Hawaiian looked like a retired sumo wrestler. With his back turned to me and the ocean roaring around him, he couldn't hear my screams to move. Although the undertow was no match for his mammoth body, I was. With perfect accuracy, my feet knocked him off of his. In slow motion, I watched his chubby arms fly up and his body lean right. Gravity came in with the assist, slamming the majority of his weight onto my right arm.

I heard a sickening snap and was swept away. That sound said it all—the fat guy broke my arm.

The pain was so severe that I couldn't get myself out of the water. My body was being pushed and pulled by the ebb and flow of the ocean, and I could barely catch my breath. I thought I was going to drown until a plump hand grabbed me by my left arm and pulled me out of the water. The fat man who fell on me had come to my rescue.

“You're a dumbass kid, you know that? This was your fault.”

He turned and waddled away. I never saw him again.

In too much pain to care about the tubby man's comment, I started walking back to my room. The bone wasn't protruding out of my skin, but there was a sizable lump that led me to believe that it couldn't be too far from breaking the surface. Halfway back to my resort, my eyesight became spotted and my legs gave way. Right before I blacked out, I saw my parents running towards me, their purple leis flapping around their necks like mini capes.

For the remainder of my time in Hawaii I wasn't allowed to be in the water past my waist. Half of me was happy because I didn't have to practice for three months, the other half missed looking at the world through a liquid lens. The water tore me in two.
Italy
Taylor Andrews

Coming here was like
falling asleep in December and
waking up in June, stunned by the
hue of the sky but
forgetting your snow-born bones
sweat and slip when soaked
in so much sun.
You are soluble in light, and
you, shadow child, dissolve
like a teaspoon of sugar,
sweet and nothing.
You speak a language that
tastes like fruit and cream
and feels like breathing
underwater, each day acting out
your most pervasive childhood dream-
facing a world full of darkness
unable to scream.
You become a bundle of
misunderstanding, blank-
non capisco non capisco non
capisco non capisco
non capisco
no.
You learn to say
si with a sweet little smile,
since it doesn't matter if you
understand, your
frenetic, thrashing mind
will stand the silence,
and you will leak your
words like a slow-bleeding
animal dragging a gnawed-off
leg through the brush.
Florence was a dream or
a movie scene
and you weren’t really there,
breathing in cigarette smoke
that smelled both like
your aunt’s sweaters and boys
you tried to rub from your brain
like an oil stain, stubborn and flammable.
You try to exist in this place
or that place: your cells your hair your
blurry profile ducking out
of a tourist’s photograph -- your
proof, souvenirs of you
left to the churches and
terracotta roofs.
You fly home sick and cold,
you don’t exist in your
room, you don’t exist in your
poems, you don’t see why
moving from beautiful place
to beautiful place
does nothing to temper
the swelling space that
occupies your skin.
A cold austerity has taken hold of me in the past hundred or so years. My irregular curves are swayed only by the cutting winds that tear through me without reprieve, the blinding light from some faraway heaven, and the ongoing trampling of unaffected automatons. There is no longer any tranquility, no sense of oneness that once permeated my being. I am no longer whole.

In the beginning, there was nothing. I remember not the exact moment in which I came to be, nor the few slivers of time which directly followed it. All I remember is the violent hurtling outward, during which I was unsure whether I truly existed or not. Eventually, I managed to gather some sense of self, along with the realization that I was beginning to slow. Fragments of rock continued to break off from me at an alarming rate, yet hope began to grow that I would survive long enough to experience whatever end this journey held. Then, I was completely still. No perceivable motion, nothing besides the almost imperceptible groans of an ever-expanding universe. For much of my life, this is all that was.

After an unknown amount of time in this seemingly static state, I became aware of heat emanating from a nearby body. For a certain span, the warmth provided comfort, breaking up the monotony that I had feared I would be a part of eternally. Ultimately though, the initial delight in that discovery wore off, leaving a terrible loneliness in its wake.

Bombardment from all sides dominated the next portion of my existence. These colossal conglomerates of rock, likely still rushing away from their initial creation, struck me at fantastic speeds, marking my otherwise unblemished façade. Although not pleasurable in any sense of the word, I reveled in the pain – any type of feeling was better than the previous indifference of the cosmos.

As these external intruders began to slow their assault upon me, I became aware of a sensation unlike that I had ever felt before. I felt an ever-so-slight squirming upon me, struggling to duplicate itself and continue its existence. I know not how, or from whence these movements came, but I decided to christen them “life.”

Soon, I was teeming with these writhing little beings, all seemingly
working toward some unknown goal. To the best of my abilities, I helped them, hope kindling within me at the prospect of acting as a guardian of their fragility. The creatures developed and evolved with my guidance, quickly morphing into beings that possessed more than the sheer desire to live. What exactly this yearning was, I am unsure.

Then catastrophe struck – another chunk of rock, larger in scale than those I had previously welcomed, struck me with astounding force, propelling dust outward from its focal point. The resulting fragmentation of my body suffocated me, and I soon could no longer feel the heat that had previously warmed me. Little by little, the movements that had once been so bountiful began to slow, until all but the tiniest life forms remained. It was at this point that I was most afraid, for I feared that the universe would not allow my progeny to continue.

Time passed, and life gradually regenerated in a way not unlike that which had occurred before the near-extinction of life. Like before, I nurtured the delicate beings, eager to bring about something that was better prepared, more able to survive the callous indifference of the cosmos. A whole host of life forms began to appear as time progressed, each with uniquely distinctive characteristics. Soon, a new creature unlike any other evolved, displaying some of my own qualities in microscopic portions. I called him human.

The humans rapidly developed, banding together for survival, fashioning shelter and tools from the bodies of other creatures. They continued to grow, learning to efficiently communicate with one another, and used my resources to nourish their bodies in ways previously unbeknownst to me. They showed kindness, empathy for one another, caring for each other just as I cared for them. They flourished, all under my watch.

As their numbers swelled, so too did their demands. What once sustained life was no longer acceptable – more became the expected. To achieve this, certain members of their kind rose up, rousing others to do their bidding. I watched helplessly as they turned their backs on the compassion that I had so carefully nurtured into their being. Humans forced others of their ilk into the building of great monuments, into the growing of their nourishment, into cruel labors that benefitted no one. Slaughters too came to pass, the victors claiming temporary ownership over some part of me, as if I was something to be possessed, something to be disposed of. Humans tinkered with the laws of the universe, not to better themselves, but instead to claim dominion over the scarcely dissimilar inhabitants of a different land. Their empathy had disappeared.

I struggled to right their course, give guidance as I once had been able to do. They resisted with a violent tenacity. Weariness soon settled in. I realized then that I was the aberration in the coldness that surrounded
me. Where I sought to create empathy and joy in humans, they instead responded to the indifference that they saw surrounding them. They didn't create the indifference – they merely echoed it.
The First Run

Darcie Connors

The two-mile loop around my house seems like a good place to start my newfound quest to become a runner, or, that is to say, to become capable of running. Not too long, not too short, and a nice long downhill section to end the route, at which point I will surely be wishing I had stopped running about 1.8 miles earlier. I’ve been feeling inspired in my long uneventful summer days to start a new hobby and exercise more, and because running outside costs less than the gym, I’ve convinced myself that this time I’ll get into it.

The preparation for my journey is lengthy; I rummage through my drawers for the yoga pants and tank top I bought freshman year, when I thought wearing actual workout clothes would somehow make going to the gym more bearable, lace up my barely worn-in pink and grey Puma sneakers, and braid and re-braid my hair until it is tucked perfectly into a neat line down my back. I have checked the schedule of my personal trainer and motivator, my fourteen-year-old brother, Kevin, to ensure our first big run will not conflict with his daily summer routine of playing tennis, socializing, and following the male lifeguards he idolizes around at the pool club. As an avid member of the North Cumberland Middle School running club, he has acquired some strategies that he guarantees will prove successful in this seemingly impossible mission. Right on schedule, I see him turn swiftly into the driveway on his bike and he enters the house a minute later, face still pink from the day in the sun and eyes covered by his bangs, haircut long overdue.

We begin in the driveway, where Kevin leads us in some opening stretches. All those years of stretching before swim practice as a kid have prepared me for this part. Left arm over right arm, pull. Switch. Balance on one foot, stare at the ground, try not to fall. Switch. Jog in place. Shake it out.

Kevin begins the pep talks.

“Now, the one thing to remember is to never stop running,” he instructs me. “Whatever you do, do not walk. Got it?”

I laugh and brush off this bit of advice, not quite ready to commit to not stopping for two miles.

“Yes, okay, I don’t think so—”

“What’s the number one rule?” he barks back at me.
“Yeah, no walking. Got it.”

We start the first leg of the trip, up the slightly inclining driveway, which never seems quite as long when I drive up it in my car. I'm only slightly out of breath by the time we pass the mailbox and round the corner, turning onto the main street and officially beginning the run down the hill. I turn my head back to try to catch a glimpse of the sign in front of the vibrantly blue church across the street, regularly updated with a witty pun about religion, often corresponding to the season, much to our enjoyment. This one, appropriately summer themed, reads, “Need a lifeguard? Ours walks on water.” I make a mental note to bring it up for discussion at the dinner table as I hear Kevin calling my name and refocus my gaze forward.

He continues to share his running wisdom as the loose gravel of the downward sloping sidewalk rolls under our feet. I am questioning whether these suggestions will be helpful, very doubtful of the idea that “the pain is all mental,” but focus on my breathing as he has instructed me to: in through the nose, out through the mouth. We have only been running downhill for a few minutes but strands of my hair have already managed to slip out of my once perfect French braid and are now plastered to the sides of my face with sweat, the weather proving to be too humid for my choice of cotton leggings. I try to focus on something to distract me from the burning sensation that is slowly beginning to develop in my calves, the heat of the late summer afternoon, the stitch crawling up my side; now I remember why I don't do this running thing. I can see the stop light at the end of the hill where we will turn for the next portion of the run. I look down at my feet as they maneuver around old bags from fast food restaurants and tattered receipts that have been abandoned on the side of the road. I wonder what sales are going on at the neighbors' craft store as we pass it, and look up to see that yes, the green street sign reading “Pine Swamp Rd.” in bold white letters that went missing and miraculously appeared in our living room has indeed still not been replaced. The screeching sound of brakes tells me that we have reached the stoplight at the end of the hill and I look at Kevin expectantly, hoping for a water break, and get only a sarcastic chuckle in return. We jog in place as we wait for the light to change.

Turning the corner, I groan as my future comes into view: the first dreaded hill. I'm not even sure how cars are able to drive up a hill that has to be at a ninety-degree angle. The view of the acres of open fields to the right of the road and the newly built houses with perfectly trimmed lawns and thriving hanging plants on their porches to the left is a bit deceiving; I know that only pain awaits me ahead.

My running partner has specific instructions for this portion of the trip.
“Don’t look up,” he says. “Don’t look at how much of the hill we have left.”

That much I can do. Eyes glued to the pavement a foot in front of me, I focus on my breathing again. In through the nose, out through the mouth. A man passes with his dog and he gives us a friendly nod and smile, but something about his perfectly crisp polo and forehead free of sweat seems like he’s taunting me. We start passing the cemetery where I learned to drive for the first time and I forget about my breathing pattern for a second, greedily gulping the hot air as I shuffle along. I hear Kevin's voice reminding me of the breathing pattern again and I repeat the instructions over and over in my head: In through the nose, out through the mouth, don’t look up, don’t — oh god, I looked. Oh god, that's far.

“Don’t look, I said!”

It seems as though at least twenty or thirty minutes have passed, if not more, once we finally make it to the top of the hill and turn right onto the next street. Kevin is talking to me, but I'm having trouble focusing on his words because there is a pebble lodged between the side of my foot and my sneaker — how did that get there? — and the pain just below my ribcage is starting to feel like a knife through my flesh and this has got to be the hottest day of the entire summer.

“I like to talk while I'm running. Do you like to talk while you're running? Kelly hates it when I talk to her while we're running.”

I think about my sister's warning about our brother's incessant chatter during their runs as the sharp pain begins to morph into a dull nausea, which seems to intensify with every bouncing step.

“I'm not sure I can do this,” I say, looking at the winding road ahead and knowing that I'm only about halfway to being back comfortably in my driveway. The nauseous feeling is getting worse.

“Look behind us. Look how far we've gone!”

“I think I'm going to be sick, I think I'm going to throw up.”

“It's all mental. It's all in your head.”

“I don't think this—”

“Whatever you do, don't walk.”

“I can't—”

“Keep running!”

I disregard my brother's final command as I search desperately for somewhere to collapse, a discreet place in case I need to vomit on the side of the road. I sit with my head between my knees on a damp log under a nearby tree, staring at the Puma logo on my sneakers, and demand that Kevin call our mother, insistent that I can't make it a step further.

Four minutes later, I watch Kevin continue his jog down the road from the front seat of my mom's car, who, upon receiving my brother's
reluctantly made phone call, has come to save me, though the pain has subsided now that I have been rescued. When the car pulls into our driveway, I feel myself fall out of the front seat onto the lawn with the intention of doing post-run stretches but instead I let my aching body rest against the cool, freshly watered grass. I imagine the inevitable lecture I will be getting when he returns but despite this, and my earlier determination, it feels infinitely better just to lie here. A few minutes pass before I hear the sound of the ends of my brother’s shoelaces rapidly hitting the pavement. It stops and he’s standing looking down at me sprawled out facedown on the grass.

“What time tomorrow?”
Driving Past Dead Sunflowers in October

Emily Francisco

Crippled and brown, as if burnt,
shriveled from weeks of thirst,

yet still they are as tall
as scarecrows, thin roots

staking the dirt with some unfeeble
strength, heads sagging

in a downward glance
as if to make sure they are still there,

the legumes that tie them to the earth,
gossamer umbilical threads yet to be cut.

Though I know this is how it is here,
this is how the harvest is done

(by killing the golden crop in late summer),
still I feel an internal companionship

with these entities as they wait,
solemnly, for the black gems

to slip from their mouths,
seeds tokens of another year gone,

one year closer to the inevitable turning
of the field to fallow.
Do you remember when we unlatched the window, chanced it and braved barefoot to tread through damp grass just to marvel at the stars? And the world was infinite, and we were nothing more than held-breath and memory catchers caught up in the celestial serenity of a lifetime unborn.

You are my constellation-maker, the keeper of my unloved parts and the singer of my unsung life. And each day, as the sun collapses on a reality that spins ever-farther from the place I once called home, you draw diamonds of my four-cornered complacency just to prove that I’m not the only one who carries crosses in my pockets.
I was caught off guard the morning you told me you loved me. It was past 2 am and I was almost asleep, head tucked against your side and my hand curled in the collar of your shirt. It was our four month anniversary. I had insisted we watch a romantic comedy for once, but you had opted to study my face instead of the screen. The more frustrated I was at the plot, the more you smiled, your mouth stretching over your sullen face. Something softened in your eyes and it made me want to kiss you. Instead I leaned in closer and you let out a breath, pressing your hand to the small of my back, gentle as air.

We waited too long after the credits and the title menu tattooed itself to the inside of my eyelids. You fumbled to find the remote and turn off the television after the third loop of music. In the familiar weight of the quiet that followed, I memorized the rise and fall of your chest. We had learned to speak through silence, since I always said the wrong things out loud.

You spoke it cautiously, the “I love you,” like you weren’t sure if you were allowed. Like you were afraid your hands weren’t enough to keep me from floating away. I’m sure you felt the heart tense in my chest and set off running.

I curled myself tighter against your side and tried not to hear the threat tucked beneath the framework of your words, the “I’ll leave you.” I had known you would ever since you first kissed me against the passenger door of your Chevy and blamed my lightheadedness on the mid-afternoon heat.

The hum of the heaters tucked in my neighbors’ backyards almost overpowered the sound of your heart beating cautiously under my ear. You were solid under my fingertips but your voice was hollow in my chest, settling itself between my ribs. More than anything I didn’t want to drift away. My lips parted to kiss your collarbone and go back to the days in August when we still weren’t sure of each other and I thought you would be gone by October. But my mouth met your cool skin and my own voice came tumbling out, four words I hadn’t prepared to say. My mumbled “I love you too” hung in the silence as I pretended to fall asleep.

When you left the next morning, I stood barefoot at the glass door and watched the gap in the side of the frame let cold air seep in. You plant-
ed a kiss on my forehead and I closed my eyes, trying to remember who I was before this. I gave up in time to watch you drive away in your Chevy, rear bumper dented from when you let me practice stick shift.

I held on to the doorframe. The air leaking through the gap stung at my eyes so that later I still couldn't read your texts, or the same ten digits that called for two weeks until you gave up.

The next month I called you and it went to voicemail after two rings. I ended my apologies with “I love you.”
Newburgh
Rachel Barber

Low, murmuring tones swept toward me from the corner computer. I glanced sideways, taking in again the gaunt form, the woman in the dirty overcoat with wiry, unkempt hair. Her mouth kept working, pushing out new syllables in a constant buzz, and her fingers leapt back and forth from the desktop keyboard to a fidgety grip—a two-handed clasp like a prayer, but gangly and desperate, her fingers tightly wound in and out. The woman's eyes held the Dell screen steadily, even as her lips hurried on, her mumbling revving up a decibel.

I turned back to my computer.

At SUNY Orange's library, as well as the Newburgh Free Library and, I imagine, any other library in the city of Newburgh, New York, you were likely to find at least one poor soul in a corner talking to herself, no matter the day. Sometimes, if nonthreatening, she would be allowed to stay inside the whole workday, shuffling between a desktop computer and a comfy armchair, the library her refuge. Other days, though, she'd be dragged out by security, screaming about the drugs she wasn't taking, or pouring out curses and death threats against the librarians and the guards. It all depended on the day and the person.

Not that any of it was really troubling, of course, at least not to a high school junior completing her AP History homework at the library. SUNY Orange had excellent security.

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Newburgh, for as long as it's existed, has never quite decided how it feels about the marginalized—the poor, the minority, the mentally ill. As Newburghrevealed.org will tell the dilettante historian, the city flourished in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, stimulating industrial and commercial growth when it lined its old turnpikes with railway tracks (and, of course, the city's location on the Hudson River had already roused some trade in preceding decades). Businesses expanded so fully, in fact, that an influx of African Americans settled into the city in the early decades of the twentieth century, searching for jobs, and a further flood of Puerto Ricans hit the Newburgh streets in the fifties and sixties, similarly eager for employment in the booming Newburgh economy. The wealthier, whiter population, however, couldn't quite come to terms with these less affluent newcomers. As increasingly poorer families made their way to Newburgh, property values declined and well-off businesses and individuals abandoned the city, moving out into newer suburbs. During
the fifties and sixties as poor, minority migration burgeoned, the Hudson waterfront properties of Newburgh—once alive with trade and businesses—swiftly deteriorated, transformed from well-kept shop-windows and neat, tidy apartment buildings to smashed-in glass and crumbling walls.

Still, the city of Newburgh assured its poorest inhabitants of rebirth and renewal, tearing down the waterfront's dead buildings (and displacing poor African American and Hispanic families in the process) in the 1960s with the promise of safer houses and civic centers. Unfortunately, the sleek, shining housing developments of this “urban renewal” project never actually materialized, leaving the waterfront's displaced populations either homeless or in houses equally decrepit. When, in the 1990s, I first laid my own eyes on the riverside beyond Water Street, the waterfront stood nearly empty, the homes long torn down and replaced with barren air. The demolition did leave a beautiful view of the Hudson River—especially at sunset, when the sky's tangerine glow fired up the water's gloss. Nevertheless, it also left some the city's most marginalized people homeless.

My own family, in all of our encounters with Newburgh, would observe first-hand the unremitting tensions between promise and disappointment, between concern for the poor and acceptance of the city's dilapidation. My parents lived in nearby New Windsor—a wealthier and proudly separate white community—for eight years under a pastoral appointment, during which time my parents interacted nonstop with Newburgh, particularly in ministry to its poor and mentally ill inhabitants. Thanks to charities linked to my pastor-mother and thanks to my father's work as a librarian at SUNY Orange and the Newburgh Free Library (libraries are a common shelter for the poor), we were never able to forget about the city's disenfranchised. For years, I watched my mother and father support the charities and churches at work in the area, from Grace United Methodist Church to Project L.I.F.E. (a housing program) to Newburgh's branch of Habitat for Humanity. My family's experience of Newburgh was an ongoing glimpse of the city's distress amidst attempts at restoration. My parents actively participated in Newburgh's healthy and generally wholesome institutions—the libraries, charities, and churches—but that meant facing the poverty, crime, and inexorable brokenness of Newburgh up-close.

It was not uncommon, for example, for my mother to come across sketchy scenes while we lived in New Windsor. She made regular food deliveries to Newburgh, to broken down houses on graffiti-ridden streets, and once, as her red Ford Escort stopped at a corner, a skinny, poorly shaven stranger ran up to her side window, a small, plastic bag in his hand. The plastic was loaded down by a heap of white powder.

Taken aback, my mother stared, her brown eyes wide, at the stranger. As she leaned her head towards the window, she told him, “Oh no, I’m just doing a food delivery.”
“Ohh,” the coke-dealer mumbled, “sorry Ma'am.” He lifted his scrappy hands in apology and scurried back towards the dark outlines of the street's rickety buildings.

Or again, on another food delivery, my mother drove by a tall, broad-shouldered young man standing in the center of the street, his eyes cast out, like a hunter's, over the cracking asphalt and the boarded up windows. Like any other number of young men on the streets in Newburgh, he held a gun in his hand.¹

Never deterred, although a bit shaken up, my mother leaned out her window once more, timidly proclaiming her desire to deliver food. The man maintained his firm stance, keeping watch over the smashed and pot-holed concrete, but he waved my mother by permissively.

Or for instance, my father came into work one day at the Orange County Community College—Newburgh's beacon of learning and societal improvement—to find that one of the college's windows had been shattered in the middle of the night (someone had seen fit to shoot a bullet through it). My dad still works there, though, to this day. Aside from the occasional drug addicts and mentally unstable patrons, the library's actually not that dangerous.

In spite of all of the drugs and violence in Newburgh, the city (according to City-Data.com) maintains a mediocre average of 1.6 police officers per thousand residents, about half of New York state's average. Although a couple of wealthier neighborhoods, or better-secured properties like the Orange County Community College, can rely on some peace and protection, robbery and assault remain high problems throughout the area, problems that neither the local authorities nor the most concerned individuals seem quite capable of dealing with.

I myself would try, of course, to persevere in love and hope, to follow my parents' lead—I believed and believe their assertion that we see Christ in every human, but especially in the poor. Still, I tended and tend to sidestep the mentally ill at the libraries, and I keep my head down when large, elderly folk with sharp body odors walk by. And I generally avoid walking the streets of Newburgh alone, even in daylight. I believe in helping the poor—I’ve gone on Habitat tours and volunteered at Project L.I.F.E. fundraisers—but I circumvent direct contact with Newburgh's poorest and shadiest persons, burying my head in papers or a computer to reduce the chances of my eyes meeting the marginalized. I won't walk away from a Newburgh citizen in need, but I never strike up a conversation either, or extend a firm, helping hand. I suppose, like the city of Newburgh itself, I've never quite decided how I feel about its needy.

***

I looked up from the pile of papers and books in front of me, scattered across the clean, gray tabletop in the Newburgh Free Library. As a
part of my senior thesis for college, I had been reading up on Christopher Smart's poem, “Jubilate Agno”, before this middle-aged figure, leaning heavily on his wooden cane, limped over to my table. A wool cap clung to the top of his head, and a faded blue jacket draped his shoulders, a shield against the elements (even though it was still mid-summer). He glanced at me almost apologetically, his short, graying beard bowing towards the table as he asked, “Can I use the power outlet?”

“Of course,” I replied automatically, already starting up from my seat, pouring my mess of thesis papers into my backpack, “and you can have the whole table too—I’m on my way out.” That was actually true—it was time to meet my ride on the upper floor of the library. A former parishioner and I were headed to a United Methodist conference on poverty.

“Thanks,” the stranger mumbled, laying out a black and white composition book on the table. As I hastily pushed my laptop into my bag, he continued, “I’m a poet, you know: a friend's setting me up with a publisher.”

I nodded, forcing interest, and paused to remark, “Cool, I’m an English major myself, with a writing concentration.”

And suddenly the marble notebook was open and he had pushed a pencil-marked page in front of me. For all of his limping and his out-of-place, autumnal clothing, the man's handwriting curved with an artist's flow, smoothly and delicately across the paper. I skimmed his short poem, nodding congenially and answering, my tone even, “It’s pretty.” It was okay.

“It had better be good enough,” the man sighed, pulling the composition back in towards himself, his fingers hanging rigidly, almost pleadingly to his book and pencil. His eyes caught the poem in a dim, but hopeful gaze. “I need this.”

I looked the man over, from the woolen cap holding fast to his head, to his dark blue jacket hugging his body closely, to his fingers glued determinedly—desperately—to his notebook. Apart from his clear emotional and monetary depression, he actually looked pretty normal (not everyone who frequents Newburgh’s libraries is mentally unstable). As I pulled my backpack about my shoulders and pushed in my chair, I nodded again his way. “I hope that goes well for you—I really do.”

Then I left him alone at the table. I had a poverty conference to attend.

1In September of 2011, New York magazine would specifically identify the city of Newburgh as the “Murder Capital of New York,” noting that Poughkeepsie—another city my family would make regular food deliveries to—was second only to Newburgh for its per capita violent crime rate (violent crime is defined legally as murder, forcible rape, robbery, or aggravated assault). Of course, the particular food deliveries mentioned here took place over a decade before 2011—back when Newburgh was safe.
Dissonance
Taylor Andrews

But how to make peace with a warring brain?
Insisting on two opposing refrains on whether to leave or to remain.
An echo of "monster" and then "you're okay,"
first "kill yourself" but then again "stay."
I sit my younger brother on the steps
Of the only house he's known
On the corner of Georgia Ave and Urbana,
Prime rush hour zone
By the bus stop in Glenmont,
And he rocks Chuck*'s, high tops,
In black and red, like my J's*,
Both brands from my block.
He's a little skater boy, same style
His friends roll with on the street,
While I match the dudes
Chillin' outside 7-11, drug dealer chic.
His skin's dark, and mine's light,
But ironically his life
Has been a little easier than mine,
Though our roots are wrapped tight
In brown soil on white land, unfertile,
Though we grow and spread.
I guess with him we all made sure He
never saw our garden was dead Like
we did, looking out our windows To
see hoodlums and struggle.
Just because we weren't in the ghetto
Doesn't mean we weren't in the jungle:
Dudes with hats with their favorite teams
And brand names on their shirts and jeans
And old heads in Nautica and Nikes
Starting to rip at the seams
And single mothers with another
Bun in the oven all going to make that bread.
Like a scary movie, some of these images
Never get out of one's head.
He asks me about college,
And how much do I enjoy it,
And how much easier it'll be for me
to go out and find employment.
I look him in eyes the way I did
One morning when he was five
And got home from the hospital
After a seizure from a 103 fever, and I lie
And tell him school is wonderful
And I'm making so many friends
That don't get into trouble,
And only welcome messages are sent.

“Do well enough,
You'll get there too,
And when you get that degree,
I'll be right there right beside you.”
It's the same thing Pops told me
When I finally gave up on street dreams
That only end in eternal sleep
For red stitched bandana seams.
And he's looking up to me
The same way I looked up as a child
To the water tower watching over us,
Collar-blue and not defiled
By the neighborhood's poisons,
Too high up from the weeds
But still close enough to keep an eye
On the next generation's seeds.
But as bad as I want his mind cultivated,
Do I say
That the road to success is one
They want us far away from, and to stay
Away from Gettysburg where they push
A Mexican off a fraternity porch
And call him a spic, then surround
A black man with the same approach
As White hoods when they hung
“Strange Fruit” for Crows to pick?
And they ask how we end up in the hood
And never leave that shit.
Do I tell him that preppy boys
In pastel colors, skittle-pack-looking,
Thinking they're tougher than Mr. T
Sit around a table with schemes a-cooking
To run him out without being open  
Are gonna follow him around every corner? 
Or white girls in yoga pants and North Faces 
Will see his skin and leave him a loner? 
So what do I tell him, when I know 
No matter where the wind drops him, 
He could be one of those 
100 brown boys in 100 brown coffins.
The screams that drifted across no man's land were as horrifying as Alfie had ever heard. The shrieks echoed, pleading for help or for death.

He lay awake in his damp dugout, unable to sleep amidst the wailing and begging of men he had known and loved like brothers. The guns, mercifully, were silent. There had been an offensive that day. It was no more effective than the half dozen others he had joined in since reaching the front. By some miracle, he had survived them all. The doctors were overwhelmed by the wounded men who had fallen within the first few meters of the trench, and those who had fallen farther into no man's land could not be helped without incurring more casualties. Whichever God-damned general had ordered the charge had once again underestimated both the strength of the German position and the blood price demanded by such tactics.

The charge had been a miserable failure. To what end did those men suffer and die? There was no victory to be had in this type of warfare, where lines could not be broken without inhuman suffering on both sides. Someday, when they had the manpower or firepower to blow the Bosch out of Belgium and France, maybe then the war would end. Or maybe the opposite would happen. Alfie didn't know which outcome was more likely these days. Perhaps the time would come when the generals would leave the safety of their posh headquarters and actually witness the futility of attrition. Then maybe both sides would cut their losses.

These bitter thoughts tormented Alfie Byrd, who had watched as friends on each side of him were blown to bits, shredded by chunks of shrapnel, or riddled with bullets from the mechanized menace that were machine guns. During his time as a private in the British Expeditionary Force, he had seen more friends buried than he had even had before the war began. He had arrived in Belgium as one of Kitchener's new boys, just in time for Wipers to again erupt in open warfare: the continuation of the savage battle from the previous fall that had decimated the British Army.

The fall of 1915 had been relatively quiet for his regiment, but it had been unlucky enough to be moved to France in anticipation of the Battle of the Somme. It had been brutal. He heard afterward that nearly twenty thousand of his compatriots had died in the first day alone. The generals had claimed that there was attritional value to the day and that the Ger-
mans had suffered as well. Of course they had, Alfie frowned. There was no way not to suffer during such a war. But what end could justify such suffering?

The screams of the men continued. No matter how much Alfie braced himself for the suffering following an attack, he was never prepared to hear the pleas for help from men who knew they would never live to receive it.

Looking around to make sure no one was watching his admittedly stupid act, Alfie stepped up onto the firestep and peeked his head over the top of the trench to see if there was anyone close by whom he could help. He looked around but could see nothing in the dark of night. Then, from a nearby section of the line, a flare lit up the ground. It was far enough away for Alfie to know it was not intended for them. For now, though, they were safe. He pitied the men down the line who weren’t.

It was still very bright, however. Alfie had learned to close one eye to prevent being temporarily blinded by the flare, but he was so shocked to see the figure of a man walking amidst the carnage in no man’s land that both eyes remained open. The flare burnt itself out and Alfie’s vision went black for a few moments. Throwing caution to the winds, he hoisted himself up over the parapet. Their barbed wire was still cut from the offensive, so he found a hole and crawled through it. As he stood, he heard a gruff voice shouting at him from below.

“Bloody hell. What do you think you’re doing?” Alfie could barely see the man in the trench, but he knew that the voice belonged to his corporal. “Get down before you attract their attention! That’s an order.”

“Look! There’s someone out there;” he said, pointing at the silhouette of the mystery soldier.

“I don’t care. Private Byrd, get your arse down here now before you get shot! Did you hear me? I said get down!”

But Alfie wasn’t listening anymore. He stepped calmly into no man’s land, avoiding shell holes and deep puddles. Now that he was out of the trench, he could smell the rotting flesh even stronger than when it had been obscured by the shit and mud and sulfuric stench of his subterranean home. The dying laments grew louder and clearer as he strolled through no man’s land, indifferent to the danger facing him.

One particular scream caught his attention. He marched across the devastated ground, having to step across a line of bodies, and knelt down beside the unfortunate owner of the voice.

Flecker, the man’s name was. In Alfie’s time with the army, Flecker had been the best captain he had known. He was brave and smart, unlike many of the spoiled aristocrats whose name alone won them their rank. It had been Flecker who bravely and foolishly led Alfie and the boys across
the field of battle that morning and who had paid the price along with his
men. Alfie cared nothing for the staff officers and generals sitting comfort-
ably in their headquarters, but he believed many of the field officers to be
among the best men on the Western Front.

“Captain,” Alfie whispered over the broken body of his former of-
ficer. The man had been gunned down that morning, his leg torn off by a
fateful hunk of shrapnel. The eyes opened wearily without seeing before the
wailing resumed. It was horrible to see any man like that, covered in blood
and sweat, but with no tears left to be shed. Alfie gave him a quick drink
from his canteen. “I’ll go back and get a medical team. We’re going to bring
you home.”

A silenced scream caught Alfie’s attention, and his eyes fell again on
the soldier he had seen from his trench, who appeared at first to be tending
the dead only a few meters away. Then Alfie realized what was truly taking
place.

He watched as the soldier drifted from one weeping victim of the
war to the next. In turn, he would kneel down next each with his smooth
and sharp trench knife and finish the work of the machine guns, flame
throwers, shells, and shrapnel. The blood drops that fell from his knife
glimmered like rubies in the moonlight. One by one, the screams fell silent.
Alfie looked at the ground, trying to come to grips with what he was wit-
nessing.

He looked up again. To his surprise, the man had vanished. Behind
him, Captain Flecker’s wailing lament ended abruptly. Alfie spun around
to see that the stranger was now next to the captain’s dead body, knife in
hand, his work there finished.

“Why did you do that?” he asked the man, astonished by the cruelty
of the merciful act.

The mysterious soldier looked calmly over to him as he wiped his
knife with a small patch of fabric. He was wearing a Tommy helmet and
wore the greatcoat of a British soldier, but Alfie did not recognize this man
from his company or any of the others nearby. Was he a newcomer to the
front? The hardened look in the man’s cold eyes made Alfie feel like the
answer must be no.

When he spoke, it was with a gravely and monotone voice that
caused Alfie to shiver violently. “You’ve heard their cries in the night as
they scream for water and for pity. You’ve heard them when they shriek.”
He stared blankly as Alfie did not respond. “Listen to them,” he ordered.
They looked around at the barren wasteland surrounding them, filled with
the screams of dying men.

“I just saw him though,” Alfie pointed to Flecker. “He was going to
live once stretcher bearers made it out here.”
“What stretcher bearers?” the other soldier sneered, his pointed and blackened teeth showing. He motioned around at the land, which was devoid of life apart from Alfie and the half-dead men on the ground. Every tree had been reduced to splinters by artillery and the poppies had been trampled into the mud by the latest offensive. “There is no one to tend them out here, not in no man’s land. No one but me.”

“Why are you here?”

The man sighed, sheathing his knife. “It is my duty. These men died at my brother’s hands. It is my responsibility to release them from the suffering he has brought.”

“You’re brother’s a fucking Fritz?” Alfie shouted, before coming to a realization. “Wait...” Two brothers cannot fight opposite each other in a battle of nations. “That coat, you stole it. You’re a bloody German, too.”

“I am not,” insisted the man, unbuttoning his greatcoat to reveal a bloodied and dirtied uniform that could have been khaki and could have been gray. “But let me ask you one thing. Why would you fight such a battle that can only bring such pain and such anguish? If you all threw down your weapons and refused to fight, this war would be over.”

“They tried it,” Alfie answered, remembering stories of the Christmas Truce he had never believed possible until he had experienced the universal horrors both sides faced daily. “But the generals put an end to it. This war can’t end until someone wins. I’m here to fight the Germans.”

“For what do you fight?”

“My family,” he said certainly, thinking of his beloved wife and the baby son he had never met. “And for King and Country,” he added, feeling obliged to include in his answer the patriotic response he had been trained to give.

“What king?” the stranger spat. “There is only one king here, and I am him.”

Another flare lit up the sky, this time even closer to their section of no man’s land. It was just bright enough to illuminate the pale and emaciated face of the other man. Alfie, now able to see the cold, dark eyes of the man, knew he was looking at the face that had haunted him since he arrived at the front.

“I know who you are,” Alfie murmured, his eyes glazing over with fear. Never before, even amidst chaotic battles or thundering artillery barrages, had he felt such immense terror. And yet, as in the face of fire, Alfie remained calm. “I’ve seen you before. You were at Wipers and the bloody Somme.”

“And Gallipoli, and Mons, Khartoum, Trafalgar, and the rest. Every single one. I was there for all of them, cleaning up after my brother.”

“War.” Alfie grimaced as he remembered his mother reading to him
from the Book of Revelation. Soldiering may have taken his beliefs from him, but he had not forgotten his lessons. “You are our reward for embracing War.” Could this conversation be real? “After what these people experience in life, do they really deserve you? Do they really deserve Death?”

“No,” the king shook his head sadly, drawing a pistol from his belt. “But this life is Hell. How could anything be worse than this?”

Alfie had no response.

“I give freedom to the living-who-are-dead. Others will take their places until humanity is either wiser or no more. You too, Private Byrd, have earned your sleep. Your family is proud of you and your comrades respect you. You’ve done well.”

“But I’m not done living,” Alfie insisted, suddenly feeling very, very weary. “I need to see my family again.”

“You will again, someday. But not in this life.”

“I want to stay and fight,” Alfie insisted, fighting the fading feeling in his head. He clutched a photograph in his jacket pocket.

“Unfortunately, the choice is not yours. The die was cast two years ago by men who will never suffer as you have. You’ve seen so much, Private Byrd. But do you really believe that you can survive this war? You will die before its end. The only question is whether you will suffer more before your death or allow me to end it now, to end it quickly.

“I am not usually thought of as kind,” concluded the soldier who was not a man. “But now that you know your choices, will you accept? Will you accept my offer of mercy?” He held up his gun and pointed it at Alfie.

It was several days before his body was recovered in a push that captured the nearest German trench. It was bloody and brutal fighting, won only ultimately not with guns or grenades, but with trench knives and sharpened spades. Although a counterattack had quickly sent them scurrying back to their own trenches, the British had been given the necessary time to collect their wounded and dying from the field.

During this short-lived success, one man had jumped into a shell hole to avoid machine gun fire and saw a slimy hand protruding from the contaminated water. He would have ignored it as he ignored all the dead for the sake of his sanity, but for the small photograph of a baby it clutched desperately. It had been showed to him weeks before by Alfie Byrd, the child’s proud father. Knowing the horrible fate of the man who had left his trench days before, the man had been unable to leave his body in the mud.

The man found some comrades and together they dragged Alfie’s body back to the trench. They climbed down and collapsed, exhausted, against the firestep. Two NCOs wandered over, wondering why the men had returned so soon.
“Fuckin’ God,” the sergeant grimaced, looking at the water logged corpse. “Alfie Byrd. How did he die?”

“Looks like a German bullet in his skull,” replied the corporal who had tried to stop Alfie’s final adventure. “The idiot got up over the trench a couple of nights ago and said he saw someone out in no man’s land. Well, of course he did. Their men and ours are out there screaming bloody murder every night. It’s enough to drive the best soldier mad. And I told him. I told him to leave them well enough alone. He didn’t listen to me; he went right on over the top.”

“Bloody hell. Bloody fuckin’ moron,” the sergeant cursed Alfie for his foolishness as a tear ran down his cheek. “Idiot boy survived everything the Bosch threw at him. One week till he got home leave and he had to go looking for fuckin’ Death itself.”
On Loss
Abigail Ferguson

The heart can think of no devotion
Greater than being shore to the ocean-
Holding the curve of one position,
Counting an endless repetition.
-Robert Frost

“Now, how old are ya?” Nana would ask, her mouth curling into a lopsided grin that resembled my father's. Seated in her blue LazyBoy, she would lean forward intently, retired from years of holding children and grandchildren, now enjoying a quiet life as the matriarch of an enormous Irish Catholic family within the nine by twelve room at Holy Family Residence. The heavily decorated halls, draped with lights, ornaments and a colorful Christmas tree served as reminders to even those who had lost their minds due to Alzheimer’s that Christmas was next week. As she leaned back into its welcoming arms, my father's own version of the grin sheepishly crept over his face as he waited for the question to be answered for a fifth time since our arrival only thirty minutes ago.

“Nineteen, Nana, I’m a sophomore in college now,” I'd reply, just as eagerly as the first time that I’d been asked. And every time, she would throw her head back in disbelief. Was it disbelief that her youngest of eight, her baby, had a college-aged daughter, or that a random family of four would take the time to visit her in this strange place? We would never know, but I would like to think it the former.

“You’re my favorite, ya know that? Such a beautiful girl! Hey good lookin’, whatcha got cookin’” She would begin to sing in reply each time. Over the years, I picked up the lyrics to the song, and would hum the tune. I would take any chance that I could get in connecting with her. Growing up, I would hear my friends talk of all the great times that they would have with their grandparents, from cooking to fishing, and I yearned to have something like that with my own grandparents. It had been fifteen years since the family had decided to move her into a nursing home. The Alzheimer's Association pamphlet that was given to us upon her initial diagnosis stated that the survival period post-diagnosis would be around eight years. Yet, here we were, fifteen years later, spending another Christmas together, and her complete loss of memory aside, Nana was chugging...
along just fine. Never once did I encounter her without a smile on her face, or a song being sung at some point in time during visits.

In order to avoid the string of questions to cycle through again, my father popped in an old cassette in the vintage cassette player that rested on the shelf near the door. The nostalgic, deep voice of my grandfather filled the room as Christmas songs, this one in particular, “A White Christmas,” came on. I hadn't really known my grandfather in life, only in memory. He had passed away when I was five, but nonetheless, memories of dancing with cousins, aunts and uncles during the holidays that encapsulated the playing of his songs every year allowed me a slight connection with him. Nana rested her head on the recliner, smiling and bobbing along to the notes. I wondered if she knew that it was her late husband who was singing so beautifully, or if the disease and years since his passing rendered him too far gone for her to remember.

As his voice trailed off at the end of the song, my parents made the exiting eye contact hinting towards the door. My brother and I began to follow suit, but as we rose to collect our jackets, I remembered that I had purposefully straightened my hair and coordinated outfits with Joe just hours beforehand. After giving my father a short tutorial on how to take pictures using my iPhone, Joe and I, wearing matching Christmas sweaters, each took a flank of the blue recliner holding Nana, and smiled. It was the last time I would see her alive.

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The family had decided to hold the wake and the funeral at Holy Family, because it had, after all, been Nana’s home, her parish, her livelihood, for the last fifteen years of her life. Entering the sliding doors for the final time into the lobby of the home, I had never felt so empty. The kind receptionist seated at the door, who always greeted us with a smile, the portraits of various saints, retired nuns, and the Virgin Mary all looking at us from their solitary positions along the walls, the nuns who had devoted their lives in serving the elderly, all smiled at us, this time with a melancholic hue. I raised my upper lip as much as the growing lump in my esophagus would allow, showing my appreciation for the unspoken condolences. As we made our way down the hallway to the room for the wake, the numbness that had blanketed the news of Nana's passing suddenly dissolved, rendering me helplessly heartbroken.

The casket was placed perfectly in the center of the small parlor. As I crept towards it, a sudden curiosity came over me. I had never been to an open viewing before. What if she looked different, different from the photograph I had taken only six months prior that would now be one of the only tangible memories I had of her? I hated myself for having such a strange anxiety in a time like this, but it did manage to mute the pain of
grief temporarily.

I looked down upon my Nana and sighed a breath of relief. Wearing a formal, dark turquoise dress, she was done up just as intricately in death as she would have been in life. Among the plethora of colorful flowers and Mass cards, there was an old photograph nested next to her in the casket. A time capsule back to 1942, the year after she had graduated from nursing school, Nana stood proudly behind a wheelchair with a younger woman sitting, who was also smiling. Dressed in the classic white hat with the Red Cross and the matching white uniform, she smiled with the lopsided grin that I had known. I took my place amongst the other cousins and family members on the floral printed couches in the middle of the parlor, to sit in heavy silence and teary, blank stares.

As I watched the mourners walk by, I saw as my aunts and uncles struggled to keep their composure with every hug. I couldn't bear to watch anymore, but as I rose to leave the room, my father beckoned me over. All eight of the siblings were huddled around an elderly woman in a wheelchair who was coming through the line. Curiosity hit me again as I walked towards the circle. My father unhinged himself from the group and waved me forward.

“Look at this.”

In her translucent, veiny hands, the woman held the same photo of Nana from nursing school. For a split second, I thought that this lady had lifted it from Nana’s casket, and as I nonchalantly did a double take, I realized that it was a separate photo.

“I was a patient of Jane’s. She was the greatest nurse that I have ever had – compassionate, smart, of good faith. She did everything with a smile on her face.”

A different kind of numbness had sunken in. For years, the thought of having a connection with Nana ran deeper than just wanting to conform with the idea of being like my friends and their grandparents. All of the stories, the songs she sang, the pictures that I would now gaze at with a heart wrenching emptiness made me realize that I just wanted a chance to be a part of someone’s life who was influential in so many ways. When it came time to clean out the nine by twelve room, I couldn't bear to reenter the room and see the blue LazyBoy, forever waiting to hold its owner. I sat in the lobby of the hotel that we were staying at for the night and prepared myself for the funeral, which was only twelve hours away. I couldn't decide if it was good that I had this time to recollect myself, or if it was just worsening the grieving process by delaying it.

My father returned from Holy Family a few hours after the wake had ended. As he walked over to me, the red splotches on his face shone through his silver-rimmed glasses. I knew that I had made the right deci-
sion to protect my heart from any more damage that night. He bent over to kiss me goodnight, but before he rose to find my mom, he handed me a vintage gold necklace with a pendant on it. I turned the heavy gold charm over to find myself as a baby, enshrined under a bubble of glass. She had remembered me.
For BonBon
Rachel Martinelli

I may not believe in God, but I do believe in Angels.

For as you lay dying with tubes and artificial air, your voice expressed through only the gentle squeezing of your fist as it enfolded the hand of the man who loved you in health and in sickness— your hands hold no sorrow, just a shared understanding of certainty,

that love will keep past its tangibility.

When your lungs creased and your breastbone folded, like origami paper your frail form took from itself to fashion a pair of wings, to carry you away from your broken body. To transcend pain endured for far too long, and find peace.

You are at rest yet you soar.

A spirit, a soul, I do not know which, or that any word can define the part of
you that remains
in the air that I breathe,
filling my lungs and
granting life so that
memory survives
what you could not.

Dwell not in God's heaven, Oh Angel,
but in me.
On Language

Emily Francisco

It's the exhaustion of words
that kills the body,

every salt-tipped consonant
and bulleted vowel

a struggle to wield,
weapons given to an ignorant youth,

the gun of syntax more
likely to be turned inward

than outward to an opponent.
Lessons can only do so much—

walking to the immigration office,
my brain mixes translations
together like a stew of leftovers,
every Italian syllable a soft, mushy carrot

and every French article
a bone of frozen poulet,

the flavors slipping together
in a broth so murky

that the thought of conversing—
forming sentences, making dialogue—
is repulsive, nauseating to my weak senses,
fragile in their new environment.
One sip of the broth,
and it is already rising in my throat
like bile, the phrases coming out
in jumbled fragments, chunks
of knowledge I knew yesterday
in a classroom of seven,
now expelled from my esophagus
in frantic sprays of, “Est-ce que vous parli—
parli inglese?”
Drowning in the prose,
lost on the way to the questura,
my romantic Firenze disappears,
and I see only a city of acrid yellow
and sordidly brown buildings,
monotonous shapes taunting
my American eyes with the blunt honesty
of reality, that I am alone
in this place called Italia,
mute and stranded
as a migrant pigeon,
so eager to flock to a new metropolis,
fly ing abroad to seek fresh
pickings from the rabble,
to feel foreign rain
graze my wings as I bathe,
but instead, I find myself desperately
nipping at the shoes of strangers,
hoping, begging, pleading for a single

crumb of guidance
for my foreign tongue to swallow.
It wasn't until after I arrived that I realized I was completely sober. Twenty-something black suits and twenty-something black dresses fill a small fraction of the room with their murmurs and their sniffles; rows of empty chairs far outnumbering the mourners in attendance. Twiddling my sweaty thumbs, I sit in the front row with my mother and father as family and friends of uncertain relations drop by to pay their respects. My parents are an odd pair of contradictions: my mother, a mere five feet of fury, usually brimming with opinion, today maintains a solemnity, acknowledging each passerby with an affirmative nod, while my father, the gentle bear of a man that he is tries his best to hold his own, but every once in a while a sob escapes his quivering mouth, the tears tracing wet lines across his big, round face. The cluster of griever s disperses as the clergyman takes his place. As the last whisper of fond memory and sympathy dies out, he begins, “We gather here today to not only mourn the loss, but also to celebrate the life of Terry Chen: a brother, a son, a husband, and forever a good friend.”

He went on reading the footnotes from the Odyssey that was my uncle’s life. I say Odyssey because my uncle had lost everything in his late thirties and fought for the rest of his life to get it all back. Well he finally got what he wanted: His wife and kids had just enough decency to show up to his funeral. I couldn't even bear to approach them. Where were they during the hardest and loneliest years of his life? The next hour was filled with stories, some heart-felt and some rather fake. As the anecdotes of “what he would have wanted” and bullshit of “a better place” drowned the atmosphere, I remembered the flask of bourbon sitting snug in my coat pocket. Ignoring my mother’s disapproving look, I pulled it out, took the cap off, and gave a silent toast in memory of my uncle, because it was after all “what he would have wanted.”

Warm numbness permeated throughout my body as I took my first sip. I gagged and my uncle slapped me hard on the back, bursting in laughter. It was the night before my first day in high school and uncle Terry felt like breaking a few rules. So sure enough, half an hour earlier I heard a knock on my window at two in the morning.

“Uncle Terry, I can't! I’ve got school in five hours!”
“I don’t see the issue here,” he replied. He was right; there was no issue and I had already begun to put on my socks. Anything sounded better than waiting restlessly for school to start and adventures with uncle Terry were always worth it. I threw on a sweatshirt and snuck out the back door, giddy with excitement.

We drove past my school and my uncle waved his middle finger around like the queen. He hated the suburban wasteland that was our town. Uncle Terry was meant to do great big things in great big cities, but he sacrificed that life for a failed marriage and two kids he never got to see. The radio kept cracking with static, but I was too nervous and excited to care. One steep hill and an abandoned playground later, we found ourselves in the parking lot of an old church, in God's blind spot. Looking back on it now, everything about that night sounds like the opening of a murder mystery, but there is nothing I will ever regret about that chilly September event.

“You ready for your first beer? Cause believe me, in college they only get worse and worse.” He was also right about this, too, but it wasn’t until four years later and after I had had my first PBR that I realized the truth in his words.

Later that night, the sun was just rising and we had downed a six-pack each. I let out an elongated burp and my uncle smiled a drunk smile.

“You know you’re always gonna be my best bud, right?”

“I know,” I replied, clinking my dark green bottle to his. The amber liquid fizzed over, soaking my jeans, but I was too drunk to care. I woke up the next morning with a headache and horrible breath, but I felt like a man.

It’s funny how those two words, “I know,” became a sort of promise or a sacred bond between the two of us. From the parking lot behind the church, we consecrated a holy ground with its drooping streetlights towering overhead and the graveyard within eyesight. This was a place devoted to empty bottles and memorable hangovers. This nightly ritual of six-packs continued for another two years in high school. We drank after his first divorce, we drank after aunt Linda got custody of the kids, and we drank when uncle Terry bought his bachelor pad. He drank to forget and I drank because I was his best bud. He looked so strong with his proud beer belly and adamant refusal to weep about his losses.

When my parents found out about my drinking habits, uncle Terry and I had a bit of a falling out. My mom tried to convince me that it was uncle Terry’s fault that my GPA had been on a steady decline. My grades improved and I stopped hanging out with uncle Terry, but this did nothing to end my alcoholism. I continued to drink to forget about the loss of my best bud and eventually, several six-packs later I forgot about him, too.
Uncle Terry smiled at me from inside the picture frame sitting by his casket as I made my way to the podium. It was one of the few pictures in which he managed to get out of bed, shower, shave, and get dressed. He looked so healthy and young back then. I unfolded my eulogy and the mic screeched as I bent it toward my mouth.

“Uncle Terry died doing what he loved best: Pounding a six-pack.” No one laughed and a lump filled my throat with embarrassment. Nice start.

I loosened my tie and dove into the story of my first beer and the audience chuckled politely, flashing me their pity smiles as I continued to read my drunken eulogy. I spoke shamelessly of how much the divorce had hurt him, glaring daggers at aunt Linda, and I spoke of the tremendous strength he showed during his struggle. As my mouth spewed kind words of what a role model uncle Terry was to me, I remembered something he told me the night he lost custody of his kids.

“Remember buddy, tears and all of that sad crap is a choice. If you choose to be strong, nothing can touch you.”

Nothing touched me for the next ten years. Three failed relationships and one college transfer later, the only thing I ever felt was the warm numbness of my first beer.

“I just want to know that you feel something, want something,” they would tell me and all I could do was shrug and apologize. I found myself content pouring all of my emotions into the bottle. All the love that I needed was in the cheap carbonated form of ambrosia.

It wasn't until this moment, and this moment only, that I had ever wanted to feel sadness so badly. Looking around the room, each of these people had tears to shed for uncle Terry. I wanted to show uncle Terry that I too, missed him desperately. As I closed my pathetic eulogy, I reached to my left breast feeling for my pulse, searching my heart to summon some pain, sorrow, anything, but my hand only found the cold metal of the flask.
Dear Father,

I love you. I don't know if I have ever been in love, but I am thankful that I have been able to experience love in the relationships that I share with you, with my mother, and with my sister. I believe that because of these relationships I understand love. You, my mother, and my sister are so much part of me that I cannot understand a world where I would not be able to be with you. I understand what family is, and I understand what death is. But the three of you are immortal.

I say this because I need you to understand before I continue that nothing can undo the love that I have for you. And nothing can undo the foundation that you have helped lay for me. It's a foundation that has allowed me to become the person I am proud to be, and it is a foundation that I hold high above my head, higher than anything else. Your hand in my creation as an individual is the most beautiful gift that can be given. It's the gift that every parent strives to give his or her child.

I feel that love and gratitude with great intensity. There is another feeling that I feel toward you with a similar intensity. It is hard to define this feeling because it seems to be a patchwork collage. It is complex, but my inability to name it does not change the great intensity with which I feel it. Disappointment is not strong enough. Anger is certainly a part of it. I feel manipulated, and I feel abused.

For my own sake, I need to articulate this clearly and tangibly because although I know myself, and I know you know me, I need to make what seems so plain to me equally plain on paper, so that I can believe that it can be understood out of context. I need a bystander to be able to see what I see, so that I know these feelings don't exist in some warped place contained unjustly in only my mind.

One of the principle parts of the individual that I have become, an individual that you have allowed for, is the unadulterated loathing of ignorance in myself. As I have matured, I have gathered many strategies to deal with this part of who I am. The one strategy that I am most proud of is an ability to admit when I don't know something. Ignorance can't remain ignorance for long if I am aware of it. Even admitting that I don't know one thing or another is comforting to me because it acts as a sort of confrontation. I am not naïve enough to burden myself with the responsibility
of having to know everything. What I loathe above all else is not knowing that I don't know. That's what I can't get past.

Maybe you don't know this part of me. In fact, I am almost sure you don't. You are a sensitive, compassionate person. You can't fully understand that part of me. I believe that if you did understand it, you would not have done what you did.

This letter is the preface to a story that I have to tell. But the story is the end. I won't pick up writing to you after I'm done. I need it to be clear, given what I have just written, why this has been so painful for me.

* It was late in the evening on a Saturday or maybe a Sunday. My mom, my dad, my sister, and I were having dinner together as a family. Dinner was wrapping up when my dad said:

"We have something we have been meaning to tell you guys." I was absentmindedly playing with a divot in the unforgivably ugly orange shag carpet that inhabits the upstairs of my house. His words made me stop and look up.

"We have been having some relationship troubles," my mom said.

The rest of the conversation was a blur. I remember sitting there for quite some time. And I remember them talking for that whole time. But I don't remember what was said, or even much about what I was thinking.

There is a big bay window in the living room connected to my dining room. As I sat at the table, I mostly just looked out the window and into the yard where I had spent so many evenings playing catch with my dad and sister as my mom sat on the walkway. My mind wandered.

I remembered other nights sitting at that table. When I was younger, when my family's schedules lined up more often, we would all sit in our spots at the table and start dinner by going around and each saying a high point and a low point of our days. "Highs and lows" is what we called it. Everyone always started with the low to get that out of the way with before telling the high. My family talked about anything and everything, so we always knew what we were going to say, but it didn't matter. We talked about getting good grades, beating a hard level in a video game, finishing a great book, having a particularly good day in the classroom, hearing a funny story in the office, having especially good soccer practices, treating a patient's odd malady, being excited about an upcoming trip, picking which musical would soundtrack that specific week, and choosing what book to read next as a family. I don't remember the lows. We had no secrets and no concerns.

We would crawl into my parents' massive bed after dinner and listen to my mom read Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Charlie Bone, or one of the countless other book series we tackled as a family. We never went to
bed in the middle of a chapter. My dad would lie down with a smile on his face as my mother’s words lulled him to sleep. My sister and I listened intently, wondering how he could possibly be falling asleep during the story.

One night, we all sat in the living room, as my mother finished the last pages of The Fellowship of the Ring. We were all wearing our coats, and my dad had the car keys in his hand. We were going to see the movie of The Fellowship that night, but we had to finish the book first. On the car ride, we made our guesses about the specifics of the movie. We wondered about characters’ hair color and height, about how scary Saruman and the Uruk-hai would be, and about just how pointy Legolas’s ears would be.

“We’re thinking about maybe separating,” one of my parents said, as I floated out of the memory.

“We aren’t thinking divorce yet, but we need to figure something out,” the other said.

I am intrigued by my odd recollection of that evening. As I picture it now, it’s a weird, cartoonish happening. Like a bad animated short. I see my parents’ words in big, white block letters floating into my left ear and falling out of my right ear haphazardly. The letters have to squeeze and condense so that the words can fit into my ear. But they only splatter like paint all over the floor as they fall through my head.

My sister became progressively more upset as the conversation continued. She unsuccessfully tried to swallow a sob before bursting into tears in the middle of something one of my parents was trying to say. She got up from the table crying and walked behind my chair through the kitchen and out of the house. I wonder if the fresh air of the cool evening gave her the relief she wanted.

The path my sister took out of the house that night was a path both of my parents would take in the next few years. First, my dad left to get an apartment in my hometown so that my mom didn’t have to be around him as much. Then my mom left the house for good to move to the town where she worked.

I sometimes think, even just after that first night of hearing about it, that I knew my parents’ relationship was doomed. It’s the sort of thing that can’t just break a little. I was so sure about the “alrightness” of my family that any impingement against my surety was catastrophically damaging. If I had already inferred that something wasn’t going well with my parents, then maybe it would have been different. I thought I knew my parents so well, yet somehow I was entirely blind to the storm that was brewing on the horizon for so many years of my life.

After my sister fled, I retreated into my room and sat in silence for hours. My room is small, and at the time, I had a big, wooden futon chair under my lofted bed. The chair faced my favorite wall in my room. From
ceiling to floor, the wall was covered in black frames filled with pictures of some of my favorite things. There was the signed picture of Allen Iverson, my most prized possession. There was a picture of my family sitting on Coral Street in Long Beach Island, New Jersey. We went there every year and took that same picture on Sunday before we left. There was one of the Super Bowl champion New York Giants. There was one of the four of us standing in front of the White Tower at the Tower of London. There was a silly one of my sister and I standing on the beach. There was one from the World Cup game we saw in Gelsenkirchen, Germany. The U.S. lost by three to the Czech Republic. The pictures were ordered very neatly on the walls. They still are, in fact. The order of things on that wall gave me comfort that night. Each frame had its place. Like the things in my life. In the months and years that followed, as I learned more about what had led to the conversation my family had that evening, I learned that the perfect picture of my life that I saw in those frames was so far from what it seemed. I see it now like a wall of tilted Picassos with fragments intermingled, slowly sliding toward the floor.

I remember some individual moments, but I only remember how I was feeling during a few of those moments. My parents’ separation and eventual divorce wasn't very different than most, I imagine. There were tears, and there was anger, and there was the overwhelming sadness that came with realizing that my family was no longer the unit that I had come to cherish. But those feelings could come from any child telling the story of parents divorcing. They are upsetting feelings, but they are feelings that I was guilty about having. I wasn't a child; my parents existed as individuals to me. What did it really matter that they no longer loved each other? I was fine. I had all I needed and bright things in my future.

The hard part was learning that the truth had been systematically kept from me for years, and that I had no idea. I took the things that came along in stride, but as I learned about what had been happening around me that wall of frames began to shake and crash. My father had been having an affair with an old friend. It had been happening for years before my mother found out. I still don't know how she learned of the affair. My father traveled a lot for work, but I wonder how many of those trips were little lies that I ate up obliviously. Before my mother found out, my father told his parents and some of his siblings. And then many months passed, maybe even years, before that evening when my sister and I first heard that they were “having troubles.” It took even more months after that before I learned the truth about the affair and the other details.

I often think about family gatherings that I went to in those years when I didn't know the truth. I laughed and joked and played with my cousins and my parents, while my older family members watched with
their secret knowledge about the lie that would have turned my world upside down. How could they have looked on at the smiling faces of my sister and me without urging my father to stop letting this lie poison our lives? We weren't babies. We were teenagers. We could have been told the truth.

I don't like to think about those gatherings anymore. It makes me sick. I keep waiting for the director of those memories to get out of his director's chair, interrupt, and tell everyone to stop. I yearn for intervention in those memories. Why were those events allowed to happen? It seems so wrong. Ignorance revealed certainly isn't bliss.

And now I sit here trying to find a way to end a story that isn't over. I am still entrenched in it. I have made progress in my understanding of it, but it is still a living, breathing thing. In its swirling around me, it still holds power over me. It's the hardest thing in my life, and that means I have a very privileged life. I feel guilty when I think about the pain that it has caused me because I know it's nothing compared to what so many people my age have had to experience. Thankfully, it doesn't control me, and I have managed to latch firmly onto the things in my life that are tied down and surfaced. I hold on to the knowledge that I am a cosmically lucky human being for having the opportunities I've had and will have. I hold on to my friends, my passions, and to my mother and sister. I even hold on to my father. I am on the ground because I know I have to be. And because being on the ground feels right. But I still feel the swirling.
Storm Clouds
Taylor Andrews

I haven't really slept
since September crept in.
I don't think that'll change.
Instead, I'll lie in bed
and wait for it to rain.
Tonight the ambulances were
crying, I told them
hush, every day, everywhere
people are dying.
You can't save them all,
don't even try to.
Once it rains, the raging fire will
go back to sleep, once it rains
the women will stop weeping.
I will lie like concrete in
the middle of the street, waiting
for the rain, to absorb it like a tissue
from lips to toes, quell the
trembling pains of a soul
with desperate outstretched fingers.
I think a flood could
drown hell, but to God it has
purpose, a product to sell, a
place for the liars and
blasphemy singers,
and the people who are
too afraid to believe.
He has no use for me. He
holds back all
the rain.
Tabula rasa

I was born at home in a chattel house—a movable wooden dwelling, built on a foundation of loose stones, in St. Mary, the fifth smallest of the fourteen parishes in Jamaica, with a population of 115,000.

My earliest memory of my mother is looking into her dark brown almond-shaped eyes as she laid me down on her lap to wash my short curly hair. Her fingers were gentle against my scalp as she massaged in the shampoo. After she dried my hair, she sat me down between her legs and plaited my hair in two big cornrows. Sometimes when I fell asleep in the midst of her combing my hair, I tilted my head to the side and rested it on her thigh. I would wake up a few hours later if not the following morning, wondering how I made it to my bed.

When my mother went to work at the craft market—selling dolly babies, maracas, beet necklaces, straw hats and handbags, I stayed at Mrs. Ruby's house. After my birth, my mother's neighbor, Mrs. Ruby, clamped and cut my umbilical cord. Mrs. Ruby had four daughters and I followed them wherever they went. I was particularly fond of Tiny. She was the youngest, and two years older than me. We used to make mud pies and tea, using green leaves. We never ate or drank any of these. One time when we were playing, Tiny accidentally picked green leaves from the wrong bush. She picked poison ivy. Her arms were covered with blisters that were ready to pop. When she started to bawl, I bawled too. I thought she was going to die. She itched and itched and itched. Out of fear of catching her disease, I pulled away and ran to call Mrs. Ruby as tears trailed down my cheeks, leaving behind salt on my lips.

***

My mom brought me to work with her once when I was four years old. We took a crowded bus to Portmore, two hours away from St. Mary. I sat on my mother's lap as people squeezed between the gap of others to get on and off the bus. When we arrived at the craft market, stalls were spread out, and people were walking back and forth in crowds. I grabbed onto my mother's long tie-dye skirt as she carried bags in her hands and I walked alongside her. We found a spot next to a group of people she knew and they helped her unload her bags and set up a stall. One of my mother's female friends picked me up, and began to talk to me.
“Yuh hav sum chubbi cheeks?2” she said as she pinched my cheeks. I began to cry as I struggled to get out of her arms. Finally, when I became too unbearable to hold she gave me back to my mom as she asked “Weh wrong wid yuh pickney3,” like she had no idea why I was crying. My mom curled me into her arms as she patted my back soothingly. After I stopped crying, she placed me on the ground so that she could finish unpacking. I held onto her colorful skirt as I stared up at wooden sculptures, paintings, maracas, clothes, fruits and vegetables, and people eating ackee and saltfish, Jamaica’s national dish. Ackee grows on small, evergreen trees. It is slightly pear-shaped and bright red when ripe. When picked from the tree and taken out of its red pod, it looks like a cluster of yellow beetle-like bugs with big black heads.

**Experiences**

I.

Down by the river we went—me, Tiny, and two of her sisters. I must have been around four or five years old because I had not started Basic School yet. Tiny and I walked in the middle of her two sisters, who were in their late teens, down the rugged dirty path with long strands of grass bending over in the road. Tiny and I used sticks to keep the grass from touching us. As we marched down the path like troops, we crossed a narrow creek with tadpoles and goldfishes swimming above new-fallen leaves that had sunk to the bottom. Tiny’s sister that led the way tested each rock before she leaped across the creek. Tiny and I, on the other hand, decided to create our own path—we took off our slippers and carried them in our hands, and walked through the water. It reached up to our knees. We laughed as the warm water swallowed up our feet. Our feet looked big and weird under water.

“Keep moving,” said Tiny’s sister, behind us. She was not mad, just eager to go swimming.

“But it’s fun,” we replied, kicking the water. As we stepped out of the water, a crispy mosaic of colored leaves clasped onto the soles of our feet while the breeze blew grains of dirt onto our damp skin. We proceeded to the river. We walked through a grove of tall grass as ticks clung onto our exposed arms and legs. When we arrived at the river, we spread one of Mrs. Ruby’s fitted sheets over a rock. As Tiny’s sisters unpacked snacks and extra clothes from their knapsacks, Tiny and I picked ticks off each other. We popped them between our fingers as splotches of blood escaped from their now squashed bodies. Afterward, we undressed, and then leaped from rocks until we made it to the water. We swam in our panties in the shallow part of the river as the older sisters jumped off branches into the deeper end. To make the shallow water deeper, we dug up the waterbed with our
small feet. We collected sand from the waterbed in our buckets and emptied them out on the riverbank. I remember when Tiny lifted up a stone in the river and I placed my bucket in front of it, and a janga\textsuperscript{4} swam into it. Its eyes were on movable stalks. It had a dark red color, two sensory antennas, four pairs of walking legs, two large claws, and broad muscular tail like a hand fan.

II.

The countryside of my childhood was a sun-drenched open space with its boundless blue skies adorned by wondrous white clouds—heaven's pillows—and its winding roads. I admired the countryside's breezy undulating hills of vast trees, and its rivers, meandering like snakes in grass. The countryside was a playground for me. Though these activities were considered taboo for females, I used to climb trees, and jump over walls or wooden fences when the gates were too far of a walk. People used to believe that if a female climbed a tree, the tree would stop bearing fruits. I used to believe it was true until I grew tired of always being the one under the tree. I recall one time when I went apple picking with one of my brothers. I was responsible for catching the otaheite apples\textsuperscript{5} in my shirt since I was a bad catcher. They were shaped like pears with bright red skin, white flesh, and a single large brown seed. The first few apples he threw went directly into my shirt and then I placed them into a black scandal bag\textsuperscript{6}. The next few apples he threw attacked me like a sudden rainstorm. I walked home with pieces of apple skins stuck in my hair, and clothes stained in red juice. My brother walked behind me, laughing wholeheartedly, like we were playing a game, and he had won. Since that day, I told myself I would never be at the bottom of a tree again—and I proved the taboo wrong. After mastering tree climbing, I noticed the production of more fruits on the trees I climbed and they even tasted better. All the trees blossomed forth at the same time, revealing yellow cherry, red apples, green guavas, and bright yellow June plums—swinging from their trees in the tropical breeze.

III.

I fear reptiles. Lizards. Snakes. Crocodiles. Alligators. Fake, dead or alive. When I was seven years old, I spent my summer in King Weston, a district nearby St. Mary, with Shereen, my older sister. She had lived in King Weston with her father and his family before I was conceived. She is ten years older than me. I used to fill plastic cups with water and freeze them in her grandmother's fridge. When they were frozen, I would sit and eat ice on the veranda while the sun stood high in the afternoon sky. One day while I sat on the veranda eating ice, my sister's troublesome cousin, Shereka, killed a green lizard with a twig as it mounted a breadfruit tree.
She picked up its lifeless body with the same twig she killed it with, and because she knew how frightened I was of reptiles, she crept up behind me and threw the lizard down my shirt. I felt a sharp, yet soft, long slippery thing slithering down my back. I jumped up from my seat and wiggled my body. I shook my shirt as tears began to develop in my eyes. When I looked down and saw the pale dead lizard on the cold linoleum tile, I screeched, and ran outside. My heart began to skip more than a beat. It thumped like a horse's hoofs on a paved road. As I cried, I screamed for my sister's grandmother, “Granny, Granny, Granny.” With each scream, my voice broke. When I saw that Shereka was heading to pick up the lizard, I screamed again, “Grannnnnyyyyy” —snot running down my upper lip and salty tears settling at the corner of my mouth. Shereka looked at me and let out an evil cackle like Cruella de Vil from *101 Dalmatians*. I stormed through the gate, and ran down the dirt road as I screamed and sniveled. When I looked behind me, she was only few feet away, chasing me, carrying the dead lizard on a stick.

IV.

Our curious eyes and body that almost got us caught. I spent the day with my best friend, Natoya, at her aunt's—half a mile down the road from my father's house. We were playing hide and seek outside. I was the seeker. I pretended to close my eyes while covering my face with my hands. I peeked through the slits of my fingers and saw that she went behind the house. I counted to ten, and then went seeking after her. When I got to the back of the house, I found her, not hiding, but peeping at her older cousin and her boyfriend through the open backdoor. They were lying down on a box spring bed, which made creaky noises. When Natoya saw me, she placed her index finger on her lips and signaled me to come where she sat. Her cousin and her boyfriend were fully dressed. His hands fondled her legs as they kissed. His hands slowly slid under her miniskirt as the breeze blew the door nearly shut, leaving barely any space to see what they were doing. Natoya had an idea. I stayed where I was and watched out for her while she crept through the small opening between the door's edge and the frame.

The room was very small. It had only a bed, a dresser with a large mirror, and one nightstand. The bed was directly in front of the door, but their heads were toward the opposite end. Natoya slithered like a snake under the box spring bed. Finally, she turned her body around, facing me. I looked at her and began to giggle as she placed her index finger on her lips again. From where she lay, she could see her cousin and her boyfriend clearly through the mirror. The dresser was in front of the bed. As they moved around on the bed, caressing each other, their body weight lowered
the bedspring, which grabbed onto Natoya's hair. At first, she wanted to scream. I saw it in her eyes. Her curious eyes transformed to death-like eyes, widened in terror, as she gasped for air in silence. Her eyes begged for mercy. She struggled as she managed to unhook her hair. I signaled to her when it was safe to crawl from under the bed. When she got outside, we tiptoed to the corner of the house before we scurried to the front as if someone was chasing after us. I gazed at her dirt brown hair and laughed; some parts lay flat as some strands stood up.

V.

I remember dancing naked in the rain as I dug my feet in the deep chocolate mud—pebbles brushing against the sole of my feet. The rain kissed my skin with every droplet as it created a soothing rhythm. I ran around in circles and sometimes around the house. I danced beneath the eave of the roof as rainwater fell from its sides. The rain drenched my hair as it hugged my neck and shoulders. I tilted my face to the sky as the rain ran over my forehead and my eyelids fluttered to deflect the water. Then, I heard my father's voice:

"Likkle gurl, com inside di house before yuh ketch feva."

"Mi soon com Papa. Mi nah guh get sick," I whined as the rain fell into my mouth.

"Mi nah guh waarn yuh again nuh."

It felt good to be out in the mellowing rain. The lukewarm water fell as droplets bounced off sprouting grass and leaves. I continued to play in the rain—dragging out my enjoyment for another five minutes. With my father's command lingering in my ears, I dispiritedly dragged my feet across the muddy ground—small puddles forming with each step.

The Pursuit of Knowledge

I started school at the age of five. I went to Mrs. Pearl's Basic School. Mrs. Pearl was a corpulent woman. She had chubby cheeks with warts on her neck and face, and short gray hair. For a religious woman, she found a lot of pleasure in beating some students while favoring others. I will never forget my first beating. I could not spell cup. She walked over to my brown sloping-top desk, and leaned her body toward my face—her saggy breasts jigged slightly beneath her blouse, and she asked me to respell the word. Again, I spelt the word wrong. She pulled me out of my seat and brought me in front of the blackboard. Everyone eyed me as my body began to tremble and sweat formed on top of my nose. I watched her every move with my curious yet horrified eyes as she lifted a leather belt from her shabby desk. She came before me and asked me to open my hands. I looked
at my palm then back at her, and began to cry.

“Please, don't beat me,” I sniffled.

“Open your hands Sophia,” she said.

“No!” I wailed, tears streaming faster down my cheeks. “I'm sorry,” I continued, my body shaking like a leaf. Before I made out another plea, she grabbed me by the arm and started flogging my delicate body like a madwoman. The first lash caught me by surprise and I began to twist in every direction until I broke from her grip and fell to the floor.

“Get up Sophia,” she yelled.

“You're going to beat me,” I sobbed.

“Go back to your seat,” she commanded.

I hauled my body toward my desk. Everyone stared at me—frightened that they could be next. I leaned my head forward and began to sob silently in my folded arms on the desk. My arms had raised welts—long red swollen lines embedded in my skin.

When my mother came to pick me up, I grabbed my lunchbox from under my desk and ran into her arms. As we began to walk home, she reached for my hand and noticed my welts. She looked at my tear-stained face, and asked:

“What happened?”

“I spelt a word wrong,” I said, lowering my eyes.

“Hush,” she soothed me as she reached out with both of her long arms and picked me up, under the armpits, until I was at eye level with her. I wrapped my legs around her waist and my arms around her neck. Her arms circled my waist as she held me tightly. She smiled at me and I smiled back as I lay my head against her heart.

\[1\text{Meaning blank slate in Latin, is the epistemological theory that individuals are born without built-in mental content and that their knowledge comes from experience and perception.}

\[2\text{You have some chubby cheeks.}

\[3\text{What is wrong with your child?}

\[4\text{A small freshwater crawfish resembling lobsters.}

\[5\text{Indigenous fruit to the Pacific Islands.}

\[6\text{Jamaicans refer to grocery/plastic bags as scandal bags.}

\[7\text{Little girl, come inside the house before you catch fever.}

\[8\text{I'm coming Papa. I won't get sick.}

\[9\text{I'm not going to warn you again.} \]
Plath’s Cremation
Brendan Raleigh

I read that Hughes had burnt the last of his wife’s journals; allowed her poems, her prose, her memory to be forgotten in the hearth by which she wrote.

And I wondered how it felt to have the very voice of his love curl up into swirling, swelling clouds of blackened ash, bound to linger and haunt the poet and his house for years and years to come—an immovable, implacable reminder that never would she write again.

Had he read her final words? And was it their eternal echoes that rang throughout his mind?

Or was it the pain of knowing that, while Plath’s body had been buried, it was her soul that had been burned.
Gravity

Abigail Campbell
Hadzabe Feast

Aubrey Gedeon
Cape Cod Sunset

Madeline Price
Artistic Fungus
Polly

Megan Zagorski
Under the Mangroves

Madeline Price
Hadzabe Smoker

Aubrey Gedeon
Wind

Abigail Campbell
Floating By

Megan Zagorski
Winter

Abigail Campbell
Zebra Longwing

Madeline Price
Lonely Sunflower

Aubrey Gedeon
Dream in Color

Rachel Martinelli
Latin-America

Mauricio Novoa

“Tu no puedes comprar el viento, Tu no puedes comprar el sol
Tu no puedes comprar la lluvia, Tu no puedes comprar el calor
Tu no puedes comprar las nubes, Tu no puedes comprar los colores
Tu no puedes comprar mi alegría, Tu no puedes comprar mis dolores”

-Chorus from the song “Latinoamèrica” by Calle 13

I used to always accompany *mi Abuela*
From Glenmont to PG County for grocery shopping
At the Mega Market, a Giant for Latinos looking
For somewhere like home to swipe their EBT Cards.
*Salvadoreños* like her, running from the Civil War
And flooding DC like the *Rio Lempa*, post up
In front of the supermarket, some selling *pupusas* From a truck in the parking lot, others taking a break From the register or from putting food away in the aisles, Others just smoke cigarettes in white crew necks,
And jeans ripped, not for style but from outdoor labor,
Work boots covered in mud or gravel, talking about
Barcelona vs. Real Madrid, or how bad they hope Mexico
Doesn't make it to the World Cup, or beat anyone for that matter –
When it comes to sport, there is no peace between rivals.

The aisles were clumped tight, with barely room for one cart
To make it to the other side, but the store felt a lot livelier
Than most of the chain grocers in my neighboring shopping center,
The way my family parties seemed a lot more bumping
Than some other parties, with my uncles,
*Papi*, and his friends cracking Coors and Coronas, and *mi Mami*
And my aunts sipped *vino* while everyone talked about how their damn kids
Never pull up their pants and always listen to that *pinche* Reggaeton
Or *música de los negros*, while they blasted their Santana in the speakers
In the backyard, not going to bed til the Witching hour.

I walk by the candles with *los Santos* and *Jesucristo* painted
On the glass, and I remember all the chains with crosses
My *Abuela* gave me, usually after my nightly prayers
That I memorized like my name but never knew what they meant,
Much like most of the words she said to me in conversation.
She always regretted not teaching us enough Spanish,
But my *Ingles* was so mastered, she heard as she sits in my childhood

Home while I am away at school, that her grandson
Could grow to be one of those writers he actually **can** read.
In my right hand, I held every dream and prayer she had for me,
Being able to walk the street with more of a guarantee of life
Than she ever saw, which to her was more golden than money.
Now I can pen the visions of Oscar Romero without a bullet in my lens.
We dance amid glass sculptures
hoping one will smash
great shards of shattered expectations
strewn across the floor.
Tread cautiously, my almost darling,
take the lead and place each step
along the patterned paths that lead
from you to me
from land to sea.
Be the shore that pulls me home
the ebb and flow of souls that roam
and drift toward one another
even though the days pull us apart.

But no,
we walk on hallowed ground
and fear the flame too much
to let ourselves get lost in movement or
the rhythm of our touch and go.
You go
and I am left, bereft,
a solitary figure
wanting only to be found
to face these faceless mannequins
these statutory crystal figurines
with someone solid by my side.

We stride with unmatched steps
and unsaid words,
you sing a stilted melody
I try to harmonize, off-key,
one note is out of place, too high
and suddenly, the world is fragments
geometry of broken glass
each statue bursts and burdens spill
laid bare for all the world to see.
And wouldn't that be lovely, dear?
No more closed eyes or false pretense
acknowledging our unloved faults
the scars we hide within our crumpled forms
the scars we've pressed upon each other's skin
fragility of flesh and bone
we think we know the others' sin
but deep within, it lurks.

We are not glass sculptures. We are
opaque, a dented flesh, deflecting all
the world's approaches. Life
encroaches
trying to beat back our pushes,
pulls at what we most desire,
futile grasps at lovely dreams
that wither with the waking.

Wake, and all the world will fade,
spun upside down and weaved with wanderlust.
We wonder whether
if the world were different,
I could shed this skin of restlessness,
and, broken, rest within.
You're a clean sheet of paper, 
my round robin.

Like the back-alley friend 
we were all warned against, 
you enable the rebellion 
that once shamed my mother.

It's not mutiny to us, is it? 
You've always embraced 
the lessons I want to remember, 
displaying them proudly 
the way my seventh-grade best friend 
would tape our projects to her fridge;

you and I celebrate together 
all I've learned since the first time, 
lying on the carpeted floor 
in my best friend's mother's house, 
shirt pulled up and needle poised, 
dripping black calligraphy ink

that would soon be thrust deep 
beneath several layers of skin. 
You're the whisper that reminds me 
of the darkness of that night, 
and I sometimes think defiance 
was the first word from my lips.

At first, you preached the reminder – 
the importance of really living and being alive. 
The sudden breathlessness I felt, 
the surface tension breaking at needle's point, 
meant I never can forget the ankh, 
the little “life” beneath my right breast.
It was three years before I realized, 
the only way to remember the hope 
I was learning to find in losing control 
was to find someone to scar you again; 
the only way to heal my heart’s wounds 
was the anchor across the ribs that protected it.

For Christmas, just a few months later, 
Daddy gave the gift of a permanent word, 
which fit perfectly on the inside of my right wrist. 
You and I waited longest for the visible “Legacy” 
that I hope mirrors the one I’ve been building 
since he first spoke the word to my child-heart.

Few hands have touched you and meant something 
the way that Jonathan’s small palms have. 
Across my left shoulder blade, you speak 
the words he and I have said for years, 
the words I had to choose to really mean: 
“I love you, to infinity and beyond, forever and ever.”

With the mix of ink and blood, you have a voice 
to speak the words that need to be repeated. 
“The story can resume…” you now say, 
a reminder that my past is just that, 
made to tell the good and the bad, 
its only power that which I choose to give.

My quiet confidante, secret keeper, 
over the course of four years and two states, 
you’ve held them close to my heart, 
and always at your surface, 
a reminder of the journey I’m making 
from hopeless rebel to joy-seeker.

A selfless martyr, 
you repeatedly endure the abuse, 
the necessary pain that marks us both. 
The way you heal, so eager to accept these words – 
they were a part of you all along, 
weren’t they?
Compagno di Viaggio

Sophia Reid

Paris à Nice

The hardest thing was not speaking my mind. I sat wide-awake at the window of the night train as my traveling companion, Jonathan, ground his teeth and chewed on his tongue in his sleep. We were in Paris, heading to Nice. The window frame trembled with the swiftness of the train. Occasionally, dots of light slashed across the glass as I stared at the empty darkness, annoyed. My eyes drifted back to Jonathan as the weight of his head shifted onto my shoulder. The grinding of his teeth grew louder, drowning out the music coming through my white headphones. I looked at him, then at the passengers, wondering if anyone else was awake because of him. A man who sat across from us slouched in his seat with his face buried in his hands. A woman who sat directly behind me laid the side of her head against the window, and each time the window frame trembled, her eyes twitched. Jonathan's head sluggishly slid down my shoulder. I tried to push him off by jerking my arm, but he did not budge. I thought about tickling his face with strands of my hair—maybe he would slap himself. I pulled my shoulder abruptly from beneath his head and watched as his own weight brought him down. He woke up and looked at me with his sleepy eyes, and there at the corner of his mouth, I noticed that he was drooling. I turned back to the empty darkness with disgust.

Firenze

Jonathan and I were in Florence for a day. Red roofs amazed us. We went on a sightseeing tour of the city. We hopped off the tour bus at Piazzale Michelangelo Square, which is on a hillside, offering a panoramic view of the city's fortified walls, the River Arno, the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio and the rounded red dome of the Duomo. We stayed there until the sun drowned in the horizon—Twilight fell: The sky turned to a light, dusky purple littered with tiny silver stars as the faded clouds stretched across the sky and the pale moon came into sight. The sunset held the promise of a calm, serene evening, and I missed my boyfriend. I looked at Jonathan as he murmured that he was hungry.

We walked to La Loggia Restaurant, across the street from Piazzale Michelangelo Square. The historic restaurant is designed in a neoclassical style with a large panoramic garden, a grand arched terrace, and private rooms. We sat inside. When Jonathan went to the bathroom, I ordered a pasta dish and Sprite. When he came back, he did not order anything, but
stared at me. Before my order came, the server brought two glasses, my
Sprite, and slices of bread and cheese. As I began to eat, Jonathan helped
himself to my bottle of Sprite, and slices of bread and cheese. I stared at
him in annoyance as he ate and drank a cup of my Sprite, leaving half the
amount in the bottle for me. Unlike some people, I don't have pet peeves—
I have whole kennels of irritation. As he ate slices of bread and cheese, I
could hear him munching loudly—his mouth wide open. After my food
came and I ate, the server brought the check. I looked at Jonathan and he
avoided making any eye contact with me. I paid and we left.

We took the tour bus back to Firenze Santa Maria Novella train sta-
tion. There were many unoccupied seats, but Jonathan chose to sit adjacent
to me. My hand luggage stood in front of my feet as I sat by the window,
and Jonathan's hand luggage stood in front of him with his oversized
backpack seated on top of it—closing me in. He infringed on my personal
space. After we got off the bus and were walking toward the station, Jona-
than tugged on my red hood and asked if we could go to Burger King. I
told him I would wait for him inside the station—I wanted to ditch him.
My tolerance level had sunk to an all-time low. Squeezing through the gaps
of people, I found a seat near our train's platform. I gazed up at the arrival
and departure sign—our train was fifty minutes away. As I started to listen
to music to help pass time, a guy came to sit next to me. He kept staring at
me.

"Ciao," he said.
"I don't speak Italian."
"Ooh, I'm sorry. I speak Italian and German. My English is bad," he
replied, in patches of unsatisfactory English.
"Okay," I responded nonchalantly, rolling my eyes to the side. I
figured he might know what okay meant, and did not say anything more.
But he kept staring at me, drilling his eyes into my open red trench coat—
beneath my blouse. He had a rapist's eyes—very wide, undressing me with
every blink. I turned my back toward him. After I turned, I felt one of his
arms on my lower back and the other holding my arm—pushing against
my breast. I turned around, trying not to cause a scene, and told him to
stop—and he smiled unabashedly. As I tried to create distance between
us, I noticed an older man eyeing up the situation. In that moment, the
creeper got up and walked over to the older man. As they spoke, the older
man stared at me over the creeper's shoulder. I could feel my pulse beat-
ing in my ears, impeding all other sound except my breath that was jag-
gedly moving in and out of my mouth at steady, gasping intervals. I could
not take my eyes away from his eyes. The connection had to be held; if it
broke—I would be kidnapped. I could not control my hands; they were
trembling in an odd pulsating rhythm inside my pockets, as my facial ex-
pression became the epitome of weak. I started to panic—where the fuck is Jonathan? Sweat began to form on my nose as I got up and sped across the station. I walked until I found a seat near a couple of old women waiting for their train. I could not call anyone. I had run out of phone credit. I kept an eye out for Jonathan, but I could not find him. When our train arrived, I left.

As the train pulled out of Firenze Santa Maria Novella train station, rolling across the tracks—racing toward Rome, I glanced up at the dusky sky. I was worried about Jonathan. What if something had happened to him? Guilt held me in a stranglehold position as negative thoughts swept through my mind. I could have been kidnapped, and no one would have known where I went. Likewise, thoughts of someone abducting Jonathan surged through my mind. I continued to stare up at the unceasing sky as it grew darker, and silver dots and a pale light appeared. Relax Sophia, just breathe, I repeated to myself.

Roma

When I arrived at my hotel in Rome, I had a Facebook message from Jonathan. He had gotten on the wrong train, but made it safely to his hotel. He had booked a different hotel when mine became full. We spent two nights in Rome. While we were there, we did not see each other. I traveled alone. Paved with small square black bricks, the streets were overcrowded with tourists and citizens. Italian musicians played instruments and sang songs along the sidewalks. The day before our departure to Venice, I messaged Jonathan and told him I would meet him at Roma Termini Train Station. He agreed.

The following morning, I waited twenty minutes for Jonathan by our train’s platform until our train arrived and people began to board. I thought he probably had gotten on the wrong train again. As I walked toward our train, I felt my body pulled backward and I turned around to see Jonathan.

“Why didn’t you look for me?” he yelled. As he spoke, he smacked his lips like someone that had just eaten.

“I didn’t know where to look for you. I thought you would be near our train’s platform since it makes more sense to meet there than anywhere else in this enormous train station,” I remarked.

“Well, you should have looked around. I saw you and you were not looking for me,” he responded, with his hand luggage and oversized backpack pulling him down. His face grew red, anger radiating from him like a bulb.

A part of me wanted to tell him about what happened to me while I waited for him in Firenze Santa Maria Novella train station, and another
part of me wanted to scream at him and tell him that I was not his mother, but I apologized and boarded the train. As I sat in my seat, looking out the window, I thought about telling him how annoying he was, but I withheld my anger—partially because I knew I needed him, to feel safe. From the corner of my eye, I glanced at him as he lounged in his seat, pouting. The hardest thing was not speaking my mind.

1Travel companion
2J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix
3Whoopi Goldberg
There is a man outside running, running very fast, his briefcase slapping the back of his arm after every stride while children on bicycles are forced off their seats trying to stop before him and other men and women walking to work quicken past him or stop and stare, wondering where he is off to, as I do, from my sixth floor wall window that covers the east side of my new office, an office I greatly deserve because winning cases at Ropes & Gray LLP is standard and the partners have found me extraordinary, and what I lack in manners I make up for in observations, insights that seem to be ordained only for my discovery except in the case of this man outside who continues to run and second after second has performed with un-businesslike but not wholly un-Olympian speed until unexpectedly he stops in front of one of Boston's many small fountains and, with my eyes on his back, has decided he has arrived where he needs to be and why he had needed to run to it, because he will not move now, not after this beat, or this beat, or three beats. He has made me in an oddly imitative way not move either as my third client of the day asks again about the selling of his real estate and why it has taken so long for the bank to give us a price but instead I evade this concern and talk rather about finding prospective buyers and perhaps a real estate agent because selling in the West End of Boston at this unfortunate-to-be-selling-real-estate-period of the winter of 2008 is hopeless and infuriating and oddly immobilizing. The man will still not move.

I shift my feet uncomfortably, keeping my head still and eyes focused, and where my lips are near the glass follows a buildup of saliva that is now sliding uneasily in methodical succession on the glass and the client notices this once it reaches its descent below my waist and imaginatively I find myself adopting his perspective of seeing me standing there at the window, flatly ignoring his presence while I possibly have a stroke or something because no one in their right health would ever willingly salivate uncontrollably for no apparent reason. But his patience rivals that of this man, outside, stock-still and staring at the water of the fountain, having just run there presumably to do this, as my client, a businessman
with many responsibilities today one would think, tolerantly waits for me to return to consciousness and say something rational and productive but this option seems significantly less important than continuing to admire this man's commitment at staring at the undrinkable and useless water. I wonder what he was thinking this morning, as he dressed to go to work in a rush of ecstasy, anticipating this theoretically never ending event of water recycling from a drain and up through a pipe and into a sculpture of a man and out through his mouth in a light jet to produce a soporific and yet also sustainably captivating art for certain passersby.

My head begins to pound and I realize my thoughts are running in tangents, from him to me to my client behind me. Something must be done. I release my neck and head from its locked gaze and see the saliva sliding down the pane, the momentum of its mass accelerating as it falls. I rush over to my desk and grab tissues, ignoring all else, and return to wipe up the six-foot mess. This is not a quick process either and the urge to look beyond the glass hold of me once more, a siege of mind I've never known before, and so I shoot my head up to look through the glass, satisfied that the man has still not moved from his spot near the fountain, his eyes presumably still studying the curvature of the spouting water.

A booming voice overcomes my captivation and I spin around to see my client standing and yelling my name, throwing his arms and swiping the papers on my desk into the air, repeating in his rage that he has been saying my name over and over again this entire time and, dissatisfied with my lack of response, turns and leaves and slams my door while the echo of his voice still hangs in the room, the papers in his wake pausing in their flight as if relaxing at their raised vantage point until the edges finally catch and, tilting, drop to the ground.

This room has never felt right, always I've had an itch to look out the window, to leave and escape. This is the office Ropes & Gray LLP give to the best first year associate and, as such, is passed on from year to year to the next best first year associate, only ever a temporary office with a temporary view. Mostly the associates will then move into a cluster of offices on the other side of the floor after another successful year, closer to the conference room, closer to the junior partners, closer to the kitchen.

It is an honor they say, but since the get-go I have been filled with the eerie feeling that the partners or years' past associates are watching me in the office somehow, from outside the door or within the room, although I lack any shred of evidence of these suspicions; I have looked through my entire office and found nothing, not a camera, not a recording device, nothing, despite having looked through every folder in the wall-high shelf that sits next to the window, or in or below or behind the sofa that sits directly across from it, or my desk and its single drawer for pens, throwing
them all out last week in a fit of sudden and anticlimactic phobia, or in the firm's issued leather chairs, or behind the lone painting of Paris that hangs on the wall to the west, or under the desk-wide carpet that cuts the room in half. Nothing. And yet the fear remains, and it is with this feeling that I am reminded of the ceiling, solid and white and forbiddingly uncheckable. I cannot look behind it, or behind the other walls, or the floor for that matter. The absence of evidence does not disqualify the validity of these fears because the possibility that they are recording what I am doing certainly remains, though admittedly yet undiscovered, and the truth is is that since I have moved into this office three weeks ago this feeling has gathered into me slowly until, like inordinate heat gathering in the Earth's crust to manifest within a magnum reservoir, it will percolate outward, through the conduit pipe and to the surface, where I will find myself breaking down the walls with my fists in another fit of uncontrollable and baseless phobia. And it is this vicious and hauntingly immobile cycle that has withheld me from doing my work, which only intensifies my paranoia that whoever is watching is observing my laughable inactivity and writing horrible reports about me. And then, suddenly, I realize, the window! The one place I had never thought, had never suspected and would thus prove to be the least suspected and most likely of all places to put a camera. I look at every inch of it from the floor to the ceiling, nothing, but it must be here, it must — and whack! I'm punching the window — whack! whack! whack! — and my knuckles quickly bruise but I continue and increasingly punch with more force — whack! whack! — and it is here, so close to having finally discovered it, that my bosses run frantically into my office, halted and silent and confused while I continue to pound on the unbreakable glass.
Addiction

Jenna Fleming

Just one time I injected your sweet scent into the blue veins traced electric against the pale white of the inside of my elbow. I huffed up the fumes that trailed where your hair or your hands had rested, even after you’d long deserted your chair. I cut you up into little neon-colored paper stamps and held them dissolving on my tongue, waiting to hear the whisper of your voice on the inside of my eyelids watching as my reflection in the looking-glass slowly became tinted with the intense mossy flavor of your gaze.

I got so used to shooting up on you. I couldn’t sleep without a bubbly glass or two of that sweet-dry-tart swirling liquid, white and red and blush. I drank you shaken, stirred, salted—I gulped you warm and stagnant, icily on the rocks, forever savoring the daggers you tore down my throat the searing flame you lit somewhere behind my left lung.

I locked you up in my pocket, packed tightly into a gilt bejewelled snuffbox and stole pinches quickly and quietly around corners when I thought no one was looking. I found it hard to leave the soft confines of my bed without a handful of the poppyseed smoke harvested from those sick fantastical blossoms. I loved nothing better than to feel time stretch out beneath my fingertips, to listen as the letters of your name were softly carved out into tracks on my bones.

I smoked up and blissed out on big sparkly crystal rocks of you, crushed into tiny pieces and jammed tight to fill up my paper pipe, then lit aflame with the inky end of my volatile pen. I used to blow big clouds of you up onto the ceiling and watch you gather there, fascinated with the way my eyesight became fuzzy
even while colors grew into motion and space itself gained shapes.

I should have known that the lurid ecstasies you offered were temporary, that the deafening wildness of a high on you could only last so long. But it was always too hard to care after that first deep heady drag, after just one tiny fiery rapturous drop— because on you I could hold stars in my hands. When I could feel that slow pulsing light echo through my fingernails, when I could see my flesh glow blinding, and just nearly hear its sizzle-song of joy, moderation wasn't possible, restraint wasn't conceivable, sensibility wasn't necessary.

You were my stimulant and depressant, teaching me when to rise and fall regardless of the distant, desperate, loving appeals made by the sun and the moon. You were my narcotic, my methamphetamine, racing through my arteries more essential than the blood that pumped through my ever-weakening heart. You were my hallucinogen and my deliriant, my aphrodisiac and my opiate. I would have sold myself away for one more hit, one more sip— I would have done anything in my power for just one more dose of you. But now I have nothing left to give and I'm terrified of withdrawal.
Now:

She needs to be warned I need to warn her she needs to know. I see her I am her in my dreams. She wears a death-colored dress and I know they’re coming following and there are lights in my head on my face and I climb into a rotten ditch. It crawls up my legs and steals my other shoe.

My first shoe my other shoe the one not in the hole in the road is gone. I threw it down a creek a lake a water so they would think I drowned and stop following me. But they don’t ever stop. They are in the grass the whispers the stares they walk in shiny shoes made out of cows that made them mad and they never stop. That was long so long ago but they’ve always been right there hiding watching waiting for me for her.

They were close when I threw my shoe away. They are close now. I will lose my other shoe. I can lose my shoe again. But she can’t. The girl they’re going for the girl and I need to tell her show her wake her. She needs to listen to me or they’ll come for her. They have metal teeth and eyes that shine like black oil like fire like cars. They say they’re helping they say get out they say they talk too too loud pounding in my blood.

I start walking again. Not too near the road but I still can hide if they come by. Sometimes I swear they see me but they just laugh their clanging their metal laugh and zoom past me throwing cigarettes sharp cans black coins at my head.

Then:

Well Leanne I said, I want to go out on a walk, but she said now little lady there are hobos and losers out there, and I said mom I know I’ll just meet Leanne near the fence by the clubhouse and she said I couldn’t. Mom says we hafta pray for those people who eat rat guts and sleep in our fields. Mom says I can’t go anywhere near those freaks.

I think it would be nice to live outside though. We could camp the whole year, and then we wouldn’t hafta go back to school. I think my mom just left for shopping or something. Let’s go outside now. Do you wanna see the clubhouse? Well my daddy made it for me. He said I was a big girl and needed a house for my big-girl life, but my mom thought it was stupid. She said I could get up to all kinds of mischief on my own.
Now:

I've walked for days and days and am closer now. I see the school the girl hates. The walls are red and solid it's not full yet not quite yet. There's people cleaning putting out chalk yelling at glowing boxes. The world is swallowing is blocking the sun. I watch for a while. I am still tired. They will not come here right here now. They know better.

The girl is safe here. From them. They want her to tear to break to eat her. Blood on my feet. Some toenails were stolen away. Blood red brown wet. Mine. They cannot take that away.

I will keep going I am getting close now. He will come for her. He came for me then they came and it never stops. Like a clock tick-tocking or the rain drip-dropping. He came for me. His soft stabbing voice with green vomit muslin.

He and the others. They pushed themselves inside me begging and screaming and fucking fucking fucking. Drip-drop tick-tock. I don't remember much.

There is one of them. He is right there. His eyes are not red but they can change that if they want to. His shoes are brown are heavy are skin. I am rabbit-still. He said something. My feet move back. He says something again, louder. He wants to know why I'm here. Ha! He knows. He knows about her. He comes rushes runs forward and I am gone. I'm good at being gone. She won't know how to be gone like me. I can teach her.

He told me he'd come for her. He tells me every day. He told me he'd hurt her I need to make it stop. The little yellow house. It's for her should be hers no one else. I'll tell her.

Then:

NO WAY? You should tell your momma about what Tommy done. If Tommy tried kissin' me, Ida bashed his brains in right there. Fine, I promise not to tell. My daddy says I'm too young for boys. Aren't these the prettiest trees? That little willow's the best, it gets nice pink flowers in the spring.

Ohhhh. Didja hear what Ms. Penelope said after math? We're gonna have that ball next week! You know, the fairy tale one! We gotta pick what princess to be… You can't be Rapunzel! Your hair's too short. Mine's perfect for Rapunzel and we can't both do that. I'll need a new dress. This one's too boring and dark. You could wear it and be Snow White! And make your brothers be all the sleepy mopey dopeys. And maybe Taaawmmy could be the Prince. We're almost there, it's a little past that fence.

Now:
Trees fade into trees into taller trees into mud into fields into more trees. How many more trees is the school from the little house? I should be there by now. There are houses glowing I feel so tired so tired my feet scrape over every dagger in the grass. I sleep for now. I would climb a tree I can't climb trees anymore. It's too dark to sleep. I can't climb trees since I was since before I was since I remember.

Sometimes to scare them away I show my hand. Some of them run away some can chop off fingers and get more metal ones to match their laughs. Mine don't. It goes no no three four five. I don't remember but it hurt. I think I cried and cried.

The girl. Can she one two three four five? They will get her. That will happen then he will happen they will happen. She needs to go. She needs to leave with me. The girl with the death-dress. Before they fuck her. They fucked me. Drip-drop tick-tock. They left a thing with me. They left it and it got big and it hurt hurt more than lost fingers hurt everywhere. I was hiding from them out out far away farther than this place. Trees and trees and trees I couldn't climb. It had a siren so they could find me. I wanted to smash it so it would stop the scream the noise the loud. I left it there noising. It's quiet now. The last time there it was white white bones.

I will get up now. The squirrels run around chasing and humping each other. Little circus clowns. I laugh too loud. I move on. Close close close now.

Then:

**Finally.** See it? It's hidden back by those elm trees. The whole thing's yellow because we had leftover yellow from the baby's room. But daddy let me paint the door blue because I like it best. We couldn't tell mom about the new paint we bought so you can't tell either. She shouldn't be back for a while yet, you think? Well, I'll just show you around and go back and play by the barn so she doesn't get mad. See, it's yellow inside too, I was gonna spill the paint so we had to use another color. I shoulda. Do you like the ladybug clock? Daddy says I'm his little ladybug so I gotta have a clock to match. I think it's pretty.

See how nice the light is? It's nice for drawing, but I'm not s'posed keep the paper out here because it'll get all wet or some raccoon'll steal it. It seems fine though. Wanna draw for a while? Just till the ladybug arm's at the six? Mom won't be back for a bit.

Now:

I see it now. It's full of light and the yellow is too bright she doesn't like it. She'll come with me she'll say why are we going I'll tell her we have
to go because they’re coming for her. They told me with the whispers and
the laughter and the lights shining in my head on the road. They’ll come
drip-drop tick-tock.

The girl will be afraid. I will tell her to stay away from them where
to hide what to eat. Leaves of three let it be. She will be free be whole. We
can go to go so far away no one will know. They know I am coming will
try and stop me. Will put me on a white table and squeeze out my throat.
Will hold me forever take out my tongue keep my screams labeled on a
cold shelf. She will be afraid will be strong. She will be strong we will run
run forever like deer on ice. They are always here they are here now in the
glowing in the houses hiding and laughing and watching and fucking. We
will go so far and hide they will never leave us.

They are laughing laughing with their teeth too shiny too sharp to
be people. They are the cars the pavement the boys pinning lizards to the
floor with needles the sad women handing out flaccid burgers the ragged
man with his hand down his pants my pants staring staring staring.

I can tell her this I can warn her that is her life my gift. The yellow
comes closer I see blue.

Then:

Didja hear that? Musta been a rabbit or something.
Lemme see what you drew! I like it, you should show Taaawmmmy.
No hitting! I was just teasing… You liiiiiike him don't you? I'm teasing!
You could be Rapunzel if you really wanted. Daddy said I'd be a
good Sleeping Beauty. He says he'll help me with the costume but only if
we work on it out here in our secret clubhouse. He already bought nice
bright green cloth. He says mom's no good at sewing, but she makes her
own dresses and Ms. Penelope says mine mom makes are real nice. He
says she would just get in the way, so I should keep it a big-girl secret so she
doesn't get mad. So you can't tell either! You keep two secrets and I'll keep
one extra good. He says we'll make the sleeves really long so no one will
make fun of my hand. It'll look good as new he said. I think they'll still
notice and poke fun at me.

Let's go back home, those clouds look scary and daddy said it's
s'posed to rain buckets tonight.

Now:

It is a trick. It is a trick she is not here. The door is off its hinges I
couldn't even knock to go in. The back the far boards are resting against
tree fingers and I can't see where crayons paper coloring should be. The
yellow isn't yellow as it should be. They were here. They came and de-
stroyed and I am too late. She is gone. They have her and she is gone. This
place did not protect her. This fucking place was supposed to stay until I came. It was supposed to help be here be strong we would leave it would fall into dust and clown room and she is gone. And they will take her everything take her away kill her over and over and over and over until there's nothing left. There's nothing left.

There is an *it* on the floor. I will not look I will not it is red it is round it is quiet. *It* is there *it* sends biting ladybugs everywhere my clothes veins gums. I choke on paper wings on air on nothing. Destroy it wreck it burn it all. I stumble outside make the spark.

It's beautiful burning the yellow the blue the roof my shirt. I howl and throw myself against tree fingers and lacey green. She is gone they are killing her. Light echoes through my skull. She the girl the princess outside bug girl. They cut her fuck her wax away her skin she is tiny now she is disappearing she is me and I left her alone because they knew I was coming and won't ever stop she is gone she is dead dying hurt afraid monsters forming they are here they are all around with lights dogs barking reaching out with their hands iron eyes and tick-tock drip-drop from every mouth from the shining house from me inside outside screaming I will find her save her heal her what is left what is left.
Artemisia in Ecstasy

Emily Francisco

*After Saint Mary Magdalene by Artemisia Gentileschi. Currently exhibited in the Galleria Palatina of the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.*

Is this she

the woman of golden skirts
one who clutches at her breast

as if tormented by some
innermost burst vein of longing
black room lit from beyond the frame

(because agony is best felt in the dark)—
she who cut her long golden tresses
in penitence

frayed ends threads of hair
hanging like shredded sinews
by the ears—

I can see her, gilded dress
falling from her shoulder
in an act of spiritual freeness

her bare collarbone blessed
by the sacred unseen flickering flame
and it is to me she glances emptily

woman-hero of my New Testament
tortured paintress
humble barefoot Maddalena—

The lips part
and in that singular silver
breath of piety
(or perhaps it is regret)
    she becomes the afflicted
    no longer a face of fortitude

yielding instead
    to the aging of feminist progeny
    her story exhaled

before me and into my lungs
    with the sigh of longevity
    and it shimmers—

saturated with the thick
    iridescent narrative
    of one who has endured
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Taylor Andrews is a junior, English with a Writing Concentration and Studio Art double major. Participates in Shots in the Dark Improv and is Co-president of Live Poets' Society. She is deeply indebted to her generous and patient family and friends.

Rachel Barber is a senior majoring in Music and English with a Writing Concentration. She plays the French horn in the Wind Symphony and Symphony Orchestra here on campus and enjoys worship and community service. Abraham Lincoln is overrated. Her family lives in Grahamsville, New York.

Victoria Blaisdell is a first-year student from Mechanicsburg, PA, who plans to major in Economics. She is honored that her poetry is allowed to grace the pages of this year's Mercury. When not writing, she enjoys eating dark chocolate, discovering new music, and fantasizing about travelling the world.

Abigail Campbell is a sophomore, History and International Affairs double major.

Darcie Connors is a senior from Cumberland, Rhode Island, where the story takes place. She is a Mathematics major and Spanish minor who enjoys creative writing but not running. This essay describes the first of a total of about three runs that summer.

Merissa Cope is a first-year, who is involved with the Painted Turtle Farm, CAB, and Live Poets' Society, among other things. She also works on the rock wall on campus and is the student in charge of organizing the Rhymes and Revelations spoken word poetry series.

Emily Cranfill is a History major with a Writing minor, who would like to dedicate this piece to everyone who said her tattoos would keep her from being successful.

Paul Eppler is a sophomore Philosophy and Public Policy double major at Gettysburg, and resides in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania while not at school. Outside of academics, he is a member of the cross country and track teams, and enjoys reading, debating, and using larger words than are necessary.

Abigail Ferguson is a senior, OMS major.

Jenna Fleming is a sophomore History and English double major from Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. She is a member of the Gettysburg College Symphony Orchestra, Sigma Alpha Iota, and the Student Alumni Association, and works in Special Collections at Musselman Library.

Emily Francisco is a senior, Art History and English with a Writing Concentration double major.
Aubrey Gedeon is a first-year and is undeclared.

Carley Grow is a first-year student from Horsham, Pennsylvania who plans to major in English with a Writing Concentration. She is involved in the Live Poets' Society and enjoys being a staff member for the fiction and poetry sections of The Mercury. After a long struggle with skepticism, she is finally learning to trust in her own voice.

Corey Katzelnick is currently a senior at the College studying the major English with a Writing Concentration. He lives in Hillsborough, New Jersey. On campus, he is involved in CHEERS and the Eisenhower Institute group SALTT. After school, he plans on either going to law school or entering the publication field.

Kevin Lavery is a History major from the Class of 2016. In a sense, he came to Gettysburg College for the Civil War but stayed for World War I. He is a Civil War Institute Fellow and a Peer Learning Associate for The Pity of War, the first-year seminar that inspired “In the Presence of Death.”

Stephen Lin is a sophomore Environmental Studies and German double major with a minor in Writing.

Rachel Martinelli is a Junior working towards her Theatre Arts Major and Writing minor. This was her first year of involvement in The Mercury and she has greatly enjoyed being the Public Relations Chair. She is excited to see her work published in the magazine and would like to commend all who submitted their writing/art. She continues to be in awe of the sheer talent amongst her peers.

Tony McComiskey is a current senior from Staten Island, New York. He is a Political Science major with minors in writing, Philosophy, and Peace & Justice Studies. After graduation, he hopes to move to DC and work on civil and social justice issues in America.

Robin Miller is a senior at Gettysburg with majors in English and Religious Studies. She enjoys fencing, singing, and writing stories that make her mother question her mental health. After graduation, Robin hopes to be working in publishing, but will probably settle for whatever gets her out of her parents' basement in Ohio.

Mauricio Novoa is a senior at Gettysburg College from Glenmont, MD (DMV stand up!), finally getting published in something that isn't a notebook. An English major with a Writing Concentration, most of his works are social justice based, looking at the social elements that affect everyday people in America, thanks mainly to his work with the Center for Public Service and his mentor, Kim Davidson. He would also like to shout out Jeffery Rioux, Gretchen Natter, Tammy Hoff, and Professors Meyer and Melton for adding to the art.

Madeline Price is a junior Environmental Studies major with minors in Theatre Arts and Educational Studies. This is her third year having photography published in The
Mercury. On campus she is involved in GECO, the Owl & Nightingale Players, Jazz Appreciation Society, and Biosphere, and last semester she studied abroad in Panama. In addition to photography, her other interests include tea, baking, and being outdoors (when there's no polar vortex).

**Brendan Raleigh** is currently in his sophomore year at Gettysburg College. He writes and edits for The Gettysburgian newspaper and works as a tutor at the college's Writing Center.

**Sophia Kareen Reid** was born in 1992 in St. Mary, Jamaica, and relocated to Brooklyn, New York in 2002. She is a poet and writer. She is a senior at Gettysburg College, class of 2014. She has written numerous poems, and literary nonfiction pieces, in the form of memoir and personal essays. She is a poetry staffer for The Mercury.

**Peter Rosenberger** is a sophomore English and Philosophy double major with a Writing minor from Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. Peter works as an RA and a tour guide on campus. He sings in the Gettysburg College Choir and performs in GBurg SMuT shows. He is a lover of rap, film, video games, the NFL, and bland food.

**Mollie Sherman** appreciates well ripened fruit and well lit rooms. She is a first year English Major with a Writing Concentration and reads arguably too much Anne Sexton in her free time.

**Megan Zagorski** is a junior, Environmental Studies and Latin American Studies double major.
Alexandria Barkmeier is a fiction writer and 2007 graduate of Gettysburg College and Georgetown Law. She has been a public elementary school teacher, a campaign worker, and an education policy analyst and advocate. She is currently an MFA candidate at Indiana University.

Candise Henson graduated from Gettysburg College in the fall of 2012. She is currently pursuing her MFA at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, while teaching freshman composition for the university and terrorizing as many students as possible.

Jennifer Spindler graduated in 2010. She interned at the MOMA, worked in an art gallery for two years after college, and participated in SCOPE and Art Basel Fairs. Currently in the NYC Teaching Fellowship Program, she is teaching Middle School social studies in the South Bronx, New York.

Karl Utermohlen graduated from Gettysburg College in 2012 with a major in English with a Writing Concentration and a Spanish minor. He is a first-year MFA Nonfiction student at the University of Idaho and he’s loving it so far. He was the Co-Editor-in-Chief of The Mercury his senior year and he’s currently part of the nonfiction staff for Fugue, the University of Idaho’s literary magazine. He also writes briefs for InvestorPlace.com, an investing and financial news site.